YouTube as a Digital Learning Platform to Enhance Speaking Skills: A Study on the Perceptions and Challenges among Pre-University Students

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores pre-university students' perceptions and challenges in using YouTube to develop English speaking skills. Using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a theoretical framework, semi structured interviews were conducted with seven pre-university students and analysed thematically to understand their perception and challenges of using YouTube to enhance speaking skills. Findings reveal that YouTube positively enhances the pre-university students speaking skills development, as well as highlighting the challenges related to accent comprehension, distractions and the need for teacher guidance. The study highlights the need for integrating teacher facilitation and developing curated YouTube content to maximize its educational potential. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of digital learning tools in language acquisition and suggest directions for future research and pedagogical practice.

Keywords: YouTube, English Speaking Skills, Technology Acceptance Model, Pre-University Students, Language Learning, Digital Learning Tools

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of language learning, speaking ability has emerged as a critical skill, particularly for learners at the pre-university level. Dalem (2017) highlights that speaking is arguably the most vital component in second language learning, a position supported by Tuan and Mai (2015), who emphasizes that the ultimate aim of English language education is to cultivate learners' ability to communicate fluently and effectively. However, despite its significance, the mastery of speaking skills remains a persistent challenge for language learners, especially when traditional methodologies are employed. Richards (2008) notes that such methods often fail to engage learners in meaningful communication. Unlike core science subjects, pre-university students tend to view English language as an entry requirement rather than a meaningful skill to be learnt thereby decreasing students' engagement and motivation to develop speaking proficiency.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Yunus, Salehi, and Chenzi (2012) state that a lack of engagement is directly linked to practices that promote traditional approaches, which focus on teacher-centred, grammar-based methods that prioritize accuracy and written proficiency. Although these methods support exam-oriented goals, they leave learners with insufficient practice in spontaneous speech (Song, 2009, as cited in Andiappan et al., 2022). Digitally native learners, who tend to interact effectively with visual, interactive, and collaborative learning environments, face significant challenges (Prensky, 2001). Therefore, there is a pressing need to adopt innovative approaches that align with students' learning preferences in using technology.

YouTube, in essence has emerged as a transformative tool in language education to address this issue. Nair and Md Yunus (2022) highlights' the integration of digital media, a key factor that enhances oral communication which promotes creativity, motivation and confidence. Similarly, Zakaria, Hashim, and Yunus (2019) states that the importance of affective and social strategies in the development of speaking skills, significantly impact learners' speaking performance. YouTube not only provides accessibility but engages with students' digital preferences. As noted by Hong, Chen, and Ye (2020) and Watkins and Wilkins (2011), YouTube provides students with an array of authentic materials enabling students to develop spoken language skills. Research by

Donny & Adnan, 2022; Ávila-Cabrera & Corral-Esteban, 2021 suggests more students are confident and willing to speak, especially in low-anxiety settings where they can control the pace and repetition of their interaction. Additionally, studies by Zhang, 2019; Albahlal, (2019) have also shown positive changes in pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary retention as a result of using YouTube content. Digital environments further promote learner autonomy and personalized pacing, which enhance cognitive engagement and language retention (Muniandy & Veloo, 2011; Michael & Shah, 2020; Qomaria & Zaim, 2021). Collectively, these findings promote the potential of YouTube in developing linguistic proficiency and to cultivate positive conditions and independent learning behaviours. These pedagogical benefits, while widely acknowledged, require further investigation within local learning context, particularly at the pre-university level in Malaysia, where speaking remains an overlooked skill.

To guide this research, the study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally proposed by Davis (1989), which emphasizes that individuals' willingness to embrace new technologies is largely influenced by their perceptions of the technology's usefulness and ease of use. TAM provides a valuable lens through which to explore how learners evaluate digital platforms such as YouTube for language learning purposes. Previous research by John and Yunus (2020) and Devi et al. (2020) supports the idea that learners are more likely to engage with digital tools when they perceive them as beneficial and easy to navigate. This study aims to explore the attitude of students toward its use in language acquisition, as well as the problems they may encounter. To address the stated objectives, this study endeavours to explore and provide insights into the following inquiries:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-university students regarding the use of YouTube in developing their speaking skills?
2. What are the challenges faced by pre-university students when using YouTube for improving their speaking abilities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a significant factor in the evolution of global education (Iberahim et al., 2023). Traditional pedagogy has made way for new approaches to teaching and learning. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025), which stresses the incorporation of technological innovations at all educational levels, highlights the importance of digital adaption in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2013). Both Education 4.0 and Industry 4.0, support learner-centered, individualized, and technology-mediated tools created to satisfy the changing needs of a knowledge-based economy (Halili, 2019; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

This shift is especially critical in the Malaysian context, where higher education institutions are increasingly expected to adopt these pedagogical innovations to ensure graduates are future-ready. Dunwill (2016) further highlights that the convergence of digital platforms and evolving learner needs is revolutionizing the traditional classroom, urging educators to reconceptualize teaching methodologies to embrace flexibility, interactivity and multimodal content delivery. Recent research also indicates that successful digital integration requires both pedagogical intentionality and technology availability to sustain engagement and facilitate deep learning (Rahman et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2023).

Speaking Skills in the Pre-University Context

Within this digital context, language learning particularly speaking skills has experienced significant transformation. Speaking, as a core productive language skill, is widely acknowledged as the most complex to acquire in second language learning due to its spontaneous and real-time nature (Luoma, 2004; Goh & Burns, 2012). Among Malaysian students, especially those enrolled in pre-university programmes, speaking skills remain notably underdeveloped despite over a decade of learning English language. English is frequently perceived not as a vital communicative tool, but rather as an academic requirement, a subject to be passed rather than a language to be internalized and proficiently employed (Andiappan, Subramaniam, & Lee, 2022; Karim, Kamal, & Chowdhury, 2023). Thus, these students often exhibit reluctance to speak, limited lexical range, poor pronunciation and lack of fluency, all of which impede their ability to express ideas confidently in

academic and social contexts (Azaruddin et al., 2022; Morat et al., 2017; Alias et al., 2021). The problem is compounded in higher education settings where students are expected to participate in seminars, deliver oral presentations and engage in critical discussions thus, speaking skills is vital for both academic success and future workplace performance (Sani & Zainal, 2020; Normazidah, Koo & Hazita, 2012). Pre-university education serves as a transitional bridge to tertiary-level learning, where students are required not only to comprehend content but also to articulate complex ideas clearly and persuasively in English (Yunus, Nordin, Salehi, Embi, & Salehi, 2013). Weaknesses in speaking at this stage can lead to lower self-confidence, reduced participation and academic underperformance (Gill, 2002). Moreover, poor communication skills are frequently cited by employers as a major concern among Malaysian graduates (Yunus & Mat, 2014; MoHE, 2015), further stressing the need to strengthen speaking competencies. Traditional pre-university learning environment in Malaysia have been characterized as instructor-centered and limited opportunities for communicative interaction (Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello, 2021). These methods do not adequately prepare students for the spontaneity and pragmatics of real-world communication. Without interventions and a paradigm shift in how speaking skill is positioned within the curriculum from a subject to be endured to a skill to be mastered, the development of effective speaking skills will remain elusive for many pre-university students.

YouTube as a Tool for Enhancing Speaking Skills

The rise of digital learning has prompted increased interest in leveraging technology to enhance language acquisition. Among various platforms, YouTube stands out due to its accessibility, popularity and the rich multimodal content it provides. Since its acquisition by Google in 2006, YouTube has become the most widely used video-sharing platform for information, entertainment and educational content (Hong, Chen & Ye, 2020). With over two billion users globally, it offers an extensive repository of authentic audiovisual material that can be harnessed for language learning.

Multiple studies have shown YouTube's ability to facilitate language development through real-life language usage, visual-auditory reinforcement, and contextualized speech models (Watkins & Wilkins, 2011; Zhang, 2019). Research done by Ávila-Cabrera & Corral-Esteban, 2021 also states that learners encounter various accents, intonation patterns, body language, and communicative contexts that are frequently absent in traditional environment. Furthermore, YouTube promotes learner autonomy by enabling students to choose content that corresponds with their interests and learning pace (Morat et al., 2017; Michael & Shah, 2020). The ability to pause, replay and imitate speech enables students to improve pronunciation and fluency while facilitating self - reflective and monitoring. This aligns with Nation and Newton's (2009) claim that frequent exposure to target language input is crucial for internalizing language structures and enhancing spoken fluency. This is particularly valuable for pre-university students who may otherwise be reticent in formal classroom settings. Furthermore, teacher-curated YouTube activities such as guided discussions, role-play based on videos, or pronunciation shadowing have been shown to bridge comprehension gaps while enhancing engagement. These studies show YouTube's pivotal role in delivering content and as a dynamic learning platform for students. The integration of these findings highlights the platform's pedagogical value in addressing the limitations of conventional methods by providing students with access to improved speaking competency.

Challenges in the Integration of YouTube for Speaking Skill Development

YouTube is a potential educational tool; however, its effectiveness in the ESL contexts, especially regarding the development of speaking skills, has notable limitations. A notable issue is brought forward by Kaur & Noman, 2021; Buntod, 2022 who states that there is a potential for passive consumption. Students may view videos without participating in active language use. This passive interaction may result in meaningless engagement (Gavriely-Nuri & Talmon, 2021). Technological accessibility and infrastructure disparities also presents significant challenges. In educational settings, especially in rural Malaysia, poor internet connectivity and restricted access to personal digital devices considerably hinder students' engagement with video-based learning resources (Azman, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). These digital divides intensify educational inequality and undermine the efficacy of YouTube-based interventions. Furthermore, Yaman & Ekmekçi, 2021 also states that digital literacy continues to be a significant concern, as both students and educators may not possess

the necessary skills to critically select, evaluate, and effectively integrate YouTube content into language learning activities. Students may either misuse the platform or fail to fully utilize its features for language development particularly speaking skills. Distraction from unrelated videos further compounds the problem, underscoring the need for pedagogical scaffolding to focus towards targeted speaking objectives. Comprehension gaps also arise when learners engage with content that exceeds their competency level. Additionally, in the absence of teacher intervention or organized listening techniques, students may misconstrue or lose interest in authentic content (Liu et al., 2020). This suggests that teacher-curated video playlist, pre-teaching of vocabulary and structured post-viewing task can transform viewing into deeper language use Vanderplank, (2016). These limitations highlight the necessity for deliberate pedagogical design and effective teacher facilitation to maximize YouTube's potential in improving speaking skills. Effective integration requires development of interactive tasks that transform input into output, including video-based discussion prompts, role-play simulations, and speech recording assignments. Without these deliberate instructional strategies, YouTube may operate as an engaging but educationally ineffective resource (Hafner, 2014; Wang & Chen, 2020).

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

This study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) to examine students' engagement with YouTube to improve proficiency of their speaking skills. According to Venkatesh & Bala, 2008; Scherer et al., (2019), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), was initially developed to understand the user adoption of information technology. However, it has now been extensively modified for educational contexts to investigate students' engagement with digital tools and platforms.

TAM comprises two fundamental elements: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), which are essential in assessing students' behavioral intention to adopt technology. In this study, PU denotes students' perception of the effectiveness of YouTube in improving their speaking competencies. PEOU reflects the ease with which students can access, navigate, and utilize YouTube's features for educational purposes. In the pre-university contexts, these perceptions are crucial for comprehending how students incorporate informal digital resources into their language development practices. A growing body of literature affirms that factors such as internet reliability, device availability, prior digital exposure, and language proficiency mediate the relationship between perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) (Halili & Sulaiman, 2018; Raman et al., 2019; Yaman & Ekmekçi, 2021). Although students may view YouTube as pedagogically advantageous, technical barriers like poor connectivity or limited device access can diminish its perceived ease of use, thereby restricting active engagement. Studies by Michael & Shah, 2020; Muniandy & Veloo, (2011) indicate that embedding YouTube videos within structured, guided tasks significantly enhances perceptions of both usefulness and usability. This shows that YouTube's integration is consistent with the enhancement of speaking skills among pre-university students. The model clarifies effective methods for providing deeper insights into the perceptions and limitations of utilizing YouTube to enhance speaking skills. As the educational landscape continues to evolve in response to technological advancements and global challenges, integrating platforms like YouTube among pre- university students represents not just an innovation, but a necessity for developing the communicative competencies essential in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative methodology guided by the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2024). This approach was considered suitable as it allowed for an in-depth examination of students' perspectives, with an emphasis on personal reflection and individual experiences. The study aimed to explore the perceptions and challenges faced by pre-university students in northern Malaysia when using YouTube to improve their English speaking proficiency. The participants consisted of seven pre-university students, all aged 18, who were enrolled in the 2024/2025 pre-university programme at a private university in northern Malaysia. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that students were relevant to the study's objectives. The inclusion criteria specified that students must frequently engage with YouTube content designed to improve English-speaking skills, be able to reflect on their learning experiences, and willing to take part in a semi-structured interview. This careful selection process ensured that the study gathered rich, relevant and reflective accounts.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because they allowed the researcher to address key topics while still giving participants the flexibility to share their personal experiences in depth. This method is particularly effective for capturing nuanced and detailed accounts of individual perspectives (Ruslin et al., 2022). A smaller sample of seven students is deemed sufficient because it allowed for intensive engagement with each student's experiences, facilitating detailed, in-depth exploration of their perspectives. Smaller samples are particularly advantageous when the research seeks to investigate complex, context-specific insights, as they allow the researcher to focus on the quality of the narratives rather than the quantity of responses.

In addition, the homogeneity of the sample, students of the same age group, programme level, and educational setting ensured that the participants shared relevant background characteristics, thereby making it easier to identify recurring patterns and differences within a focused context (Boddy, 2016). This aligns with qualitative research principles, where small, purposively selected samples are often employed to capture the nuanced realities of a specific group. While the findings are not intended to be broadly generalizable, they offer contextually rich insights that can serve as a foundation for future studies involving larger and more diverse populations

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis for this study was conducted using thematic analysis which supports a flexible and insightful approach to identify and interpret recurring patterns of meaning within the narrative of the students (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is suitable for examining perceptions and challenges students faced using YouTube to improve their speaking skills. Thematic analysis was used to examine both the content of the students' statements and their interpretations of speaking experiences using YouTube. The initial phase entailed thorough engagement with the data. All semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim, documenting verbal nuances, pauses, and natural speech patterns to maintain the authenticity of the students' voices. The transcripts underwent multiple readings, accompanied by reflective note-taking and preliminary interpretation. This process facilitated a comprehensive understanding of each student's narrative and highlighted potential areas of thematic importance. Manual coding was adopted to identify key features of the data pertinent to the primary research questions. Each transcript underwent a line-by-line analysis to identify descriptive segments, phrases, or recurring themes that represented participants' experiences. The data fragments were assigned initial interpretive labels (codes) including "positive perception," "confidence building," "improved fluency," "improved pronunciation," "distraction," "technical issues," "difficulty in selecting content," "negative perception," and "teachers guided needed." Codes were derived from the data. After coding all data, related codes were grouped into larger clusters of meaning. The clusters were analysed to discern patterns that indicated common meanings among all respondents, alongside distinct insights relevant to particular contexts. The process entailed the formation of conceptual clusters of codes, including those associated with confidence, fluency, pronunciation, and pedagogical expectations, which were subsequently organized into initial thematic categories. For example, statements such as "I feel more confident speaking after watching vloggers" and "I mimic their tone and phrases" were categorized under a broader theme initially designated as "Confidence and Pronunciation Fluency." This phase represented a transition to interpretive categorization, as the data began to assume thematic structure.

The emergent themes were then subjected to a process of refinement. Each theme was re-examined against the coded data extracts to ensure coherence, consistency and conceptual clarity. Themes that lacked sufficient narrative depth or did not capture a distinct meaning were either restructured, combined, or discarded. As a result, five final themes were established;

1. YouTube as a Positive Learning Tool
2. Enhancing Learners' Confidence and Fluency
3. Impact on Pronunciation Development
4. Distractions and Technical Challenges
5. Comprehension and Pedagogical Gaps

These themes were not treated as rigid categories but as fluid constructs, representing interconnected layers of the respondents' experience that resonated with the two guiding research questions. The theme names were crafted to be meaningful, while reflecting on the essence of the research questions. The theme "Enhancing Learners' Confidence and Fluency" captured not just the development of verbal skills but also the emotional transformation of the respondents' experience through repeated engagement with English content on YouTube. "Comprehension and Pedagogical Gaps" highlighted respondents' frustrations with understanding video content independently and their expressed need for structured instructional support. Throughout this stage, the themes were further enriched by being aligned with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), especially the constructs of Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use and Behavioural Intention to Use (Davis, 1989). For example, students' perceptions of YouTube as an engaging medium corresponded positively with its perceived utility, whereas concerns related to distractions and technical issues aligned with difficulties related to usability. In the concluding phase, the themes were integrated into a narrative synthesis, underpinned by descriptions and direct quotations from students to maintain the authenticity of their perspectives. Interpretive commentary linking students' perceptions was also provided. The findings were contextualized within the broader framework of qualitative educational research, emphasizing the transformative potential of YouTube as a platform for enhancing speaking skills. In accordance with qualitative research ethics, all students received informed consent following a briefing on the study's objectives and procedures. Confidentiality was upheld during the process, with all identifying information redacted from transcripts. Ethical procedures followed institutional guidelines, ensuring respect, dignity, and voluntariness throughout all phases of data management (Dahal, 2024). Thematic analysis offered a flexible framework for revealing respondents' perceptions regarding the use of YouTube to enhance their speaking skills. This qualitative approach, framed within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), underscores the transformative potential of learner-centered digital tools, as articulated by the respondents' voices and reflections.

FINDINGS

Based on the coding of the transcripts from seven respondents (S1–S7), the following five themes have been developed, corresponding to the two research questions. These themes reflect both the benefits and challenges students perceive in using YouTube to enhance their speaking skills.

Table 1 Identified Themes and Codes

Theme 1 Code	**YouTube as a Positive Learning Tool** *Positive Perception*
Theme 2 Codes	**Enhancing Learners' Confidence and Fluency** *Confidence Building, Improved Fluency*
Theme 3 Codes	**Impact on Pronunciation Development** *Improved Pronunciation*
Theme 4 Codes	**Distractions and Technical Challenges** *Distractions, Technical Issues*
Theme 5 Codes	**Comprehension and Pedagogical Gaps** *Comprehension Difficulties, Teacher's Guidance Needed*

These themes are organized under the two main research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of pre-university students regarding the use of YouTube in developing their speaking skills?

YouTube as a positive learning tool

A significant number of participants expressed favourable attitudes toward YouTube as a language learning tool. This theme reflects learners' appreciation of the platform's accessibility, flexibility and user-friendliness, a core constructs in the TAM model. Respondents frequently emphasized YouTube's motivational value and ability to facilitate personalized, informal learning outside traditional classrooms. S3 highlighted, "*YouTube makes learning feel natural. I don't feel like I'm studying, but I'm learning at the same time."* Similarly, S5

commented, "*It's a fun way to learn English, not like reading a textbook. I can find videos that match what I like."* These remarks support research by Moghavvemi et al. (2018), who argue that YouTube fosters intrinsic motivation and learner engagement through relatable, multimedia-rich content.

In terms of perceived usefulness, learners described how YouTube allowed them to access a wide range of English content at their own pace. S1 remarked, *"When I don't understand something, I just pause or replay. That really helps me understand better."* The autonomy and adaptability of the platform highlight its effectiveness as a tool for individualized learning, corroborating Alwehaibi's (2015) findings that YouTube enhances learner autonomy and motivation in educational contexts. The favourable perception corresponds with the perceived ease of use, as the majority of respondents regarded the platform as intuitive. The simplicity of content navigation and selection fostered a stress-free learning environment, enhancing students' readiness to incorporate YouTube into their study practices.

Enhancing Learners' Confidence and Fluency

The interviews consistently highlighted the beneficial effects of YouTube on learners' confidence and speaking fluency. Participants reported that consistent exposure to spoken English through videos enhanced their comfort in speaking the language and improved their ability to articulate thoughts. S2 explained, *"I used to be very shy, but after watching people speak confidently, I started trying to speak like them. Now I feel braver."* S6 shared a similar experience, stating, "*I used to pause and think too much when speaking. But now, after practicing with YouTube, I speak more smoothly."* These reflections underscore how modeling and repetition is essential and are naturally embedded in YouTube viewing. Watching fluent speakers repeatedly enabled learners to internalize speech rhythms and vocabulary, which they then attempted to emulate. This is in line with Watkins and Wilkins (2011), who assert that video-based input supports speaking fluency and builds communicative confidence by providing learners with accessible language models. From the TAM lens, confidence and fluency improvements contribute directly to perceived usefulness. When students recognize tangible improvements in their speaking ability, they are more likely to value the platform and continue using it.

Impact on Pronunciation Development

The theme of pronunciation development was particularly prominent among one who paid close attention to phonological features in videos. YouTube offered respondents the opportunity to observe mouth movements, stress patterns, and native intonation in real-time. S4 remarked, *"I never realized I was saying some words wrong until I watched a video where the speaker said it clearly."* S7 added, *"When I hear how native speakers pronounce words, I can copy them. I repeat after them and check if I'm close."* Respondents found this immersive and mimicry-based learning more effective than traditional instruction. This reflects the concept of auditory scaffolding, where learners develop pronunciation through listening and imitation (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Additionally, Liu et al. (2020) also emphasised that the visual-auditory combination strengthens pronunciation retention an input crucial for pronunciation mastery in ESL learners. The significance of perceived ease of use is apparent, as the platform enables learners to replay and slow down videos, facilitating a focus on pronunciation nuances, capabilities that traditional classrooms may not provide as effectively.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges faced by pre-university students when using YouTube for improving their speaking abilities?

Distractions and Technical Challenges

Although YouTube offers significant potential, numerous respondents expressed concerns regarding frequent distractions and technical limitations that occasionally impede the learning process. A significant number of respondents indicated that they were diverted into unrelated videos, resulting in time loss or diminished concentration on language goals. S3 expressed frustration, "I start with English videos, but then I see entertainment videos in the suggestion bar and forget why I came here." Likewise, S2 said, "*Sometimes I waste one or two hours just jumping from one video to another without learning*." In addition to distractions, technical issues such as internet connectivity were also cited. S5 noted, "In my hostel, the internet is slow. I cannot watch high-quality videos. It keeps buffering, and I get annoyed."

The responses indicate that external distractions and infrastructure challenges diminish the perceived usefulness of YouTube, which is a critical element of the Technology Acceptance Model. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) observe that system-related barriers can substantially impede the acceptance of educational technologies, particularly when users encounter cognitive or environmental overload

Comprehension and Pedagogical Gaps

A notable theme identified in the analysis was the challenge learners encountered in comprehending complex content, which included the pace of native speakers and the use of slang. YouTube provided a wealth of content; however, not all of it was understandable to the respondents without assistance. S6 explained, "Sometimes the speakers talk very fast, and I miss the meaning. I can't follow everything." Similarly, S1 admitted, "*When I don't understand something, there's no one to ask. I need a teacher to help explain the video*" The challenges underscore the pedagogical gap that may occur when respondents engage with self-selected digital content in the absence of instructional support. The platform facilitates personalized learning; however, comprehension may be compromised if learners lack listening strategies or cultural knowledge. This is consistent with the findings of Liu et al. (2020), which highlight the necessity of scaffolding for the effectiveness of unstructured digital learning. From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model, these challenges reduce perceived usefulness, particularly for learners who may lack autonomy or the linguistic skills necessary to engage with native-level content. S7 suggested, "It would be better if teachers gave us a video and asked questions about it. That way, we understand more." This approach enhances our understanding. These observations underscore the significance of teacher mediation in optimizing the educational benefits of YouTube, aligning with Hafner's (2014) assertion that teacher-curated playlists and pre-viewing guidance improve comprehension and learner engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings align with the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and explains how pre-university students utilize YouTube as an effective educational tool for enhancing speaking skills. Participants largely characterized YouTube as a significant, accessible platform that promotes exposure to authentic language discourse, fostering improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. Consistent with TAM, perceived usefulness emerged as a critical factor influencing students' willingness to engage with the platform. Frequent exposure to authentic content, on-demand access to diverse materials, and opportunities for self-directed learning were identified as salient advantages. Research by Moghavvemi et al. (2018) similarly emphasizes YouTube's role in promoting learner autonomy and motivation through personalized, interest-driven content.

Students' appreciation of YouTube's accessibility, flexibility, and intuitive design mirrors findings from recent studies (Lee & Dressman, 2022; Sun & Yang, 2023), which emphasize the motivational power of interest-driven, multimedia-rich content. The ability to pause, replay, and select videos that match personal preferences highlight the autonomy and self-directed learning opportunities the platform affords, features identified as central to sustaining engagement in language learning (Little, 1995; Hrastinski, 2019). The observed improvements in confidence and fluency highlights the value of repeated exposure to authentic language models, supporting prior research that video-based input fosters communicative competence through modeling and imitation (Watkins & Wilkins, 2011; Vanderplank, 2016). Similarly, the positive impact on pronunciation aligns with evidence that audiovisual input enhances learners' phonological awareness by providing both auditory and visual scaffolds (Liu et al., 2020; Yenkimaleki & Van Heuven, 2017). The findings illustrate how YouTube's adaptable features alleviate the rigid limitations of conventional classrooms.

Nevertheless, the study emphasises that the pedagogical effectiveness of YouTube is not automatic. Passive viewing, unstructured content consumption, and exposure to rapid or culturally unfamiliar speech can hinder comprehension and impede learning (Sun & Yang, 2023; Liu et al., 2020). Technical limitations, distractions, and accessing non-educational content further exemplify the challenges of open-access platforms (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Sweller, 1994).Students emphasized the critical role of teacher-mediated content curation, vocabulary scaffolding, and feedback, reinforcing that structured engagement converts passive exposure into effective language learning (Lee & Dressman, 2022; Vanderplank, 2016) The study's qualitative approach,

focusing on a small, context-specific sample of seven pre-university students from northern Malaysia, enabled rich, detailed exploration of learner perceptions. While this provided nuanced insights into learners' attitudes, motivations, and lived experiences, it limits the generalizability of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Additionally, reliance on self-reported perceptions introduces potential biases, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their improvements. Nonetheless, these subjective measures remain valuable for capturing the affective and motivational dimensions of technology-mediated learning (Maxwell, 2021). The absence of pre- and post-testing also precludes causal claims regarding improvements in speaking performance, which was an intentional choice to prioritize learners' experiential narratives. Future research could adopt mixed-methods designs that triangulate perception-based data with objective performance metrics, expand sample diversity, and examine the influence of contextual variables such as digital confidence, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation (Zhao, 2003; Lai, 2015; Huang et al., 2019).

These findings carry practical implications for language educators and curriculum designers. YouTube should be integrated within a blended learning framework, complementing structured classroom interactions to enhance speaking proficiency and learner engagement (Hrastinski, 2019; Al-Zahrani, 2015). Teacher-curated playlists, guided vocabulary scaffolding, and reflective post-viewing activities are essential for mitigating distractions, preventing fossilization of errors, and maximizing pedagogical value (Hafner, 2014; Jones & Hafner, 2012; Hafner & Miller, 2011). Peer evaluation, self-reflection, and teacher feedback further reinforce learner autonomy and pronunciation development (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2017). Structured engagement strategies such as collaborative video annotation, role-play reenactments, and discussion enhance cognitive processing and long-term retention, transforming input into productive language output (Vanderplank, 2016). In summary, this study confirms that YouTube, when strategically integrated and scaffolded, can serve as a potent tool for enhancing speaking skills among pre-university learners.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that YouTube, when integrated effectively, can significantly enhance students' speaking skills by offering authentic input and user-controlled learning. Framed within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), findings confirm that perceived usefulness and ease of use influenced learners' acceptance of YouTube as a language learning tool. Participants reported greater confidence, fluency and pronunciation accuracy, echoing findings by Kay (2012) and Wang and Chen (2020), who emphasized video-based learning's ability to support oral language acquisition. YouTube's user-friendly interface and personalized recommendations promoted learner engagement an observation supported by Huang et al. (2019).

However, the study highlights the necessity of structured support. Teacher-selected videos, paired with feedback mechanisms, were found to further reinforce learning outcomes (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2017). As digital learning environments expand, language educators and curriculum designers must incorporate platforms like YouTube within blended approaches that are pedagogically sound and learner-focused. Future studies could explore long-term impacts and learner-specific factors influencing engagement with video content.

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