

## EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF USING TIKTOK FOR ENGLISH LISTENING PRACTICE

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### *Abstract*

*TikTok has become one of the most widely used digital platforms among university students, offering potential benefits for English listening practice. However, little is known about how learners personally experience using TikTok specifically for listening, particularly regarding the types of linguistic input they learn, the patterns and trends that support comprehension, and the strategies they use to manage listening difficulties. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design involving semi-structured interviews with three English Education students. Thematic analysis revealed two major themes: (1) TikTok provides authentic, enjoyable, and motivating listening experiences through exposure to informal expressions, reduced forms, and predictable content patterns such as story time and commentary videos; and (2) students apply self-directed strategies such as replaying videos, using captions, and selecting content aligned with their proficiency. An integrative meaning showed that students perceive TikTok as a space where entertainment and learning naturally intersect. These findings suggest that TikTok can serve as a flexible supplementary tool for developing English listening skills.*

**Keywords:** *TikTok, English listening practice, student experience*

### INTRODUCTION

Listening plays an important role in second language acquisition, and understanding its benefits is crucial for supporting learners' development (Graham & Santos, 2015). However, research has shown that many learners continue to struggle with effective listening comprehension, as this skill involves complex cognitive processes that are often difficult to teach and assess (Field, 2008; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Traditional classroom materials frequently lack sufficient authentic input, limiting students' exposure to the diversity of real-life communication (Gilmore, 2007; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Several scholars also emphasize that limited access to natural spoken language can hinder learners' ability to recognize reduced forms, informal expressions, and varied accents, which are essential for real-world listening (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). As students increasingly engage with digital media, it is important to explore platforms that offer beneficial listening practice beyond the classroom. In response, the rise of digital platforms has shifted the landscape of language learning, with social media applications such as TikTok offering multimodal and authentic language resources. Previous studies have shown that TikTok can increase learners' engagement and provide real-life language exposure, thereby supporting the development of English listening skills (Alolayan, 2025; Suprihatin & Kurniawan, 2023). Recent research further highlights that short form videos expose learners to

spontaneous speech and everyday communication patterns that are rarely found in textbooks (Setiawan et al., 2024).

In recent years, digital platforms have widely been used to enhance language learning, with TikTok becoming one of the most popular and accessible tools among students. Several studies have explored the pedagogical potential in English learning. Findings suggest that short form videos can provide authentic listening input, support vocabulary acquisition, and foster learner motivation while reducing affective barriers (Alolayan, 2025). TikTok's multimodal features allow learners to combine visual and auditory input, making the learning process more engaging and contextually meaningful. Other studies also highlight that the platform's informal and entertaining environment helps students interact with English more naturally, encouraging repeated exposure and incidental learning in everyday contexts (Fokatea & Widagsa, 2024; Suprihatin & Kurniawan, 2023). Despite these advantages, most previous studies have focused on general perceptions or have combined multiple language skills such as listening and speaking, rather than examining listening as a distinct learning process (Fokatea & Widagsa, 2024). As a result, little is known about how learners actually experience using TikTok for English listening practice, particularly in understanding its benefits, challenges, and learning strategies. This gap highlights the need to explore learners' lived experiences to understand how they make sense of authentic digital input and the strategies they employ while engaging with TikTok for listening.

Previous studies have examined TikTok in English learning, but they have mostly focused on general perceptions or learning outcomes rather than students' actual experiences. While these studies highlight some advantages for listening, such as positive learner attitudes despite informal language (Fauziah, A., & Pratolo, 2025), how students personally experience and make sense of these benefits remains underexplored. Some research also notes that although TikTok provides authentic and varied input, learners may engage with it differently depending on their interests, proficiency levels, and viewing habits, which suggests that personal experiences play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of the platform (Setiawan et al., 2024). However, existing studies rarely investigate these individual variations in depth. This gap indicates a need to investigate learners' lived experiences in using TikTok specifically for English listening practice. Understanding these experiences can offer deeper insight into how authentic digital content is interpreted, what challenges learners face, and how they developed strategies to navigate listening demands on the platform.

This study views listening as an active mental and emotional process in second language learning (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Authentic input is important because it exposes learners to natural speech and real communication (Gilmore, 2007). TikTok's short multimodal videos provide such input but also require students to be critical in managing distractions and informal language. Since learners engage with TikTok voluntarily and in various everyday contexts, their interpretations, challenges, and strategies may differ significantly, making personal experiences an essential aspect to investigate (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Using a phenomenological approach, this study explores undergraduate students' experience using TikTok for listening practice and what meanings they derive from its benefits, challenges, and strategies. By focusing on

lived experiences, this research offers insights that move beyond measuring perceptions or outcomes, highlighting the ways learners interact with authentic digital content and construct meaning during informal listening practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore undergraduate students' perceived benefits of using TikTok for English listening practice. The phenomenological design was chosen because it aims to understand how individuals perceive and make meaning of the benefits they experience when using TikTok for English listening practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than measuring improvement or testing hypotheses, this study aims to capture students' lived experiences in perceiving and interpreting the benefits they gain from their engagement with TikTok as a listening resource.

The participants of this study were three undergraduate students majoring in English Education at a university in Indonesia. They were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria: (1) they actively use TikTok, (2) they have used TikTok as a platform for English listening practice, and (3) they were willing to share their experiences and perceptions openly. Although the number of participants was small, it was considered sufficient since phenomenological research emphasizes on depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this approach, the purpose is to gather rich and detailed descriptions of lived experiences, and such depth is more attainable when the number of participants is limited. Creswell and Poth (2018) further explain that phenomenological studies commonly include between 3 and 10 participants, allowing researchers to explore individual experiences closely without reducing the quality of the analysis.

In this study, including three participants enabled the researcher to examine each person's perspective in detail and to identify subtle patterns across their accounts. A smaller sample ensured that the data remained manageable for careful thematic analysis, supporting the phenomenological aim of capturing the essence of participants' experiences. With three information rich cases, the researcher could attend to both shared and distinct viewpoints regarding the perceived benefits of using TikTok for English listening practice. To maintain confidentiality throughout the research process, each participant was assigned a pseudonym (P1-P3).

The main instrument of this study was a semi-structured interview, which was selected because this format is more suitable for phenomenological research than a structured interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows participants to describe their lived experiences freely while still providing enough guidance to maintain relevance to the research focus. The development process began with identifying five theoretical constructs relevant to the focus of this study, namely: (1) general experience of using TikTok, (2) perceived benefits for listening development, (3) challenges encountered during listening, (4) self-directed strategies applied by learners, and (5) the personal meaning attached to using TikTok as a learning tool. These constructs were drawn from theories of digital learning, authentic input, incidental learning, and learner autonomy, and were then translated into measurable

indicators. To ensure validity, the interview questions were reviewed by two experts in English language education and piloted with one undergraduate student to confirm clarity, relevance, and alignment with the constructs. Feedback from this process was used to revise and refine the questions before data collection.

The finalized interview guide consisted of 11 open-ended questions that were distributed across the five constructs. Three questions elicited students' general experiences using TikTok, three explored perceived benefits for English listening development, two examined linguistic and non-linguistic challenges, two focused on the strategies students employed to improve comprehension such as replaying clips or using subtitles and one question addressed the personal meaning or value students associated with using TikTok as a learning tool. The open-ended format enabled participants to elaborate freely while ensuring that each question remained aligned with the study objectives. To ensure validity, the interview guide was reviewed by two experts in English language education and piloted with one undergraduate student. Feedback from this process was used to revise and refine the questions to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the constructs.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted online via Zoom, using either English or Bahasa Indonesia, based on participants' preference. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes and was scheduled outside class hours. Before beginning each session, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, obtained consent, and assured participants of confidentiality and their right to withdraw. The interviews followed a prepared guide, and follow-up questions were asked when clarifications were needed. Field notes were also written to record additional observations or non-verbal cues.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. First, the researcher conducted familiarization by repeatedly reading the transcripts, comparing them with the audio recordings, and composing analytic memos. This step aligns with Braun and Clarke's emphasis on immersing oneself in the data to ensure that early interpretations are grounded in participants' actual words. Second, initial codes were generated inductively by identifying meaningful units of data such as words, phrases, and segments related to benefits, challenges, and strategies. To ensure the worthiness of the coding process, the researcher applied constant comparison, checking each code against the dataset to maintain consistency and avoid researcher bias. Coding decisions were also documented in a coding log, which served as an audit trail demonstrating how interpretations developed.

In the fourth phase, the initial themes were reviewed by checking their coherence with coded extracts and with the dataset as a whole. Redundant or overlapping categories were merged, while unclear categories were refined, the fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes to ensure conceptual clarity and distinctiveness. Finally, in the sixth phase, the themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions and supported by direct quotations.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed member checking, peer debriefing with a qualitative expert, and the use of reflexive notes to reduce researcher bias.

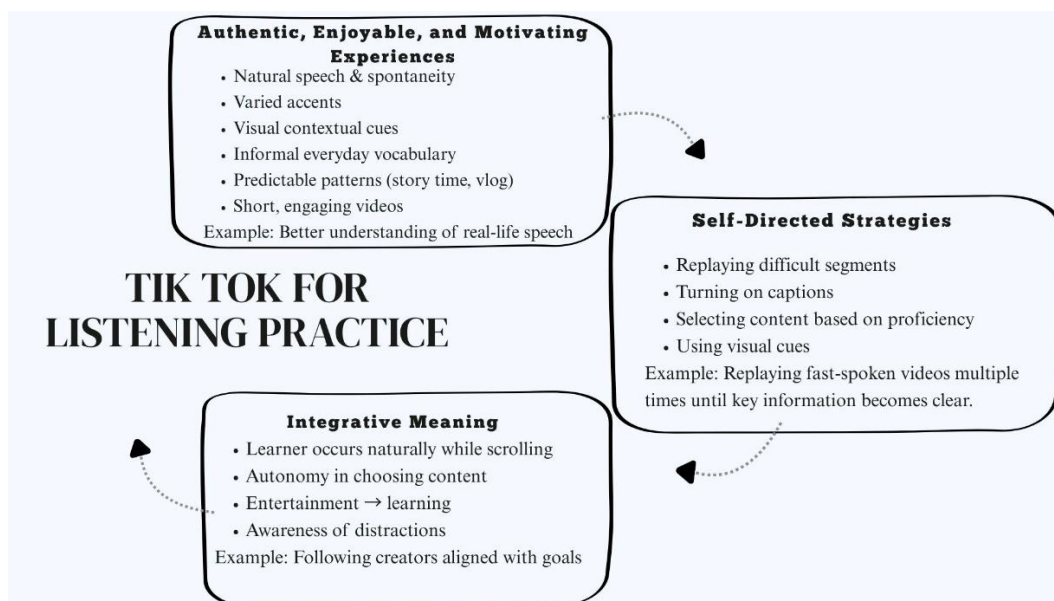
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews with three participants (P1, P2, and P3), two major themes were identified that describe undergraduate students' experiences in using TikTok for English listening practice. These themes include authentic, enjoyable, and motivating listening experiences, as well as self-directed strategies to manage listening challenges. In addition, an integrative interpretation captures the personal meaning students assign to their use of TikTok. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Table 1. Summary of Themes and Illustrative Evidence*

Factor	Theme
Exposure to authentic English input	Authentic, Enjoyable, and Motivating Listening Experiences
Independent and metacognitive listening strategies	Self-Directed Strategies to Overcome Challenges
Personal of using TikTok	Integrative Meaning: Entertainment-Learning Intersection

The following mind map visually summarizes the thematic structure identified in this study. It presents two main themes: authentic, enjoyable, and motivating listening experiences and self-directed strategies to overcome challenges alongside one integrative meaning that reflects how these themes collectively shape participants' overall engagement with TikTok. The visualization highlights the key points and examples that illustrate how TikTok functions as a flexible digital space where listening practice occurs naturally, intentionally, and through the participants' own choices and strategies.



*Figure 1. Thematic Network of Undergraduate Students' Experiences Using TikTok for English Listening Practice*

The thematic relationships shown in picture 1 are elaborated through the following explanations of each theme.

### 1. Authentic, Enjoyable, and Motivating Listening Experiences

Participants described TikTok as a platform that offers authentic and accessible English input. They encountered informal expressions, spontaneous speech, varied accents, and connected forms such as *gonna*, *wanna*, and *kinda*. These features reflect real-life communication, supporting Gilmore's (2007) The view that authentic materials contribute to the development of communicative competence. Participants also reported that this authentic input helped them learn commonly used informal vocabulary, natural intonation, and everyday expressions that are not typically emphasized in classroom materials.

Participants also noted that many TikTok videos, especially narrative formats such as storytime follow a familiar structure that begins with background the information, moves to a main event, and ends with a reaction. This familiarity made it easier for them to follow content even if the language was fast or heavily informal.

“Because many videos have the same format, like storytime, it’s easier to guess what the speaker will say next.” (P1)

In addition to authenticity, participants emphasized the enjoyable and flexible nature of using TikTok. Short videos supported by visual cues made listening feel effortless, allowing English exposure to take place organically during everyday activities. This sense of enjoyment closely aligns with Suprihatin & Kurniawan, (2023), who highlight the role of multimodal input in creating accessible learning experiences.

“It doesn’t feel like studying; it’s entertainment but still improves my listening.” (P2)

In addition to enjoyment, participants also described using TikTok for listening as motivating. They felt encouraged to continue watching English content because the platform frequently suggested videos aligned with their interests, making the listening

experience feel relevant and personalized. Some participants also noticed that they gradually understood more slang, faster speech, and unfamiliar accents over time, which gave them a sense of progress and increased their confidence. These feelings of improvement and relevance contributed to their motivation to keep engaging with English listening practice on TikTok.

Together, these experiences show how authenticity, familiarity with content types, and enjoyment combine to support sustained meaningful engagement with English listening practice.

## **2. Self-Directed Strategies to Overcome Challenges**

Participants also discussed challenges such as rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, and limited subtitles. To address these issues, they relied on self-directed strategies, including replaying videos, enabling captions, choosing content aligned with their proficiency, and using visual cues to support comprehension.

“The accents on TikTok are more varied, so sometimes it’s a bit difficult, but subtitles can help.” (P3)

Participants also mentioned using visual cues to assist understanding when they were unable to catch certain words. These strategies reflect metacognitive regulation, which Goh & Vandergrift (2021) describe as an essential part of effective listening development. Without explicit instruction, participants naturally monitored their difficulties and adjusted their approach as needed. This experience is in line with Fokatea & Widagsa (2024), who noted that TikTok supports autonomy through self-directed strategy use.

## **3. Integrative Meaning: Entertainment and Learning Combined**

Beyond the two main themes, participants perceived TikTok as a digital space where entertainment and learning naturally intersect. They explained that the platform serves different purposes depending on how they choose to engage with the content, allowing English exposure to occur in a way that feels personal and meaningful.

“TikTok can be both entertainment and learning; it depends on us as users and content creators.” (P2)

This integrative perspective highlights how participants exercise agency in shaping their own learning experiences. Rather than relying on structured materials, they decide what to watch, how to interact with content, and when learning occurs. This sense of ownership reflects a shift from passive consumption toward intentional, self-directed digital participation. Such agency aligns with the concept of critical digital engagement, where individuals navigate digital environments with purpose and awareness (Suprihatin & Kurniawan, 2023).

This study revealed two major themes and one integrative meaning regarding participants’ experiences with TikTok as a tool for English listening practice. The first theme highlights how TikTok provides authentic, enjoyable, and motivating input, while the second theme demonstrates participants’ self-directed strategies in managing listening challenges. The integrative meaning shows that participants view TikTok as a space where entertainment and learning naturally intersect.

The participants perceived TikTok as a source of authentic, diverse, and enjoyable English listening materials. This result supports Gilmore (2007) and Setiawan et al. (2024), who emphasized that authentic input enhances communicative competence by

exposing learners to natural language use in real-life contexts. Similarly, Alolayan (2025) found that short multimodal videos on TikTok provide rich listening input that reflects everyday speech and various accents. However, unlike Fauziah and Pratolo (2025), who reported that informal expressions on TikTok sometimes caused comprehension difficulties, the participants in this study viewed such informal features as motivating and relatable. This contrast may be explained by their metacognitive awareness and selective engagement, which enabled them to focus more on meaning than on grammatical accuracy. Therefore, this study extends previous research by suggesting that authentic digital content can increase both linguistic exposure and emotional engagement, making listening practice more meaningful and sustainable.

The study also found that TikTok created a flexible and motivating environment for listening practice. This finding aligns with Fokatea and Widagsa (2024) and Alolayan (2025), who concluded that social media platforms reduce affective barriers and promote learner autonomy. Participants in this study expressed that listening through TikTok felt enjoyable because it could be done anytime and anywhere, turning casual scrolling into incidental learning. This is consistent with Goh & Vandergrift's (2021) idea that a relaxed, low-pressure setting enhances listening comprehension. Nevertheless, the current study contributes further by emphasizing the role of autonomy beyond classroom contexts. Unlike Suprihatin and Kurniawan (2023), who discussed TikTok in a formal learning setting, the present findings reveal that learners independently transformed entertainment into autonomy play a key role in sustaining engagement in digital learning environments.

Taken together, these two themes reveal an overarching meaning: students perceive TikTok not merely as an entertainment platform, but as a flexible digital space where learning can occur naturally and intentionally. Although this interpretation did not function as a separate theme, it reflects how authenticity, motivation, and metacognitive strategies combine to shape participants' overall experiences. This aligns with Suprihatin & Kurniawan (2023), who emphasize the importance of learner agency and critical digital awareness when navigating social media for educational purposes. In this study, participants demonstrated such agency by actively transforming casual content consumption into meaningful listening practice.

Overall, the interconnectedness of authentic input, motivational engagement, and self-directed strategy use suggests that TikTok can serve as an effective supplementary tool for English listening development. Authentic materials encourage engagement, flexible use increases motivation, and strategy application supports comprehension. These insights highlight the need for educators to guide students in using digital platforms intentionally so that entertainment-based media can be transformed into purposeful learning experiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored undergraduate students' perceived benefits of using TikTok for English listening practice through a phenomenological approach. The findings revealed two major themes: (1) TikTok provides authentic, enjoyable, and motivating

listening experiences, and (2) participants employ self-directed strategies to manage challenges such as varied accents and fast-paced speech. Beyond these themes, an integrative meaning emerged, showing that participants perceive TikTok as a digital space where entertainment and learning naturally intersect, allowing them to engage with English input in flexible and personally meaningful ways.

The study concludes that integrating social media platforms such as TikTok into language learning can enhance students' exposure to authentic input and improve their motivation and autonomy. However, learners need to be guided to use digital content critically and purposefully to avoid distractions and maintain learning focus. Future research is suggested to explore classroom-based implementations of TikTok for listening practice and examine its long-term impact on students' listening comprehension and digital literacy.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on social media-assisted language learning by providing phenomenological insights into how students experience TikTok as a listening resource. The findings highlight the role of learner agency, authenticity, and self-directed strategies in informal digital learning environments. These insights offer pedagogical implications for integrating social media platforms as supplementary listening resources in English language education.

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