

Vietnamese College Students' Perception Towards Using TikTok for Independent English Speaking Practice

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Perception, MALL, TikTok Duet, technology-assisted language learning, EFL, Independent learning, Vietnamese students, Speaking

With the rise of digital platforms, TikTok has emerged as a popular social media platform with potential applications in English language learning. Among its features, TikTok Duet, allows users to create split-screen videos with others, presenting unique opportunities for practicing speaking skills. This study explores non-majors' perceptions of using TikTok Duet to independently improve their English speaking skills. Participants were students at an elementary English level at a private college in Vietnam, including 9 interviewees and 40 students completing questionnaires. The study indicated that most students felt TikTok Duet enhances their English speaking, pronunciation, and confidence, and even grammar and vocabulary. However, some students expressed reluctance to use TikTok Duet due to privacy concerns, limited response time and technical issues. The study suggests implementing technical support, offering privacy protection measures, and providing external incentives for students to engage with this practice.

Introduction

With the rapid growth of digital platforms, social media technology has evolved into a dynamic educational instrument that offering new learning approaches. TikTok is one of these social network platforms that has become very popular, especially among younger people. TikTok has potential for educational purposes in addition to its entertainment value, especially for communication skills. TikTok Duet's feature allows users to create a parallel video to an original video, meaning they can shoot their video next to others. This offers language learners an immersive speaking practice experience. Although TikTok duet offers significant benefits, studies were limited on its usage for independent English practice for Vietnamese students. Understanding their experiences as well as perceptions of benefits and challenges is one way to gauge their acceptance. Therefore, this research was conducted on how students at a private college perceived using TikTok Duet in their speaking practice independently.

Literature review

Student Perceptions of Social Media in Education

In the past decade, studies on social media (SM) in education have shown a positive expectation that students may be prepared to adopt social media networks (SM) for learning purposes in spite of mixed perceptions. For example, Smith (2016) found that SM is a “double-edged sword” in education. Despite several potential advantages for facilitating learning, SM is also considered a distracting factor that obstructs learning for students. According to Aloraini and Cardoso (2020), different student levels (i.e., beginners and advanced students) have different perceptions toward SM, with advanced learners showing more reluctance to use it for academic purposes. Similarly, Alshalawi (2022) reviewed the literature on social media networks and explored that many students appreciated the value of social media for learning, especially for higher education institutions.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Research consistently shows that learners have a positive perception of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which significantly enhances their learning experiences and ability to learn independently. According to Wagner et al. (2016), applying MALL enhances its quality and reflects modern educational trends by providing constant access to study resources anytime and anywhere, serving as a tool for developing individuals in an informational society capable of mobile-assisted lifelong learning. This perspective is further reinforced by a meta-analysis conducted by Taj et al. (2016), which confirmed that MALL positively impacts EFL learning, especially in vocabulary acquisition and instruction. Additionally, Azli et al. (2018) pointed out that the respondents, who are English learners as a second language, strongly believe that MALL plays an essential role in autonomous learning and interactive learning. Finally, the research by Luu et al. (2021) has shown specific mobile apps' high effectiveness in improving students' speaking skills.

TikTok for English Practice

TikTok is a YouTube-like app where users can upload videos to their accounts. The difference is the duration of the videos: TikTok only allows short videos, while YouTube allows longer ones. Several studies suggest that using Duet on TikTok can enhance learners' English proficiency across several language skills, including writing, reading, and speaking. Consider the findings of Nurwinda and Ambarwati (2024), which indicated that almost all of their experiences showed a positive outcome regarding using TikTok as a learning tool for practicing speaking. Most participants found TikTok engaging for this purpose because of its novel and interesting features. One feature usually mentioned by students is the "duet me" challenge. The TikTok Duet feature enables users to create a video alongside an original video, allowing them to film their content side by side with others. Students show appreciation for the interactive platform and ease of navigation. In a similar line, Hamsia (2024) investigated the usage of TikTok in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and highlighted a considerable improvement in speaking skills. The study suggested that the main benefit of utilizing TikTok in educational settings is its ability to transform traditional language learning methods into engaging and interactive experiences. Zhen et al. (2022) focused on TikTok Duet, specifically the Duet Challenge, which allows users to develop conversational skills. The study found that after participating in the Duet Challenge, students improved their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication skills. This suggests that TikTok Duet could enhance ESL learners' conversation skills and serve as an effective interactive learning tool for teaching specific targeted skills in ESL.



Figure 1: Duet Tiktok challenge (Duet with Bees)

Independent Language Learning/Speaking Practice

In the scope of this study, Independent Language Learning (ILL) is defined as learners taking responsibility for their learning processes, such as goal setting, learning approaches, and assessment, especially outside classrooms. The topic of independent language learning has been extensively investigated recently with positive results. For example, Tran (2021) found that non-English major students had a positive attitude toward autonomous language learning and acknowledged its importance, yet they were uncertain about their own behavioral attitudes toward it. In addition, Yusnimar (2019) explored the connection between independent learning and teacher guides in improving speaking among college students. The results highlight that the independent learning approach with teacher guidance significantly enhanced the students' performance in English-prepared talk. Similarly, Snow et al. (2017) studied Chinese students' independent language learning practices in an exam-focused setting. The study suggested that successful English learners often utilize a variety of supplementary materials and practice to improve their language skills. This indicates a proactive approach to language learning, where students actively seek opportunities beyond classroom instruction. It is essential for teachers to prepare students for the challenges they may face during independent language practice. By informing students about potential difficulties, they are less likely to become discouraged and more likely to achieve their goals.

Research Gap and Research Questions

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the potential of TikTok in English practice, there is a need for more focused research on the perceptions and experiences of Vietnamese college students in utilizing the platform for independent English-speaking practice. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to contribute to understanding how TikTok Duet can be effectively integrated into English language education, particularly for independent speaking practice in non-major learners. The purpose of the study could be achieved by answering two research questions:

1. What are the perceived advantages of using TikTok Duet for independent English-speaking practice among Vietnamese college students?
2. What challenges do Vietnamese college students face when using TikTok Duet for independent English-speaking practice?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Participants were students at the elementary level at a private college in Vietnam, including 9 interviewees. These are students that I taught General English to in the summer semester of 2024. The learning objective for these English sessions is to reach the A2 level on the CEFR. In the General English course, speaking skills are taught along with other skills (reading, listening, writing), vocabulary, and grammar, but are more focused. Students have to take an oral test (including a presentation and Q&A interview) at the end of the course. The students' language levels are around A1 on the CEFR, with only some students at A2 in the class. The course is around 5 weeks long. As a course requirement, students are required to prepare for 4 topics for the oral test. The questions in 4 topics are asked randomly in the oral test. During the course, students are introduced to the supplementary Duet videos on TikTok according to the 4 main topics of the course to help them better prepare for the final oral test.

Design of the Study

To address the research questions, the researchers used a mixed-methods approach that combined questionnaires and interviews to enhance the accuracy of data collection.

Data Collection & Analysis

The interview was used to clarify and gain insights about students' perspectives, challenges, and solutions regarding duets on TikTok. Eleven questions in the focused group interview were divided based on two research questions. Specifically, the first four interview questions outlined the students' perspectives and habits regarding TikTok duets. Then, students were required to describe some of the challenges and difficulties they encountered when using TikTok for duets in the next five questions. For the last two questions, they were asked to provide some solutions and their ideas on how to implement the TikTok Duet feature better in the future. Through purposive sampling, nine students were selected for the focused group interview (they are from two classes I taught). Selection criteria focused on diversity, including the following factors: gender, to explore different perspectives between boys and girls; language proficiency, to examine how different speaking levels affect their perspectives of TikTok Duet; class participation, to ensure balanced viewpoints of active and quieter students. The goal was to select the most diverse group to collect a range of information about students' perspectives and experiences using TikTok duets to improve their English. Students were given the opportunity to speak in Vietnamese to make it easier for them to express their ideas and thoughts.

Findings and Discussion

Perceived Advantages of Using TikTok Duet for Independent English Speaking Practice

The data highlighted that TikTok Duet helps non-major students at the college improve their pronunciation, fluency, confidence, listening skills, vocabulary, and grammar.

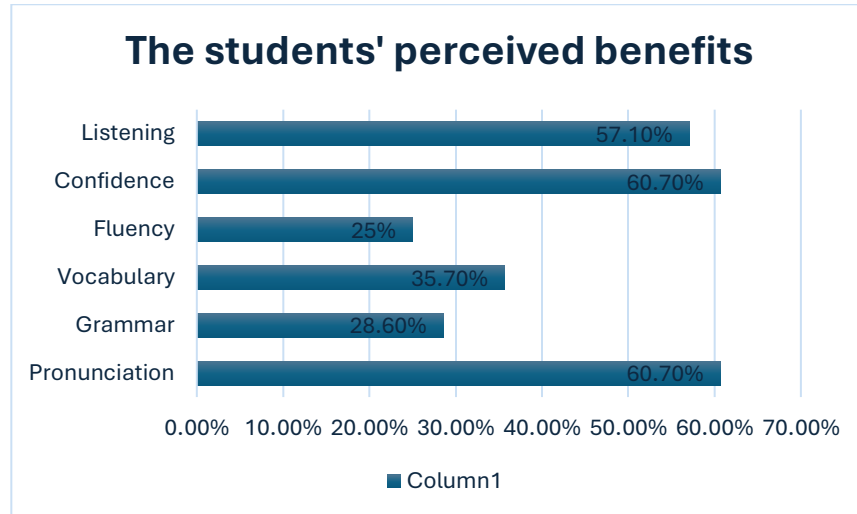


Figure 2: The students' perceived benefits

Pronunciation, Fluency and Confidence

The chart demonstrates the benefits of using TikTok Duet when practicing English. According to the chart, around 61% of the students improved their pronunciation and confidence, while 25% improved confidence. This finding can also be seen in the interviews when students reported their improvements in fluency and pronunciation by allowing them to imitate their teachers' pronunciation and practice repeatedly. For example, student 1 said: "When the teacher speaks or pronounces something, and we repeat it, it will be more accurate because we are listening to the correct pronunciation model." student 3 added: "Teachers read at a slow and moderate pace. I've noticed that even my classmates who haven't studied much yet can learn from those Duet videos, making it easier for them to understand the lessons." Notably, nearly 60% of students (Figure 2) claimed that their listening skills were enhanced because of the speakers' moderate speed and clear enunciation.

In terms of fluency and confidence, student 1 commented: "After listening and practicing, I feel more confident to speak English, and I speak more fluently." Similarly, one student shared: "Also, I feel more confident when I'm facing the camera on my phone. It kind of reduces the fear of speaking in front of a camera. I believe that it could help me become more proficient at making TikTok videos in the future."

This positive outcome can be attributed to duet videos on TikTok made by Vietnamese English lecturers at the college. The videos provided clear and familiar pronunciation models that were easily understood by the students, contributing to their learning and confidence. The studies by Rahmawati et al. (2023) and Karya et al. (2022) also support this finding (TikTok had a positive influence on students' fluency and confidence).

Grammar and Vocabulary

The chart shows moderate improvement over grammatical forms and vocabulary. Around 35% of respondents believed their vocabulary and grammar increased after dueting the challenge on TikTok. Similarly, the figure for grammar was approximately 29%. For example, one student mentioned: “As for grammar and vocabulary, I think it helps me know more about the correct structure. Even though the teacher provides grammar structures, I don't feel I've improved much because I still struggle to put simple grammar into longer sentences. Comparing this to other methods, I'm not sure it helps as much with grammar." This can be explained as the content of the duet video is supported by the teachers' model answers and suggested vocabulary and sentence structures after each question. Such benefits are confirmed in previous research (Iswahyuni, 2021), where the usage of TikTok enhanced speaking skills including grammatical patterns and vocabulary.

Overall, the findings suggest that TikTok Duet greatly improves students' pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in their English speaking skills.

Challenges of Using TikTok Duet for Independent English Speaking Practice

It can be seen that technical issues (61%), lack of confidence (around 43%), time constraints (29%), and fear of privacy (21%) are the challenges faced by the students while dueting on TikTok.

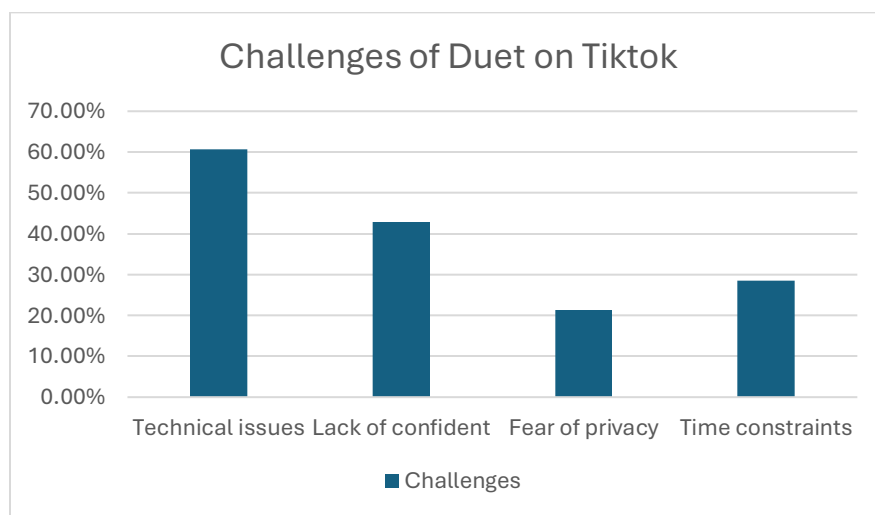


Figure 3: Challenges of using duet on Tiktok

Technical issues

According to the chart (figure 4), all of them encounter technical issues, but the frequency of these difficulties is different. Nearly one-third of students commented that technical issues happened, while more than half of them encountered those issues. In the interview, some students complained that the video could take a long time to load, and there was frequent lagging, depending on the length of the videos and the internet speed. The students also revealed that the sound was out of sync with their speech and that the sound echoed if they didn't wear earphones with a mic.

This finding aligns with the research conducted by Hamsia (2024), which found maintaining time, flow, and audio synchronization challenging. To encounter these challenges, the guideline for the duet should clearly demonstrate potential problems and suggest solutions to avoid students'

frustration in dealing with the frequent issues. Plan B should be suggested in case of technical failures. For example, students can watch the video on a device (laptop) and record the video with a front camera to answer the questions without using the duet feature on TikTok.

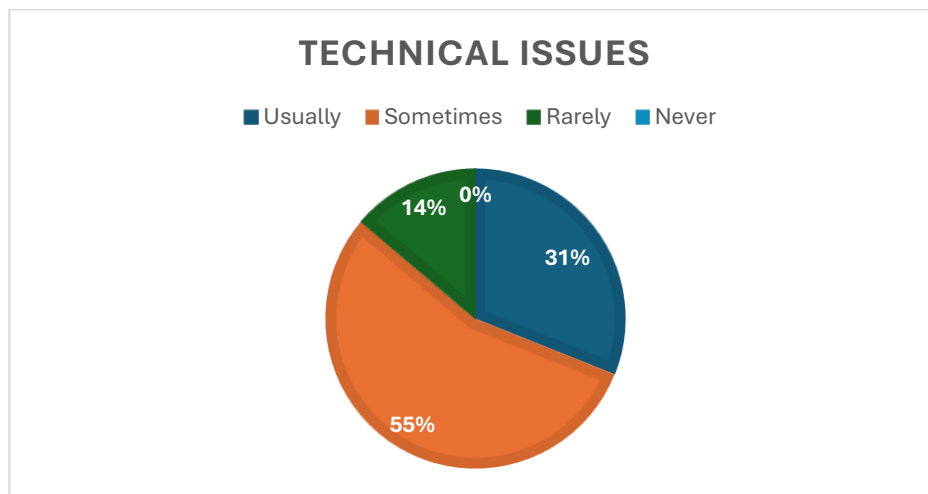


Figure 4: Technical issues

Privacy Concerns

Most of the students have privacy concerns and the fear of peer judgment, especially for students who were reluctant to post their duet videos in public mode. This was reflected in a student's statement, "I'm also concerned, teacher, because my pronunciation isn't very good. So, I limit who can view my videos, like family and close friends." Most of the students, when interviewed, shared that they were willing to share their videos if their pronunciation was perfect. However, some felt less embarrassed and were familiar with it after the first time. Some shared their duet videos, downloaded them, submitted them on Padlet, and then deleted them immediately.

Student 5 shared: "At first, I did have concerns. I recorded my videos and kept them private because I wasn't used to it and felt shy about sharing them."

Other Challenges

Some students encountered challenges with the response time limitation, as student 5 pointed out: "One challenge I face is when the waiting times given by the teachers are too short. If I have a longer answer, I find that my response doesn't match the time well. If my answer is lengthy, I often end up simplifying it. For example, instead of saying, 'I would do this because of this reason,' I might just respond with, 'I would do this,' without expanding on my answer further. In hindsight, this should be calculated carefully when planning the content of the videos. On the other hand, the students in this study have not mentioned the additive features of TikTok compared to the research by Nurwinda & Ambarwati, 2024, where participants identified that TikTok's algorithm and its addictive nature pose significant challenges in using the platform.

In summary, despite valuable opportunities for language practice with TikTok Duet, students encounter significant challenges, including technical issues, privacy concerns, and time constraints. These challenges must be addressed to improve their overall experience.

Duet TikTok as Independent Speaking Practice

According to the chart (Figure 4), only 7% of students practice their English duet every day, and nearly 60% of the respondents completed 4 duet videos. It is clear that many students require external motivation and support to engage consistently with this practice. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers incorporate dueting videos on TikTok into lesson plans or assignments to increase motivation for their students. Another notable finding is the influence of time constraints on their ability to practice independently. Nearly 30% of the survey respondents admitted that their busy schedules, including the amount of assignments from courses as well as part-time job commitments, affected their practice. When asked about the after-duet challenge in the course, most of them shared that they did not develop the habit of dueting independently; only one did. In conclusion, to promote consistent engagement with TikTok Duet as a tool for independent speaking practice, teachers should offer guidance on time management, incorporate these duet activities into their curriculum, and encourage students to develop self-directed learning strategies such as by setting specific goals or reflecting on their progress. This can enhance their intrinsic motivation and promote consistent duet practice.

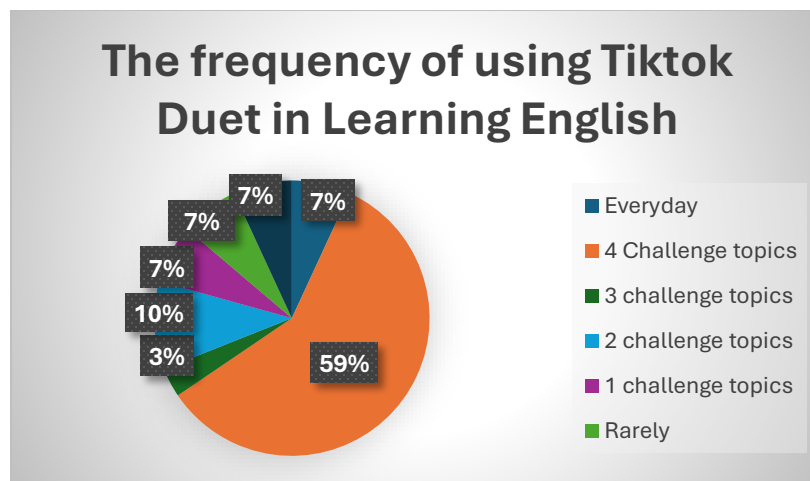


Figure 4: The frequency of using Tiktok Duet in Learning English

Conclusion

Based on the survey and interview results, most students have improved their English speaking skills, particularly in pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. Although grammar and vocabulary improvements were also recognized, the results were less pronounced in these areas. However, the article also pointed out some major challenges, including technical issues, privacy concerns, and response time limitations. Most students encountered challenges with video lag, sound synchronization, and internet connectivity issues. Privacy concerns also made some hesitant to share their videos publicly, although a few were able to overcome their initial reluctance. Furthermore, students emphasized the need for additional time and external motivation to practice independently beyond the structured duet challenges.

Overall, this finding indicates that TikTok Duet can serve as an effective tool for supplementary speaking practice outside the traditional classroom. However, it is challenging to consider it a

standalone method for independent practice, as the duet videos heavily depend on teachers (creators) to provide structured models and content. To encourage broader adoption and enhance the sustainability of TikTok Duet as a tool for improving English-speaking skills, it will be essential to address the identified challenges, particularly those related to technical and privacy issues. Future research could investigate potential solutions to these challenges and assess the long-term impact of using TikTok Duet on students' speaking skills.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Due to time constraints and limited resources, it was impossible to survey every student, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, this research primarily concentrated on customized TikTok Duet videos structured sentence models tailored for lower-level students. These types of duet videos are less popular than the more commonly used ones, where users simply repeat the same sentence. With additional time, the research could have included a larger sample size and potentially revealed broader insights. Addressing the identified challenges, particularly those related to technical issues and privacy concerns, is crucial for fostering wider adoption and ensuring that TikTok Duet becomes a more sustainable tool for enhancing English-speaking skills. Future research could investigate solutions to these challenges and assess the long-term impact of TikTok Duet on students' speaking abilities.

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