

The Impact of Using YouTube on Developing Kurdish EFL University Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of YouTube on the development of English-speaking skills among Kurdish EFL university students and graduates. The research aimed to evaluate how YouTube's digital pedagogy influences oral proficiency, learner confidence, and autonomous learning strategies. Using a descriptive mixed-methods design, data were gathered from 32 participants via convenience sampling in the Kurdistan Region. The primary instrument was a 17-item online questionnaire analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that YouTube functions as a potent catalyst for psychological and linguistic development, markedly increasing speaking confidence and diminishing language anxiety. The findings indicate that students effectively acquire skills incidentally through entertainment and strategically utilize subtitles as cognitive scaffolding. The study concludes that YouTube successfully bridges the gap between formal instruction and real-world communication, implying that integrating multimedia platforms into EFL curricula can foster greater learner autonomy and global intelligence.

Keywords: YouTube, speaking skills, Kurdish EFL students, mixed methods, and digital pedagogy.

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Introduction

In a world where English has become the lingua franca of international communication, developing proficiency in speaking skills is indispensable for academic, professional, and social integration. For Kurdish university students in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is not merely an academic pursuit but a critical gateway to wider global opportunities (Qadir & Bostanci, 2024; Ghafar, 2020). However, speaking skills notoriously remain difficult to develop due to traditional teaching methodologies, restricted exposure to authentic language use, and a chronic shortage of engaging resources (Islam & Roy, 2024). The digital revolution has introduced transformative avenues for learning, with YouTube emerging as one of the most potent tools for EFL education (Saed et al., 2021). By offering a vast array of content ranging from instructional tutorials to real-world conversations, YouTube provides learners with unrivaled exposure to authentic English usage. This platform fosters independent, activity-based learning, which is particularly vital for Kurdish EFL students who often have limited classroom practice and low confidence in speaking. Research indicates that such digital tools blur the line between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, making learning more efficient (Alobaid, 2020).

Despite the acknowledged benefits of technology in higher education, teaching English in the Kurdistan region remains a significant challenge. Role learning and textbook-based instruction often dominate current pedagogical approaches, failing to create the dynamic environment necessary for oral fluency. While several studies have explored YouTube's general benefits in language learning (Kern, 2024; Apoko & Waluyo, 2025), there is a notable research gap regarding its specific impact on the Kurdish sociolinguistic context. Most existing literature focuses on Western or East Asian contexts, leaving a void in understanding how YouTube interacts with the unique cultural and educational barriers faced by Kurdish EFL learners. The uniqueness of this study resides in its concentrated analysis of how this particular demographic employs YouTube to navigate localized obstacles, including limited native speaker interaction and conventional curriculum limitations.

Studies have demonstrated that incorporating digital platforms into formal education can boost student engagement and close the gap between theory and practice (Shiryaeva et al., 2019). Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the efficacy of YouTube in enhancing the speaking abilities of Kurdish EFL university students. Specifically, the research objectives are

1. The study aims to assess the influence of YouTube on improving speaking subskills, specifically fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
2. The research also aims to analyze the perceptions and engagement of YouTube as a self-directed learning tool.
3. The aim is to propose practical guidelines for integrating YouTube content into the Kurdish EFL curriculum to foster a more interactive and autonomous learning environment.

Methodology

This section outlines the research framework employed to investigate the impact of YouTube on the English-speaking skills of Kurdish EFL students and graduates. It details the research design, participant characteristics, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

Research design

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative research design supplemented by qualitative insights (mixed-methods approach). The quantitative component utilized numerical data to identify

trends in learning outcomes, while the qualitative element captured nuanced participant experiences through open-ended responses. This design was chosen for its efficacy in analyzing student perceptions and the perceived effectiveness of digital tools in language acquisition.

Participants and sampling

The target population comprised university students and graduates from English departments within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A convenience sampling technique was employed, resulting in a total of 32 participants (N=32). This sampling method was chosen due to its practicality in accessing a specific demographic within a limited time frame. The sample included a diverse range of participants in terms of age, academic status (current students and alumni), and self-reported English proficiency levels, ensuring a broad perspective on the research topic.

Research instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of 17 items, categorized into two sections:

1. Quantitative section: 15 multiple-choice questions designed to measure speaking skill development, learner attitudes, and the frequency of YouTube usage for educational purposes.
2. Qualitative section: 2 open-ended questions allowing respondents to provide detailed descriptions of how YouTube enhanced their speaking proficiency and fluency.

To ensure the instrument's validity and reliability, a pilot study was conducted. The draft was reviewed by a research supervisor and a peer tutor. Based on their feedback, redundant items were removed and wording was refined to ensure clarity and alignment with the research objectives.

Data collection

Procedure data collection was conducted digitally. The survey link was distributed through academic networks, student mailing lists, and instant messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp and Telegram). Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Before commencing the survey, participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided their informed consent, ensuring that the data gathered would be used strictly for academic research and handled with confidentiality.

Data analysis

The collected data underwent a two-stage analysis:

1. Quantitative analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were automatically generated and verified to identify dominant trends in student improvement.
2. Qualitative analysis: Responses from open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This involved coding the responses to identify recurring themes related to YouTube's impact on accent acquisition, vocabulary growth, and speaking confidence.

Results

This section presents the findings from the 32 survey responses, analyzed through the lens of digital pedagogy and language acquisition theories. The discussion is organized into thematic sections that explore YouTube's role as a transformative educational tool for Kurdish EFL learners.

Theme 1: YouTube as a practical learning tool

The data suggests that YouTube functions as a highly effective platform for enhancing both the psychological and linguistic aspects of speaking skills.

1. Cultivating speaking confidence

Confidence is a critical psychological determinant in oral proficiency. The survey results indicate a significant positive shift in learner self-efficacy. As illustrated in Figure 1, 75% of respondents (53.1% "Agree" and 21.9% "Strongly agree") confirmed that watching YouTube videos increased their confidence in speaking English. Listening repeatedly to natural environments such as vlogs and interviews accustoms learners to authentic speech patterns. This consistent exposure reduces "foreign language anxiety," allowing students to imitate native rhythms in a low-stakes environment. Conversely, a small minority (12.5% neutral and 12.5% total disagreement) may represent learners who still face barriers in autonomous learning or require more structured guidance to translate viewing into confident speaking.

YouTube helps boost my confidence in speaking English

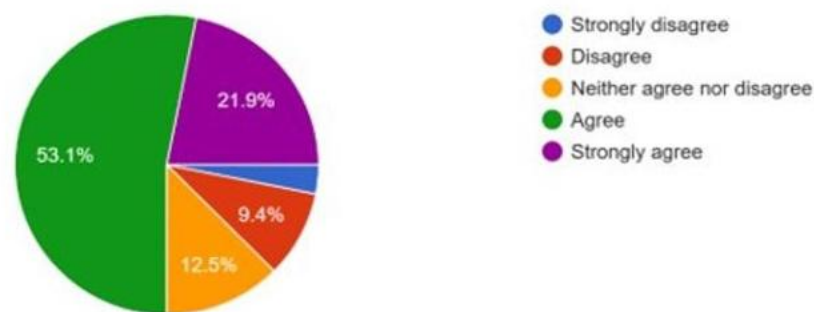


Figure 1. Percentage of students who feel more confident speaking English after using YouTube

2. Perceived effectiveness as an educational medium

The learners' perception of YouTube's utility reflects its growing status as a surrogate classroom. Figure 2 demonstrates that 75% of participants perceive YouTube as an effective medium for English learning, citing its user-friendliness and vast content availability as primary benefits.

I find YouTube to be an affective tool for learning English

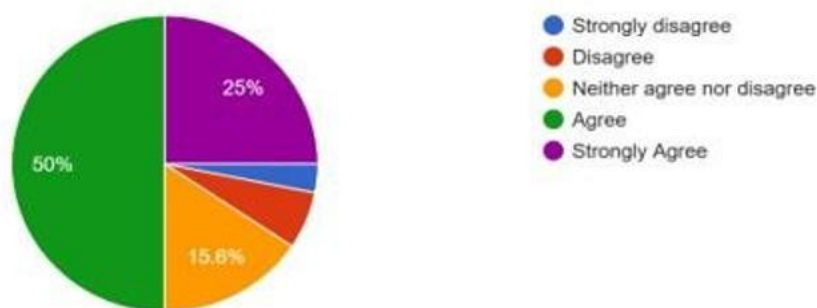


Figure 2. Students who believe YouTube is an effective tool for learning English

The 15.6% who remained neutral may indicate a group that uses the platform sporadically without a defined learning strategy. However, the overwhelmingly positive consensus suggests that for

the majority of Kurdish students, YouTube bridges the gap left by traditional textbook-based instruction.

3. Direct benefits to speaking proficiency

Beyond general perception, the study sought to measure the direct impact on speaking performance. Figure 3 reveals that 84.4% of respondents reported a direct improvement in their English-speaking skills resulting from YouTube exposure.

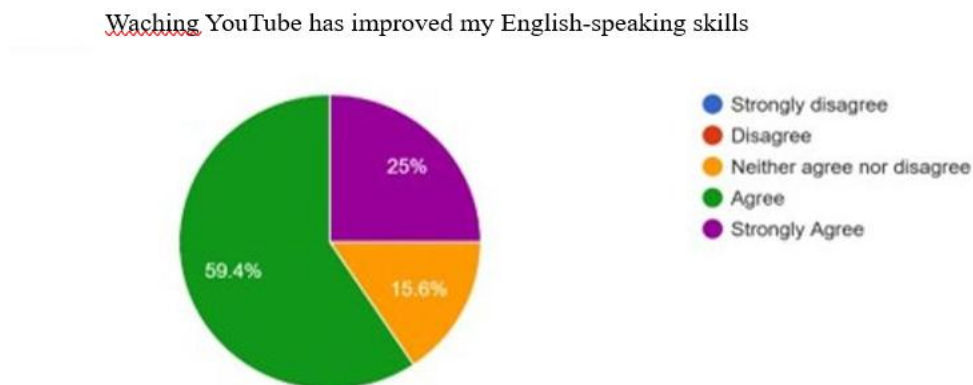


Figure 3. Watching YouTube has improved their English-speaking skills.

The absence of any negative responses ("Strongly disagree" or "Disagree") is a remarkable finding, reinforcing YouTube's position as a reliable support tool. The 15.6% neutral group likely represents students who utilize the platform primarily for passive listening or entertainment without actively engaging in oral output.

Theme 2: Incidental learning and content specificity

A significant finding of this study is that language acquisition frequently transpires outside of formal educational objectives, facilitated by entertainment and particular content genres.

1. The power of incidental learning

Incidental learning occurs when students acquire language skills as a byproduct of engaging with intriguing content. As shown in Figure 4, 68.7% of the sample (53.1% agreed, 15.6% strongly agreed) stated that watching YouTube for leisure purposes enabled them to learn English subconsciously.

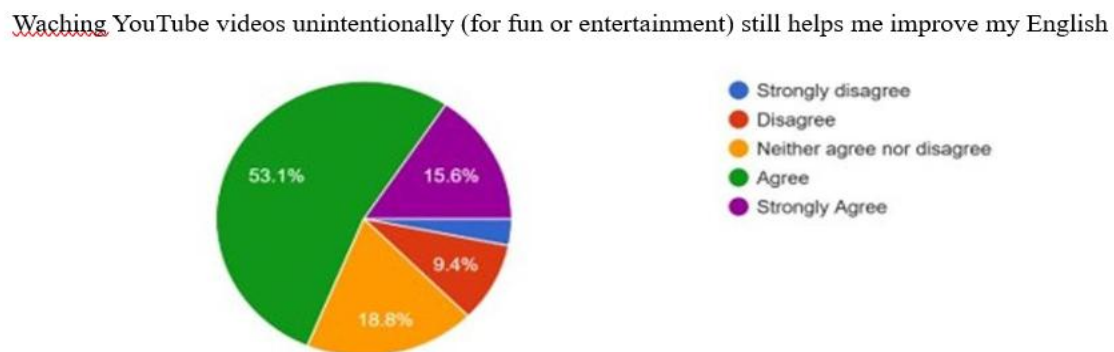


Figure 4. Students who learned even through entertainment content

This "subconscious acquisition" allows learners to pick up pronunciation, rhythm, and lexis without the pressure of a formal lesson. While a small percentage (12.5%) did not perceive this benefit, likely due to a preference for structured learning, the majority trend confirms that YouTube's entertainment value is a powerful vehicle for linguistic immersion.

2. Effectiveness of specific content genres

The findings indicate that 68.8% of respondents (comprising 31.3% who "Agreed" and 37.5% who "Strongly agreed") identified entertainment-driven content such as movies, vlogs, comedies, and series as vital tools for enhancing their English speaking exercises. These genres typically feature everyday conversations, affective language, humor, and rich cultural nuances, which collectively bolster linguistic comprehension and practical usage. In contrast, 15.7% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the utility of such content. This resistance may stem from a preference for traditional structural learning or an inability to shift their mental frame from pure entertainment to active language acquisition. Additionally, 15.6% remained neutral, likely representing learners who have not yet consciously evaluated the impact of leisure viewing on their proficiency or those who consume a generalized range of content without a specific pedagogical focus. Overall, the data confirms that a significant majority of students benefit from exposure to naturalistic language. The nature of the content is decisive; when learners identify with material that mirrors authentic, everyday dialogue, they are better able to recall vocabulary, mimic natural intonations, and internalize conversational forms. Ultimately, this immersive engagement translates into a more robust and assertive speaking ability.

I learn to speak English more effectively from specific types of YouTube content

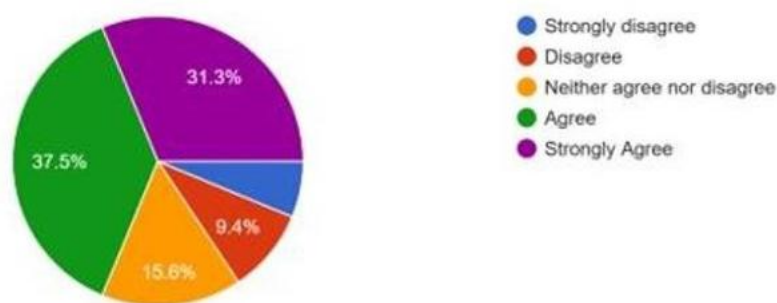


Figure 5. Students who think of certain YouTube videos in enhancing their speaking skills

These genres offer "affective language use" and everyday conversations that are often missing from formal curriculum. By identifying with material that mirrors real-life interactions, Kurdish students can better recall vocabulary and echo natural intonations.

3. Pronunciation and native speaker exposure

The final aspect of the analysis focused on the role of native speaker input. As depicted in Figure 6, 68.7% of participants reported that watching native English speakers helped them improve their pronunciation and accent.

Exposure to the natural rhythm, stress patterns, and articulation of native speakers provides a "phonetic blueprint" that textbook cannot replicate. This is especially crucial in the Kurdistan region, where there is limited access to native speakers. Student progress from rote memorization to a more naturalistic and

assertive speech style by emulating these models.

Watching native English speaker on YouTube helps me improve my pronunciation and accent.

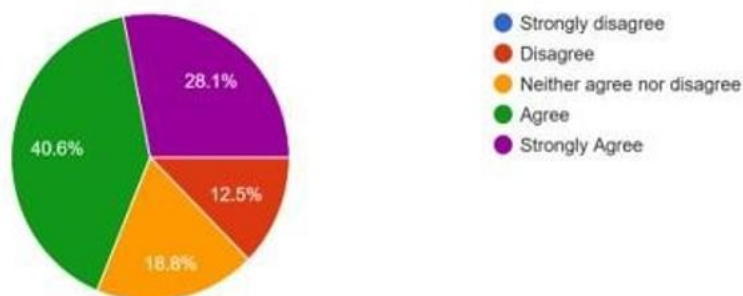


Figure 6. Watching native English speakers on YouTube helps students improve their pronunciation and accent.

Theme 3: Learner preferences and strategies

This third section investigates the specific pedagogical strategies that students employ when interacting with YouTube and how these choices facilitate their speaking development.

1. Subtitles as cognitive scaffolding

Multimedia learning often requires “scaffolding” to bridge the gap between listening and comprehension. As shown in Figure 7, 71.9% of respondents (40.6% “Agree” and 31.3% “Strongly agree”) indicated that the use of subtitles significantly enhanced their learning experience.

Using subtitles while watching English videos improve my language learning experience.

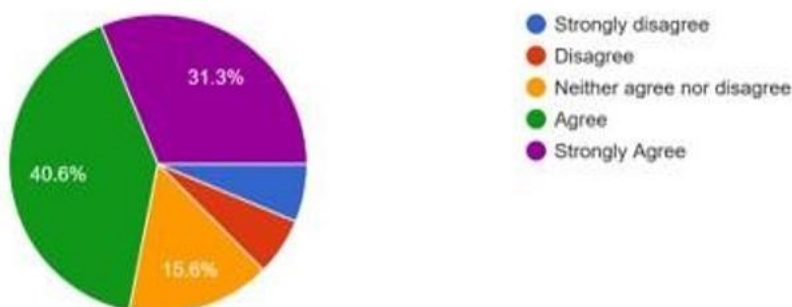


Figure 7. Percentage of students who prefer using subtitles

The high level of agreement indicates that Kurdish EFL students use subtitles as a multifunctional tool for (1) vocabulary acquisition in context, (2) identification of grammatical patterns in authentic materials, and (3) correlation between text and pronunciation. For the 15.6% who were neutral, subtitles may represent a transitional stage toward independent listening. In contrast, the 12.5% who disagreed were likely advanced auditory learners or those who considered subtitles a distraction from pure listening practice.

2. Preference for clarity and comprehension

Instructional pacing is crucial for effective mimicry. Figure 8 reveals that 62.5% of participants (46.9% “Agree” and 15.6% “Strongly Agree”) preferred YouTube videos that featured slow, clear speech accompanied by engaging visuals.

Videos that are clear, slow-paced, and visually engaging are more effective for learning English

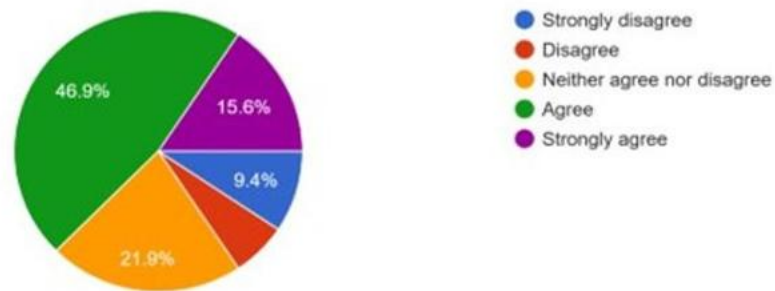


Figure 8. Preference for slow and clear speech

This preference highlights the importance of comprehensible input during the early and intermediate stages of language acquisition. Visual support combined with clear articulation provides a foundation for learners to try shadowing techniques without being overwhelmed by a naturally fast speech rate.

3. Acoustic flexibility through accent diversity

Exposure to various phonetic models is crucial for global communication. As depicted in Figure 9, 71.9% of respondents (15.6% “Strongly Agree” and 56.3% “Agree”) affirmed that exposure to various English accents (British, American, Australian, etc.) helped their adaptation.

Watching videos in different English accent helps me become more adaptable in understanding and speaking English

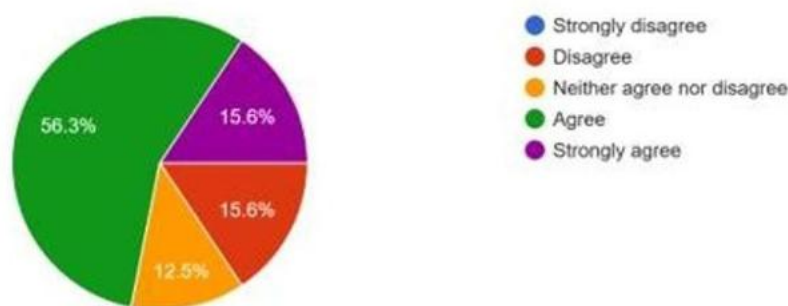


Figure 9. Students exposed to various English accents

This finding suggests that YouTube's vast array of accents is an excellent resource for developing the acoustic adaptability required in today's global society. Although 15.6% faced difficulties with unfamiliar phonological patterns, the majority trend suggests that diverse exposure strengthens learners' ability to decipher real-world interactions.

4. Long-term consistency and individual factors

Learner self-efficacy often contributes to long-term success. Figure 10 shows that 71.9% of participants believe consistent use of YouTube will significantly improve their speaking ability in the future. Additionally, Figure 11 shows that 59.4% of respondents consider age and prior experience as the primary determinants of their ability to utilize digital media for learning.

I believe using YouTube regularly will lead to significant improvement in my English speaking over time

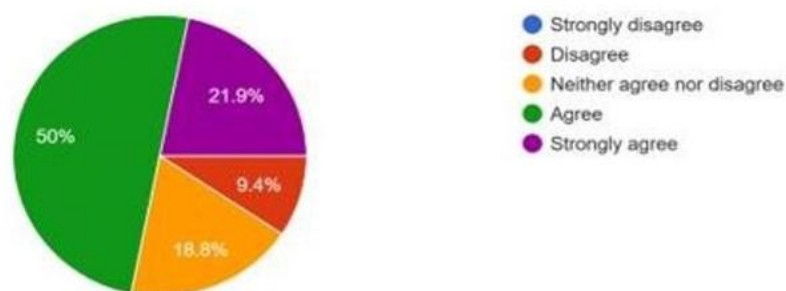


Figure 10. Consistency of quality in YouTube

My age or experience level influences how effectively I can learn English through YouTube

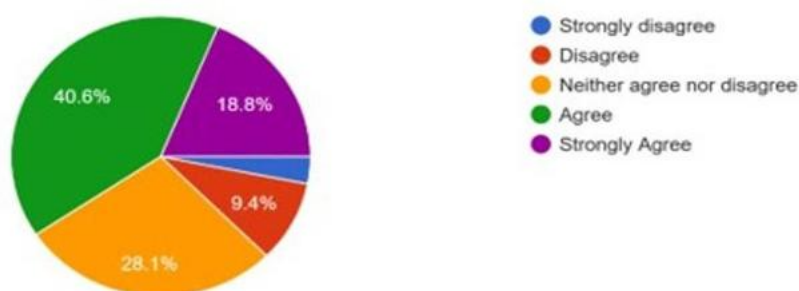


Figure 11. Impact of age and experience on YouTube-based learning

Discussion

Theme 1: YouTube as a practical learning tool

The results of this study offer substantial empirical evidence that YouTube serves as a transformative pedagogical instrument for Kurdish EFL learners, effectively addressing the psychological and linguistic deficiencies commonly found in conventional language education. The significant boost in learner confidence, reported by 75% of respondents, serves as a direct reflection of Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. As noted by (Farchan et al., 2025; Orhani, 2023), YouTube provides a private, low-anxiety digital environment where students can experiment with their speaking skills without the immediate pressure of social judgment often found in physical classrooms. In the Kurdistan region, where traditional teaching methods may unintentionally increase student anxiety, this "virtual language lab" helps students lower their mental barriers, which makes them more open to language input. This reduction in anxiety acts as a key catalyst for the reported increase in public speaking motivation

and self-efficacy, aligning with the findings of (Roy & Gandhimathi, 2025). Given these high confidence levels, the results imply that YouTube functions as an emotional bridge that enables Kurdish students to transform from passive learners into more assertive communicators.

The immediate improvement in speaking proficiency reported by 84.4% of participants further underscores the platform's role as an effective provider of "comprehensible input." Specifically, the 90.6% improvement in pronunciation identified in the results suggests that YouTube serves as a crucial phonetic model for students. By observing and imitating native speakers, Kurdish learners gain exposure to appropriate lexical choices and idiomatic expressions that are frequently absent from standard textbooks (Meinawati et al., 2020). The vast array of content, ranging from vlogs to tutorials, ensures that learners are not merely memorizing linguistic rules but are witnessing the language in action within real-world contexts (Kristiani & Pradnyadewi, 2021; Hudri et al., 2025). This phenomenon of "incidental learning," experienced by 68.7% of the sample, facilitates the subconscious acquisition of speech structures and accent nuances (Hanh, 2023). Given this high level of effectiveness, the results indicate educators in Kurdistan a strong reason to use YouTube as an important source of real-world material in the classroom.

Further, the results of this study reveal a significant shift toward greater learner autonomy. The fact that 71.9% of respondents utilize subtitles as cognitive support and another 71.9% believe in the long-term effectiveness of YouTube indicates a high level of learner agency. Unlike the rigid structures of traditional higher education, YouTube offers "flexible learning options" that accommodate diverse individual preferences (Hudri et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025). The ability of students to control their learning pace allows for a personalized alignment of content with specific individual needs. This versatility makes YouTube an invaluable adjunct to formal instruction, particularly in regions with limited access to native-speaking environments (Hudri et al., 2025). Consequently, the practical implications of this research emphasize the need for educational institutions in Kurdistan to design formal guidelines for integrating YouTube into the curriculum. By leveraging the existing learner autonomy, institutions can produce graduates with the acoustic flexibility and global communicative competence required in the modern world.

With its dynamic and engaging platform that improves many facets of language acquisition, YouTube has become a vital tool for language learners looking to improve their speaking abilities. Studies have shown that integrating YouTube into language learning environments improves speaking confidence, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Self-paced learning, interactive content, and real-world exposure to spoken language achieve this goal. YouTube affords students real-world language exposure, which is essential for improving pronunciation and expanding vocabulary. By simulating native speakers, the platform helps students improve their pronunciation (Amal et al., 2025; Rustan & Hamidi, 2024). According to studies, students who use YouTube exhibit considerable gains in vocabulary and pronunciation, with the most noticeable increase in pronunciation (Rustan & Hamidi, 2024; Asary et al., 2024). Increased learner confidence has been associated with the use of YouTube for language acquisition. Speaking confidence is enhanced by the platform's interactive features and the option to interact with content at one's own pace (Amal et al., 2025; Syaputra & Nurwita, 2024). Students are encouraged to actively participate in their learning process by YouTube's captivating material and the opportunity to observe real-world examples of language use, which is crucial for improving speaking abilities (Syaputra & Nurwita, 2024; Hudri et al., 2025).

YouTube makes digital literacy, which is becoming increasingly crucial in today's classrooms, easier to achieve. Students can study language content on their own and improve their speaking abilities outside of the conventional classroom environment thanks to this digital literacy, which promotes autonomous learning (Khasanah & Lestiyawati, 2024; Hudri et al., 2025). Because of the platform's flexibility and accessibility, students can customize their educational experiences to meet their unique

needs, which encourages self-directed learning and improves speaking skills (Hudri et al., 2025; Kristiani & Pradnyadewi, 2021). Studies that contrast YouTube-based learning with conventional teaching techniques reveal that students who watch YouTube videos enhance their speaking abilities more. In contrast to more passive older approaches, YouTube content is said to be participatory and entertaining (Khasanah & Lestyanawati, 2024; Mosully, 2024). Students who used YouTube to learn languages scored better in experimental situations than those who received instruction using traditional techniques, especially in aspects like language use and delivery (Mosully, 2024). Although YouTube has many advantages for improving speaking abilities, there are drawbacks as well. Some students have difficulty understanding different accents and choosing relevant content, which can make studying more difficult. To fully utilize YouTube's instructional potential, instructor guidance and structured programming are also stressed. These difficulties show how crucial it is to combine YouTube with other teaching strategies and offer well-chosen information to guarantee successful learning outcomes (Dominic et al., 2025; Hudri et al., 2025).

Theme 2: Incidental learning and content specificity

The findings in theme 2 highlight the significant role of entertainment-driven content in facilitating incidental language acquisition among Kurdish EFL students. A significant finding of this study is that language acquisition often occurs outside of formal educational objectives, as evidenced by the 68.7% of respondents (Figure 4) who reported learning English subconsciously through leisure activities. This "subconscious acquisition" underscores the power of linguistic immersion through engaging media, allowing learners to pick up pronunciation, rhythm, and lexis without the psychological pressure of a formal lesson (Nasrullah & Saifuddin Amin, 2024; Fakhr et al., 2021). This aligns with the broader literature on audiovisual media, such as movies and TV shows, which facilitates learning by providing authentic language input and cultural context that are often missing from traditional textbook-based instruction (Касимбекова, 2024). Genre specificity further influences the effectiveness of this method. Figure 5 reveals that 68.8% of students found vlogs, movies, and comedies particularly useful for speaking exercises. These specific genres provide "affective language use" and everyday conversations that mirror real-life interactions, allowing Kurdish students to better recall vocabulary and echo natural intonations (Teng, 2025). This suggests that watching English movies and vlogs is perceived as an effective and enjoyable way to improve various language skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural understanding (Mubarakah & Rizal, 2025). Students have a more natural and immersive language experience when they connect with material that interests them.

Also, YouTube gives learners a "phonetic blueprint" by letting them hear native speakers. As depicted in the results, 68.7% of participants (Figure 6) reported that watching native English speakers helped them improve their pronunciation and accent (Elaoufy, 2025). Exposure to natural rhythm, stress patterns, and articulation is particularly crucial in the Kurdistan region due to limited direct access to native speakers. YouTube is a dynamic, context-rich platform that helps people learn new words and improve their pronunciation by giving them real-life examples (Rahman et al., 2025). The platform's accessibility and informal nature also encourage autonomous learning behaviors, such as the use of captioned videos, which can enhance vocabulary retention through contextual clues (Fakhr et al., 2021; Teng, 2023). Students are empowered to engage with content at their pace, utilizing features like pausing and note-taking to facilitate their learning (Elaoufy, 2025). However, while the majority of trends confirm that YouTube's entertainment value is a powerful vehicle for immersion, challenges such as distractions or unreliable subtitles can occasionally hinder progress. This aspect reinforces the need for a balanced approach where the platform's potential for autonomous growth is supported by structured guidance to ensure that incidental exposure translates effectively into consistent linguistic progress (Dominic et al., 2025; Elaoufy, 2025).

By offering genuine, multimodal, and adaptable learning opportunities, exposure to native speakers via websites like YouTube greatly improves pronunciation for language learners. Through mimicry, repeated exposure, and self-paced learning, YouTube provides learners with access to native speaker information that helps them improve their pronunciation. This method improves students' confidence and general speaking abilities in addition to helping them pronounce words correctly. YouTube provides students with real-world exposure to native speakers, which is essential for improving their pronunciation. Through imitation of native speakers' sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns, learners can improve their pronunciation (Hasanah & Wahono, 2022; Amal et al., 2025). Because the website offers a vast array of information, students can select videos that correspond to their interests and skill levels, increasing their motivation to practice pronouncing words correctly (Al-Jarf, 2022).

YouTube is a useful resource for practicing pronunciation because it incorporates audiovisual components. The ability to see and hear how native people pronounce things helps learners understand and mimic proper pronunciation. YouTube's adaptability enables students to work at their speed, watching videos again as necessary to grasp particular pronunciation rules. This self-regulated learning strategy is very advantageous for students who have limited access to native speakers in their immediate surroundings (Al-Jarf, 2022; Hudri et al., 2025). Pedagogical Methods and Structured Learning: Integrating YouTube situations into classrooms and other structured learning increases its efficacy. YouTube videos, which have been demonstrated to enhance students' pronunciation skills greatly, can be used by teachers to develop and administer pronunciation classes (Kusuma et al., 2024). By actively encouraging involvement with the material rather than passive intake, pedagogical strategies including task-based and interactive approaches improve the learning process even more (Amal et al., 2025). YouTube is a useful resource for improving pronunciation, but it also has drawbacks. Without organized instruction, learners may struggle to choose relevant material, comprehend various accents, and stay motivated. Furthermore, problems like erratic internet connections and the possibility of passive viewing can make learning more difficult (Purwanti et al., 2022). It is advised to use YouTube in conjunction with other teaching strategies to overcome these obstacles and offer guided practice to optimize learning outcomes (Hudri et al., 2025).

Theme 3: Learner preferences and strategies

Theme 3 investigates the specific pedagogical strategies and cognitive techniques that Kurdish EFL students employ when interacting with YouTube to facilitate their speaking development. A predominant tactic identified is the use of subtitles as cognitive scaffolding, which serves to bridge the gap between auditory input and comprehension. The study found that 71.9% of respondents (40.6% "Agree" and 31.3% "Strongly agree") indicated that subtitles significantly enhanced their learning experience. This high level of agreement lends credibility to the strategy of using subtitles as a multifunctional tool for vocabulary acquisition and the correlation between text and pronunciation. As noted by (Gowhary et al., 2015); (Oktapiani et al., 2024), subtitles serve as an essential link for EFL students who might otherwise struggle with direct auditory comprehension, with research showing that captioned videos can yield a moderate impact size of 0.64 in speaking skill improvement. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of instructional pacing, with 62.5% of participants (46.9% "Agree" and 15.6% "Strongly agree") preferring YouTube videos that feature slow, clear speech accompanied by engaging visuals. This preference aligns with the theory of "comprehensible input," which is essential for successful language acquisition through techniques like shadowing and mimicking (Amal et al., 2025; Gowhary et al., 2015).

Visual support combined with clear articulation provides a foundation for learners to practice oral output without being overwhelmed by naturally fast speech rates. This allows students to select videos that fit their specific interests and skill levels, thereby increasing overall engagement and comprehension

(Baroroh & Rizal, 2023). Acoustic flexibility through accent diversity also emerged as a vital factor for global communication. The survey revealed that 71.9% of respondents affirmed that exposure to various English accents, such as British, American, and Australian, helped their adaptation. YouTube's extensive collection of accents serves as an ideal instrument for cultivating the phonological adaptability needed in today's global community (Ate et al., 2025; Mulyo et al., 2024). As students become accustomed to various speech patterns and intonations, this exposure becomes crucial for enhancing pronunciation accuracy and listening comprehension (Hasan, 2025). Finally, the results show that 71.9% of participants have a strong sense of long-term self-efficacy, meaning they believe that using YouTube regularly will greatly strengthen their speaking skills in the future (Amal et al., 2025; Ate et al., 2025). However, the study also recognizes that digital learning is not a universally applicable solution. About 59.4% of those who answered said that their age and previous experience were the most important factors in their ability to use digital media well (Ate et al., 2025). This suggests that while YouTube is a powerful tool for autonomous development, individual learner characteristics and a systematic approach to the platform are significant drivers in achieving successful language outcomes.

When using YouTube as a language learning medium, Kurdish EFL students have a number of difficulties, especially when it comes to improving their speaking abilities. These difficulties are complex and include pedagogical, technological, and individual elements. Improving technology infrastructure, offering organized instruction, and creating a conducive learning environment are all necessary components of a holistic strategy to address these issues. One of the main issues is the erratic internet connection, which can make it difficult to watch YouTube videos and interfere with learning (Purwanti et al., 2022; Hasanah & Wahono, 2022). Confusion and false information can result from students' frequent inability to determine appropriate and trustworthy YouTube content (Hasanah et al., 2025; Elaoufy, 2025). Students may participate in passive viewing, which has little effect on language acquisition, if they receive inadequate guidance. To optimize YouTube's instructional potential, structured activities and instructor assistance are necessary (Amal et al., 2025; Hasanah et al., 2025). Students' unique language learning objectives and the content on YouTube frequently diverge, which might result in ineffective learning experiences (Purwanti et al., 2022). Kurdish students often struggle with personal issues such as a lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and anxiety when speaking. YouTube's lack of engaging and encouraging environments can exacerbate these issues (Ghafar & M. Amin, 2022).

Lack of preparedness and independence may limit students' potential to benefit from YouTube as a learning tool. It is essential to promote self-directed learning and offer ways for efficient use (Purwanti et al., 2022). Purwanti et al. (2022) suggest that we can reduce technological obstacles by enhancing internet connectivity and providing access to reliable digital resources. In 2025, Hasanah et al. suggested that to ensure YouTube is used effectively as a learning medium, teachers could play a crucial role by selecting appropriate content, pausing videos for explanations, and incorporating interactive exercises (Hasanah et al., 2025; Abbas & Qassim, 2020). Students can overcome personal obstacles and gain confidence in their speaking talents by creating a positive and encouraging learning environment (Ghafar, 2022). Students' learning experiences and language proficiency can be improved by encouraging them to actively interact with YouTube content through activities like note-taking, discussions, and mimicking (Amal et al., 2025; Elaoufy, 2025). While YouTube holds enormous potential as a language-learning resource, achieving it requires resolving these issues. Teachers can help Kurdish EFL students in overcoming obstacles and increasing their language skills by expanding their access to technology, offering systematic advice, and creating a friendly learning atmosphere. Furthermore, looking into other resources and techniques that work in addition to YouTube could offer a more comprehensive approach to language acquisition.

Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative role of YouTube in enhancing the speaking skills of Kurdish EFL university students. Motivated by the need for authentic language exposure in the Kurdistan region, the research aimed to evaluate how YouTube's digital pedagogy influences oral proficiency and learner autonomy. The results indicate that students were able to improve their performance by interacting directly with native speakers and picking up new information through entertainment content. The results show that students were able to improve their performance by interacting directly with native speakers and picking up new information through entertainment content. Additionally, strategic learners employed subtitles as cognitive scaffolding to bridge the gap between listening and speaking. The study concludes that YouTube successfully bridges the gap between formal instruction and real-world communication by providing "comprehensible input" and diverse phonetic models. The pedagogical implications suggest that integrating multimedia tools into the EFL curriculum can significantly foster self-directed learning and global acoustic flexibility. However, the small sample size and reliance on self-reported perception data limit the study. Future research should employ longitudinal experimental designs with larger cohorts to objectively measure actual linguistic gains and the long-term retention of speaking proficiency acquired through digital platforms.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author contribution

Sozyar Raza Ali: Conceptualization; Methodology; Software. **Hemn Mohammed Ali:** Data curation; Writing-original draft preparation. **Zanyar Nathir Ghafar:** Visualization; Investigation. **Sozyar Raza Ali:** Supervision. **Zanyar Nathir Ghafar:** Software; Validation. **Hemn Mohammed Ali:** Writing-reviewing and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly in order to improve the clarity of the English language, refine the grammatical structure, and enhance the overall readability of the manuscript.

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