
English Education Students' Experiences with English Vlog Content for Speaking Development: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract: Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Although many studies have examined the effectiveness of digital media for language learning, limited research has explored how English Language Education students independently develop speaking skills through English-language vlogs beyond formal classroom instruction. This study investigated the experiences and challenges of English Language Education students in improving their speaking skills through English-language vlogs. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants from the English Language Education Program at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin and analyzed using Mishler's four-step narrative analysis. The findings revealed that English-language vlogs contributed to improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and accent awareness, while their influence on grammar accuracy and intonation remains limited. Participants also reported challenges, including fast, informal speech, unfamiliar cultural references, and difficulty maintaining active engagement during viewing. Furthermore, graduate students demonstrated more purposeful and reflective learning strategies than undergraduate students. These findings suggest that English-language vlogs can serve as valuable informal learning resources that complement formal instruction and promote greater learner autonomy in the development of EFL speaking skills.

Keywords: English Vlog Content; Speaking Skill; Informal Digital Learning; Narrative Inquiry; English Education Students

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a fundamental productive skill that learners use to construct and convey meaning in real-time interactions (Andas, 2020; Herlisya & Wiratno, 2022). Proficiency in speaking is often considered a tangible indicator of overall language achievement, particularly for students enrolled in English-related degree programs (Kirani et al., 2024). However, proficiency in spoken English is rarely achieved through classroom instruction alone; fluency, natural intonation, and native-like pronunciation typically develop through sustained and voluntary exposure to the target language outside formal settings (Sidabutar, 2024).

The motivation for this study stemmed from direct and repeated observations conducted by the researcher, who is a student in the English Language Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. In various academic and campus events,

seminars, and public presentations, students in the English Language Teaching (TBI) program were consistently seen presenting, debating, and conversing in English with a level of confidence and fluency that seemed to go beyond what could be explained solely through classroom instruction. This observation raised a specific question that is generally not addressed in the formal curriculum: through what self-directed and purposeful channels do these students develop these competencies? Rather than assuming that the answer lies solely in coursework, the researcher became curious about the informal learning practices students engage in on their own initiative, in which digital media, particularly English-language vlog content, stands out as a highly accessible and popular resource (Saufi, 2021).

English-language vlogs, a blend of video and blog formats primarily shared on YouTube, combine audio, visuals, text, and spontaneous, natural delivery into a single medium (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020). Because vloggers typically speak in an unscripted, conversational style, viewers are exposed to authentic pronunciation, everyday vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and a variety of accents that are rarely highlighted in structured textbooks (Ikhlasa & Suryadi, 2023). Previous research has reported that interaction with English-language vlogs and similar YouTube-based content is associated with improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and self-confidence (Mufidah & Muhammad, 2023; Saidalvi et al., 2021), and that discussion-based and social media exposure also support the development of speaking skills (Mohammed & Ahmed, 2023). Similarly, Ningias & Indriani (2021) reported that EFL students' confidence in speaking is closely associated with their learning experiences and active engagement in English learning activities. Their findings suggest that meaningful and self-directed learning experiences can positively influence learners' willingness to communicate and improve their speaking performance.

Taken together, these findings indicate that students' speaking development may be supported not only by classroom instruction but also by meaningful self-directed learning experiences in digital environments. Such learner-initiated engagement has been discussed theoretically within the broader field of Informal Digital English Learning (IDLE), which is defined as self-directed English learning in digital contexts outside the school environment, independent of formal instruction (Lee, 2020).

Socket (2014) also described informal online learning as a process that occurs naturally and is largely self-directed, in which learners acquire linguistic competence through engagement with online media as a recreational activity. Benson's (2011) framework further situated these practices within a broader model of learner autonomy, in which learners control the content, pace, and goals of their own language development outside of teacher-mediated settings. This framework offers a useful perspective on why students already immersed in an English major curriculum might also seek out and rely on informal digital resources, such as vlogs, to refine the speaking skills their peers observe.

Although research on vlogs and speaking skills is growing, most existing studies have examined heterogeneous student populations or students not majoring in English, or have relied on quantitative research designs and classroom action research (e.g., Saidalvi et al., 2021; Setiawan & Pranowo, 2022). Research specifically focused on English Language Education students, that is, learners already enrolled in an English major curriculum and often regarded by their peers as competent speakers, remains relatively scarce; previous studies have also not compared how this informal learning is experienced across various academic levels, ranging from undergraduate to graduate programs. This study addresses

this gap by focusing exclusively on English Language Education students at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, involving six undergraduate and two graduate (Master's level) students, to examine both common and level-specific dimensions of their self-directed learning experiences.

Therefore, this study addressed the following research questions: (1) What are the experiences of English Language Education students in watching English-language vlog content as a means to improve their speaking skills independently? (2) What challenges do English Language Education students face in this process, and how, if at all, do these experiences differ between undergraduate and graduate students? Accordingly, this study aimed to describe the experiences of English Language Education students using English-language vlogs for self-directed speaking skill development, and to identify the challenges they face and any differences in how they approach this informal learning practice by educational level. Theoretically, this study was expected to expand the discussion on informal digital English learning in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Indonesia, specifically targeting English Language Education students; practically, this study was expected to provide insights to English Language Education students and faculty on how self-directed digital resources can be identified and productively integrated alongside classroom instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design, which involves the collaborative construction of participants' stories through interviews, aiming to represent their lived experience as faithfully as possible (Creswell, 1994). This design was appropriate because the study sought to understand how individual English Education students personally made sense of and narrated their independent learning journeys with English vlog content, rather than to measure the effect of vlog exposure in a generalizable, quantifiable sense.

Research Setting

This research was conducted at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The undergraduate data were originally collected within the English Education Study Program in November 2024, while the graduate (S2) data were collected within the Master's Program in English Language Education as an extension of the original dataset for this article.

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Lenaini et al., 2021), consistent with the small, context-rich samples typical of qualitative inquiry (Miles et al., 2014). From an original ten-participant undergraduate sample, six English Education students (academic year 2021, coded EP1-EP6) were retained based on criteria such as active involvement in debate or English competitions, informal English tutoring experience, academic excellence, and habitual use of English vlogs; four non-English-major participants were excluded. To extend the comparative scope across academic levels, two graduate students in the Master's Program in English Language Education, both former English

Education undergraduates who continued to rely on vlogs for speaking development, were additionally recruited (coded GP1-GP2) for their ability to reflect on how their strategies had evolved. In total, eight participants (six undergraduate, two graduate) contributed data.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews covering two areas aligned with the research questions: (A) students' experiences with English vlogs, including fluency, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, intonation, accent, and viewing habits; and (B) challenges faced, including cultural references, vocabulary retention, pronunciation discernment, engagement, content accessibility, and distractions. Graduate participants received one additional comparative question asking how their vlog use had changed since their undergraduate years.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following Mishler's (2016) four-step model: summarizing each participant's account, rearranging responses into thematic categories, identifying recurring patterns and divergences across participants and academic levels, and drawing conclusions about their broader meaning. Participants' original wording was retained wherever possible, with minor edits made only where non-native grammatical errors would obscure meaning. Participants consented to the use of their responses, and identifying information was replaced with the codes EP1-EP6 and GP1-GP2 throughout.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings together with their interpretation, organized into four sub-findings and discussion: (1) fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary gains; (2) the limited impact on grammar and intonation; (3) accent, viewing habits, and the demands of independent engagement; and (4) graduate participants' reflective and strategic engagement. Where relevant, the two graduate participants' (GP1, GP2) comparative reflections are highlighted alongside the undergraduate participants' (EP1-EP6) accounts, and each sub-finding is discussed in relation to current theories and prior research.

Fluency, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary Gains

All eight participants agreed that watching English vlogs positively influenced their speaking fluency. Undergraduate participants described the process largely as imitation: listening to and mimicking vloggers' natural pace and rhythm of speech.

"Vlog content influences my fluency because I get to hear and mimic the natural pace and flow of spoken English." (EP2)

The graduate participants echoed this pattern, framing it in more academic terms and associating gains in fluency with repeated exposure to natural conversation.

"Watching English vlogs really helps my speaking because I get used to real-life expressions and how people actually talk." (GP2)

Pronunciation emerged as one of the most consistently reported benefits among all eight participants, who described vlogs as a model for correcting or refining pronunciation through repeated listening to native speakers.

"I know a lot about how to spell a good pronunciation there." (GP1)

The undergraduate participants likewise reported using vlogs to identify and self-correct pronunciation errors, with several noting that visual and contextual cues in the video complemented the spoken model and made mimicry easier. However, this benefit was not without friction: some participants found it difficult to catch precise pronunciation when vloggers spoke quickly, used reduced forms, or connected words in natural speech, a challenge that both graduate participants also identified.

"Vloggers often speak quickly, use reduced forms, or connect words in natural speech, which makes it difficult to clearly identify how individual words are pronounced." (GP1)

Vocabulary expansion was reported unanimously across both groups as one of the clearest benefits of vlog viewing, with participants describing exposure to everyday words, idioms, and slang not typically covered in textbooks.

"I learn a lot of new vocabulary from vlogs, which also makes me have new slang words." (EP3)

"I know a lot [of] vocab from there." (GP1)

However, several participants, particularly among the undergraduate group, reported difficulty retaining new vocabulary unless they actively paused videos to note down unfamiliar words. Both graduate participants likewise reported that new expressions were easily forgotten without deliberate review or reuse.

"I often forget new words if I do not use them. I try to repeat or note them down." (GP2)

The consistent gains reported in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary align closely with Krashen's (1981) Input Hypothesis, which holds that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level ($i+1$). English vlogs serve as precisely this kind of input: they are largely comprehensible due to visual and contextual support, yet consistently expose learners to vocabulary, pronunciation, and speech patterns that are marginally beyond what structured classroom materials typically provide. This is consistent with earlier findings from Saidalvi et al. (2021) and Mandasari & Aminatun (2020), who likewise reported that vlog-based exposure meaningfully improves speaking-related competencies. At the same time, the recurring difficulty in retaining vocabulary and discerning fast, connected speech suggests that comprehensible input alone is not sufficient: learners still need to apply active strategies, such as pausing, repetition, and note-taking, to convert passive exposure into durable, usable competence.

The Limited Impact on Grammar and Intonation

In contrast to fluency, most participants across both groups reported that vlogs had little direct impact on their formal grammar, attributing this to the casual, rule-relaxed nature of vloggers' spoken register.

"In terms of grammar, I do not think it has much impact, as many native speakers do not strictly follow grammar rules in casual speech." (EP1)

GP1 similarly reported no meaningful influence on grammar, explaining that attention while watching was directed toward speaking rather than grammatical form, whereas GP2 offered a more nuanced view, noting an indirect influence through repeated exposure rather than through explicit rule learning. Responses regarding intonation were likewise mixed among the undergraduate participants: some (EP2, EP4, EP5, EP6) reported that observing vloggers' rising and falling intonation helped them sound more natural and expressive. In contrast, others (EP1, EP3) felt that intonation made little difference to their overall speaking development. Both graduate participants, by contrast, reported a clearer, more positive influence, with GP2 explicitly noting that she now paid attention to how vloggers stress and intonate sentences and tried to reproduce the same patterns.

The comparatively limited impact of vlogs on formal grammar reflects the informal, rule-relaxed register that characterizes most vlog speech, echoing Setiawan & Pranowo's (2022) observation that naturalistic input favors communicative fluency over grammatical accuracy. This pattern can also be interpreted through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which frames language learning as fundamentally a social, interactive process. Because vlog viewing is a largely one-directional, non-interactive activity, it cannot fully substitute for the negotiated, feedback-rich interaction that Vygotsky considered essential for consolidating grammatical competence, which may explain why participants' gains clustered more strongly around receptive-to-productive skills like pronunciation and vocabulary than around grammar or, for some undergraduate participants, intonation.

Accent, Viewing Habits, and the Demands of Independent Engagement

Most participants reported that vlogs shaped their familiarity with and preferences for accents, with several expressing a preference for American accents over British ones due to perceived difficulty with British vowel and stress patterns.

"Yes, but I am more focused on American, I am not interested in British because I do not understand it." (EP6)

The graduate participants held more moderate views on the influence of accent, describing it as noticeable but comparatively subtle. Undergraduate participants reported varying viewing frequencies, ranging from daily viewing to two or three times per week, generally favoring daily-life and university-related vlogs for their relatable, conversational content. The graduate participants reported similarly frequent but more deliberately scheduled viewing habits.

"Almost every night, before I go to sleep." (GP1)

"I usually watch a few times a week, depending on my free time." (GP2)

Both undergraduate and graduate participants favored vloggers described as interactive, cheerful, and relatable, suggesting that a vlogger's personality and delivery style, not only the linguistic content, shape learners' sustained engagement with the medium. This self-directed engagement was not without its difficulties. A recurring challenge across both groups involved understanding culturally specific references, humor, or idioms embedded in vlog content, which participants said could obscure meaning even when individual words were understood.

"Sometimes I do not understand cultural references, so it makes me confused and harder to understand the meaning." (GP2) fully

Both undergraduate and graduate participants also acknowledged that pausing videos repeatedly to mimic speech or practice pronunciation could feel effortful and disruptive to the natural flow of watching, occasionally reducing motivation to engage actively rather than passively.

"Repeatedly pausing and replaying videos can feel time-consuming and sometimes disrupts the natural flow of watching, which reduces my motivation to practice consistently." (GP1)

A minority of undergraduate participants reported occasional difficulty finding vlog content matched to their proficiency level, particularly when podcasts or vlogs featured very fast, fluent speech; however, most participants across both groups felt that the sheer volume of available content on YouTube minimized this concern. Advertisements, missing subtitles, and network interruptions were the most commonly cited external distractions among undergraduate participants. In contrast, both graduate participants noted that unclear audio or the absence of captions occasionally hindered comprehension, prompting them to replay videos or enable captions when available.

These patterns of accent preference, content selection, and the effort required to sustain engagement are consistent with Sockett's (2014) description of online informal learning as a naturally occurring but largely self-directed process, in which learners themselves must supply the motivation, strategy, and persistence that a classroom would otherwise provide. Viewed through the Informal Digital Learning of English framework (Lee, 2020), the challenges participants described, cultural opacity, fading engagement, and inconsistent content fit, are not incidental but characteristic of extramural digital learning: because no instructor mediates the input, learners must exercise their own agency to select suitable content, sustain attention, and work around technical or motivational barriers.

Graduate Participants' Reflective and Strategic Engagement

When asked to reflect on how their use of English vlogs had changed since their undergraduate years, both graduate participants reported a shift toward more intentional, self-monitored engagement.

"My approach has changed. Now I am more aware and intentional, like focusing on expressions and pronunciation, not just watching for fun." (GP2)

GP1 offered a comparable account, describing an evolution from watching primarily for entertainment as an undergraduate to more consciously extracting useful expressions and pronunciation patterns for active use in graduate-level academic and professional English communication. This suggested that as English Education students progress academically, their engagement with the same informal resource becomes increasingly deliberate and metacognitively aware, rather than purely incidental.

Benson's (2011) framework of learner autonomy helped to explain this comparative finding: the graduate participants' shift toward more intentional, metacognitively aware viewing suggested that autonomy in informal digital learning may deepen and become more strategic as learners progress academically, rather than remaining static. This offered a plausible, though partial, account of how sustained informal exposure, compounded over

years of academic and personal engagement with English, may contribute to the confident speaking performance that initially prompted this study. Taken together, these findings suggested that English vlogs hold clear value as a supplementary, learner-driven resource for developing speaking-related sub-skills, particularly fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary, among English Education students. However, because vlogs appeared less effective in supporting grammatical accuracy and, for some learners, intonation, and because they lack built-in interactive feedback, they were best positioned as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, structured classroom instruction and interactive speaking practice. Lecturers in English Education programs might consider explicitly acknowledging and channeling students' existing informal vlog-viewing habits, for instance, by incorporating vlog-based materials into fluency- or pronunciation-focused activities, while ensuring that grammar and interactive communication continue to be addressed through formal instructional design.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how English Education students at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, both undergraduate and graduate, experience and navigate the use of English vlog content as an independent, self-directed resource for enhancing their speaking skills. The findings showed that vlog viewing substantially supports fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and familiarity with accents, while its influence on grammar and intonation is more limited and uneven across learners. Participants across both academic levels encountered similar challenges related to cultural references, vocabulary retention, fast native speech, and sustaining active engagement. However, graduate participants demonstrated a more intentional and reflective approach to using vlogs than they recalled having as undergraduates. Interpreted through the lens of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and the Informal Digital Learning of English framework, these findings offered a preliminary, learner-grounded explanation for how English Education students may independently cultivate the speaking confidence often observed among them. As this study was limited to eight participants from a single institution and relied on self-reported interview data, future research could employ larger samples, longitudinal tracking, or mixed-methods designs to examine further how informal digital learning practices interact with formal instruction over the course of English Education students' academic development.

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