

## EFL Students' Perception on The Use of TED Talks to Enhance Speaking Skills

Hasna Azzahra<sup>1</sup>, Rahma Aulia Usysyifa<sup>2</sup>, Fadhilatul Maulidha<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Language Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Pekalongan Indonesia

[hasna.azzahra@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:hasna.azzahra@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup> English Language Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Pekalongan Indonesia

[rahma.aulia.usysyifa@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:rahma.aulia.usysyifa@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup> English Language Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Pekalongan Indonesia

[fadhilatul.maulidha@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:fadhilatul.maulidha@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id)

### Abstract

*Learning English for EFL students requires more than just vocabulary and grammar; it also needs confidence and fluency. This study explores how students view TED Talks as a tool to help improve their speaking skills. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data gathered from university students through semi-structured interviews. The results show that TED Talks help them improve pronunciation, fluency, and speaking confidence. They also learn from authentic English input, noticing how speakers use intonation, gestures, and organize their ideas in presentations. Students reported feeling more motivated to practice speaking because they could see real examples of effective communication. They also appreciated being able to manage their own learning by choosing talks and strategies that suited them. However, they faced some challenges, such as fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and varied accents. To handle these difficulties, they used strategies like replaying videos, using subtitles, taking notes, and practicing independently. Overall, the study concludes that TED Talks can be an effective supplementary resource for speaking practice when combined with supportive activities and guidance from teachers to help learners maximize the benefits.*

**Keywords:** TED Talks; EFL; Speaking Skills; Student Perception; Language Learning

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### Introduction

Speaking is a key part of communication, but many EFL learners struggle with it because they rarely get to hear or use real, natural English, and they lack good speaking models. In many contexts, this difficulty is worsened by speaking anxiety, low

self-confidence, and limited exposure to authentic speaking situations (Riadil, 2021). In classrooms that rely on traditional methods, students often miss out on genuine interaction: role-plays or drills may feel artificial, so learners don't get enough chances to speak meaningfully and confidently.

TED Talks can help fill that gap. These speeches are real-world, well-delivered English presentations that show natural intonation, clear pronunciation, and strong communication strategies. Because they are given by a wide range of speakers, they also expose learners to different accents and speaking styles, making them great models for EFL students. According to Fitria (2022), TED Talks allow students to analyze how speakers organize their ideas, use gestures, and emphasize key points helping students learn not just what to say, but how to say it.

Although much of the past research has focused on how TED Talks improve listening and vocabulary, there is growing evidence that they also support speaking. Patty et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study and found significant improvements in students' speaking competence (fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation) after integrating TED Talks into instruction. Students also reported feeling more confident and motivated to speak in English after watching the talks.

Given this background, the purpose of this study is to explore EFL students' perceptions of using TED Talks to boost their speaking skills. Specifically, it asks: How do students feel about using TED Talks for improving their spoken English? By focusing on their attitudes, perceived benefits, challenges, and strategies, the study aims to find out whether TED Talks can be a practical and effective tool for enhancing speaking in EFL settings (Daflizar, 2024).

## Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' perceptions of using TED Talks for speaking improvement. The participants were three English major university students who had prior experience watching TED Talks. They were selected purposively because they could provide rich insights about using TED Talks to learn speaking. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences and opinions freely.

The interview questions focused on the participants' experiences with TED Talks, including how the videos influenced their pronunciation, fluency, and confidence; how they noticed and learned from real language use, intonation, gestures, and presentation styles; the challenges they faced; and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. The recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns, recurring ideas, and key insights across participants. The researchers ensured trustworthiness by checking the transcripts with participants for accuracy and clarity. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were fully observed throughout the study.

## **Findings**

This study explored students' perceptions of using TED Talks to improve their speaking skills through semi-structured interviews with three female participants. The findings are presented descriptively, with direct quotes to show participants' authentic experiences.

All participants felt that TED Talks were helpful for improving their speaking. They said the videos exposed them to natural English, including pronunciation, intonation, and presentation style, which felt more real than textbook listening. Emma shared:

*"I think TED Talks really help, especially to hear how native speakers talk. I understand their intonation and how they explain ideas. It feels more natural than listening from a book" (Emma, 2025).*

Mia added:

*"For me, TED Talks help because I can hear real speaking examples. I learn how speakers organize their ideas, not just grammar" (Mia, 2025).*

Lily also noted:

*"I feel TED Talks help because I can see how people speak in public. Like the others, I learn intonation and how to put sentences together when explaining something" (Lily, 2025).*

Participants described specific improvements they noticed. All mentioned that TED Talks helped with pronunciation and confidence. Emma said:

*“The biggest thing for me is pronunciation and confidence. Because I hear how they speak, I feel braver to imitate them. I also like the speaker’s gestures; they help when I present” (Emma, 2025).*

Mia added:

*“Like my friends said, pronunciation and fluency improved the most. After watching a few times, I got used to the rhythm of their speaking. I also learned some new vocabulary” (Mia, 2025).*

Lily agreed:

*“Same here, pronunciation and confidence are what help me the most. I feel braver to speak even if my grammar isn’t perfect. Their intonation is easy to copy” (Lily, 2025).*

However, participants also faced challenges. The speed of speech was often too fast, and some vocabulary was difficult to understand. Emma mentioned:

*“It’s usually hard because the video is fast and the words are sometimes difficult. I usually watch it again with English subtitles first. When I understand, I try without subtitles” (Emma, 2025).*

Mia said:

*“I also feel the speech is too fast. Sometimes I pause, rewind, and write down hard words. If the accent is difficult, I look for a speaker who’s easier to understand” (Mia, 2025).*

Lily added:

*“The problem is mostly the same, fast talking and hard words. I usually use subtitles first and watch again. Sometimes I write down new words to study later” (Lily, 2025).*

To handle these difficulties, participants developed strategies like replaying videos, using subtitles, pausing to take notes, and writing down new words. These strategies show they actively engaged with the material and practiced self-directed learning.

Overall, the findings suggest that TED Talks are seen as a useful tool for improving speaking skills. Participants appreciated the authentic language input and real examples of communication. Even with challenges like fast speech, difficult vocabulary, and accents, they used strategies to overcome them. Their experiences indicate that TED Talks can support speaking improvement in EFL contexts through authentic exposure and learner-driven strategies.

## **Discussion**

The interview findings suggest that TED Talks serve as a powerful and flexible tool for enhancing EFL students’ speaking skills. The participants’ positive perceptions especially regarding pronunciation, intonation, and confidence clearly align with existing research. For instance, Fitriyani, et al (2024) found in their case study that students responded very positively to TED Talk videos; they reported increased motivation, better pronunciation, and exposure to new vocabulary. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Patty (2024) showed a *large positive effect* of using TED Talks on students’ speaking competency, suggesting that the benefits observed by the participants in our study are not anecdotal but supported more broadly.

One of the most striking benefits from the students’ responses is how natural and “real” the language of TED speakers felt. The participants highlighted that they don’t just hear scripted textbook English they hear real speakers organizing their ideas, using gestures, and conveying passion. This realism helps them internalize not only *what* to say, but *how* to say it. This supports the argument that TED Talks provide *authentic input* which is critical for language learning (Fitria, 2022). In addition, in the study by Cuong &

Pang (2024), EFL seniors reported using TED Talks regularly to develop their public speaking skills, precisely because they saw these as models of effective speech giving.

The improvement in pronunciation and confidence, as reported by Emma, Mia, and Lily, also aligns with classroom-based research. For example, Imroatul Karimah et al. (2022) found that using TED Talks significantly improved students' pronunciation, fluency, and public speaking ability. The consistency across these contexts suggests that the exposure to well-delivered spoken discourse can help learners internalize prosodic features and become more comfortable speaking themselves.

However, the challenges raised by participants especially about fast speech, difficult vocabulary, and varied accents are important to address. These are not just trivial complaints; they reflect the complexity of authentic materials. As one student said, *"the video is fast ... the words are sometimes difficult"*. This echoes what teachers and researchers have observed. In a qualitative study from Indonesia, Saputra (2025) noted that students found certain TED Talks too fast or with unfamiliar accents, and they missed opportunities for interaction, which limited the usefulness of the talks for developing speaking confidence.

Importantly, the strategies participants used to overcome these challenges replaying videos, using English subtitles, pausing to take notes, and writing down new vocabulary show their active engagement and self-regulation. These are not passive learners; they are self-directed, choosing to scaffold their own learning. Such behaviors are exactly what many pedagogical models recommend when using authentic video resources: not just "watch," but pause, reflect, imitate, and internalize (Tran & Nguyen, 2024).

From a pedagogical standpoint, these results have several important implications. First, teachers who want to integrate TED Talks into their speaking curriculum should not just show the videos and move on. They can scaffold the activity: before watching, students might be given guiding questions; during watching, they might pause to discuss or shadow; after watching, they could reflect, practice, or even role-play parts of the talk. Such scaffolding can help mitigate comprehension issues and deepen learning (Mildayanti, 2023).

Second, curriculum designers should carefully select TED Talks that match students' language level and interests. If talks are too advanced (e.g., very fast, dense vocabulary, difficult accents), they may demotivate or overwhelm learners. But if selected

Well, TED Talks can serve as an engaging bridge between the “real world” of language and the classroom world, enriching both content and language learning. This aligns with findings about the use of authentic materials and scaffolding (Zhang & Singh, 2025).

Third, there is room to integrate TED Talks with peer interaction. While our participants primarily used talks independently, pairing TED viewing with group discussion or presentation tasks can leverage the motivational power of speaking in front of others while using models from the talks. This could make learning more collaborative and communicative, consistent with research on scaffolding-based instruction enhancing motivation and reducing anxiety in EFL learners (Cuba Carbajal, et al, 2023).

On a theoretical level, the findings support the notion that authentic input and learner autonomy together can lead to meaningful speaking development. This combination aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles: authentic, meaningful language use, plus opportunities for learners to manage their own learning (Husna et al, 2024).

Yet, there are some limitations and caveats. First, watching TED Talks by itself may not be enough for all learners: without guided tasks, students might not internalize all the language or practice production adequately. Second, there may be a selection bias: the participants in this study seemed motivated and self-directed; learners who are less intrinsically motivated might not adopt the replaying, note-taking, and self-regulation strategies. Third, the duration and frequency of TED Talk use were not deeply explored how much time and how often should students engage with these videos to see real improvement?

For future research, several avenues are worth exploring. One, a longitudinal study could examine how regular use of TED Talks over a semester or year impacts speaking accuracy, fluency, and other dimensions (e.g., complexity, interaction). Two, experimental or quasi-experimental designs could compare classes that use TED Talks and scaffolded tasks versus those that don't, to measure the added value. Three, teacher perspectives could be studied: how do EFL teachers perceive the integration of TED Talks, what challenges do they face, and what support do they need (Husna, Fauziati, & Setyaningsih, 2024). Four, research could explore peer-based tasks (e.g., students do mini TED-style talks themselves) to see if production based on models strengthens speaking competence

This study explored how EFL students perceive TED Talks for improving their speaking skills. The participants found TED Talks helpful for improving pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. They also learned from authentic language, including intonation, gestures, and presentation styles, which felt more natural than textbook listening. Watching the videos regularly helped them notice how ideas are organized and how speakers engage the audience. Overall, TED Talks provided a realistic model of spoken English that motivated students to practice speaking. The students also faced challenges, such as fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and different accents. To overcome these difficulties, they used strategies like replaying videos, using subtitles, taking notes, and practicing independently. These actions show that students were active and self-directed learners. With proper guidance and supportive activities from teachers, TED Talks can be a practical tool for speaking improvement. Therefore, TED Talks can be an engaging and effective supplementary resource for EFL learners to develop their speaking skills.

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