TIKTOK AS A NEW FRONTIER FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A B S T R A C T

In the current digital era, there are many tools or media that support English language learning by utilizing social media, such as TikTok which is one of the trending media.This research aims to explore the positive and negative experiences of students while using TikTok for learning English in higher education. The research method used is phenomenology with observation and interview techniques.The research indicate mostly positive and interesting learning experiences, driven by vocabulary growth, improved pronunciation and listening skills, and the platform's high accessibility, diverse content, and support for self-reflection and knowledge sharing. However, there are challenges such as distractions, content difficulty, technical issues, and a lack of structured learning. Nevertheless, TikTok significantly enhances student motivation.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become an essential part of daily life, including in education. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are widely used by university students to access information and improve their academic skills. Among these, TikTok stands out with its diverse range of unique and interactive special effects, allowing users to easily create engaging short videos. These videos can be shared with friends or a wider audience, making TikTok not just a platform for entertainment but also a valuable tool for learning and creative expression.According to Pratiwi et al, (in Diko, 2022) stated that ,the participants had a positive attitude regarding the TikTok application used as a strategy in English language learning to help improve literacy and speaking skills.

Research indicates that students are more engaged in learning when using media that align with their digital lifestyles. TikTok, with its short video feature, enables quick and engaging content delivery, consistent with the concept of Microlearning. In English language learning in higher education, TikTok offers innovative solutions through educational content such as language tutorials, vocabulary challenges, and direct interaction with native speakers. According to Tran in

Alharthy (2025), stated that incorporating TikTok videos into language instruction significantly enhanced students' vocabulary retention and overall language skills.

The use of TikTok in English language learning allows students to research independently, build confidence in communication, and expand their linguistic knowledge in a more engaging way than conventional methods. However, challenges such as distractions from non-academic content, lack of regulation on content credibility, and variations in technological access remain significant. Therefore, educators and content creators must create an organized and focused learning environment on TikTok. This includes selecting relevant and high-quality content and guiding students on how to use the platform effectively for academic purposes. Additionally, efforts to enhance students' ability to understand and use digital information are essential so they can distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information, and utilize TikTok's features optimally for English language learning. According to Putri in Hongsa et al. (2023) mentions that a learning medium is a tool that develops along with learning technology and comes in various of forms including audio, visual, and audio-visual.

Consequently, research on TikTok's role as an innovative platform for English language learning in higher education is vital. By understanding its potential and challenges, TikTok-based learning strategies can be optimized to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching at universities. The effectiveness of social media-based learning largely depends on how content is structured and presented to attract and maintain student engagement. On TikTok, the use of visual elements, audio, and direct interaction enables a more enjoyable and practice-oriented learning experience. Comment and duet features provide opportunities for students to engage in collaborative discussions or language practice, enhancing speaking skills and understanding of different accents. Research has shown that social media platforms like TikTok can improve students' self-confidence and academic performance (Looichin & Chuah,in Jah et al (2024).

Therefore, it's important to consider how social media use affects student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. Social media engagement significantly influences student learning, motivation, and attitudes, especially in challenging subjects Almagro in kholifah (2022). Excessive social media use has negative impacts, including a decline in academic performance among students Brohi et al in kholifah (2022). By implementing these strategies, educators can

maximize the potential of social media as an effective learning tool and enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic performance.

To address these challenges, a systematic approach is necessary to integrate TikTok into the English language curriculum in higher education. Educators can act as facilitators in selecting and recommending appropriate content and guiding students in evaluating information credibility. Developing TikTok-based programs specifically designed for academic purposes can maximize the platform's benefits as an effective and engaging learning tool.

The utilization of TikTok in English language learning offers innovative solutions through educational content such as language tutorials, vocabulary challenges, and direct interaction with native speakers. TikTok enables students to learn independently, build confidence in communication, and expand their linguistic knowledge in a more engaging way than conventional methods. This finding is supported by a preliminary interview with a lecturer from the English Language Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua Barat., who stated that TikTok has proven to be quite helpful in increasing student engagement. The lecturer also highlighted TikTok's ability to provide diverse and relevant learning materials that align with students' interests. Therefore, this research aims to investigate further the potential of TikTok as a tool for English language learning in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to explore students' subjective experiences in utilizing TikTok as a medium for learning English. The aim is to deeply understand how students experience and interpret the use of TikTok in the context of language learning. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with students who have experience using TikTok to learn English. Data analysis were carried out thematically to identify patterns of experience and meaning that emerge from the interview data. The results of this research are expected to provide comprehensive insights regarding the potential of TikTok as an English language learning tool from the perspective of students. This research will employ in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. In-depth interviews are essential for eliciting detailed narratives from participants about their experiences using TikTok for English language learning. These interviews will allow the researcher to explore the positive and negative

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aspects of their experiences, their perceptions of the platform's affordances and limitations, and the impact of TikTok on their language learning process. The interviews were supplemented by observational data and document analysis.

Data collection in this research used a mixed-method approach, including interviews, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' experiences in depth. Participatory observation allowed research to observe student interactions directly on the TikTok platform. Document analysis was conducted on relevant content to understand how English is used and learned on the platform. The data source in this research were obtained from in-depth interviews with second-semester students of the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua Barat. The primary data source for this research will be in-depth interviews with students. Secondary data sources may include classroom observations and relevant documents, such as lesson plans or student assignments.

Data Analysis Procedures This research uses qualitative research, namely by interviewing second semester students of English language education at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua Barat. Qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning and subjective experiences. In this context, interviews are used to explore students' views, and observation and documentation are used to complete the data.

1. Detailed reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts to become familiar with each participant's account.

2. dentification of emergent themes within each transcript, focusing on the participants' descriptions of their positive and negative experiences with TikTok.

3. Clustering of emergent themes into broader patterns.

4. Comparison of themes across participants to identify commonalities and variations in their experiences.

5. Interpretation of the findings, focusing on the participants' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their use of TikTok for English language learning. "The analysis will specifically address the research question by systematically identifying, categorizing, and comparing the positive and negative experiences reported by the students. This will involve looking for patterns in their descriptions of how TikTok has facilitated or hindered

their language learning, the specific features they find helpful or problematic, and the overall impact of TikTok on their learning process.

RESULTS ANDDISCUSSION

The data analysis revealed three overarching themes related to students' experiences with TikTok as a learning tool. These themes, derived from both observation and interview data, provide an in-depth understanding of the platform's role in English language learning.

1. Theme 1: TikTok as a Supplementary and Engaging Learning Resource

    The findings consistently show that students perceive TikTok as a valuable supplementary tool that enhances engagement and motivation. Observations revealed that students actively interact with various types of content, while interviews highlighted the platform's role in making learning more flexible and enjoyable.

    a. Observation Results:

        1) Content Consumption: Students were observed engaging with diverse content, including language tutorials (e.g., grammar rules, pronunciation tips), vocabulary challenges, and cultural videos in English. This suggests a broad approach to language acquisition.

        2) Active Interaction: Beyond passive viewing, students actively liked and saved educational videos, commented with questions, and even shared content with peers. This demonstrates a proactive, community-based approach to learning.

        3) Student-Created Content: A notable finding was that students created their own content, such as language learning vlogs and pronunciation practice videos. This shows a high level of active participation and a desire for self-directed learning.

    b. Interview Results:

        The Role of TikTok in English Language Learning: Findings from Student Interviews Based on interviews with students, TikTok is seen as an engaging and motivating learning tool. The platform functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as an effective and flexible supplementary learning resource.

        1) Question: How would you describe your overall experience using TikTok for learning English?

a) Student Answers: The overall experience is described as positive. Students find it interesting, enjoyable, and easy.

   (1) YM: Describes his experience as "very interesting" because it helps him learn new vocabulary.

   (2) FD: Explains his experience as "very enjoyable" because he can learn in a relaxed way.

   (3) TPNA: Notes that it's "easier" and "simpler to understand" since it can be accessed anytime, anywhere.

2) Question: What are the main positive aspects or benefits you feel from using TikTok in your English learning process?

b) Student Answers: The main benefits are gaining new experiences andfinding engaging content.

   (1) FD: Gives a specific example of an animated video about the difference between science and fair, which helped him understand quickly.

   (2) MKK: Feels helped by learning from other content creators who share knowledge and tutorials.

   (3) MAR: Benefits from content that teaches daily idioms and phrases in informal conversation contexts

3) Question: Can you give specific examples of how TikTok has helped you learn English?

c) Student Answers: TikTok specifically helps with improving vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension.

   (1) FD & CAW: State that using subtitles in videos is very effective for understanding word meanings and pronunciation.

   (2) TPNA: Feels that his speaking ability and knowledge of daily vocabulary have improved.

   (3) MKK: Provides a specific example of searching for the English word for "sabun" (soap) and finding related vocabulary.

4) Question: In your opinion, what is the impact of TikTok on your motivation to

learn English?

    d)   Student Answers: The majority of students state that TikTok makes them more motivated.

       (1) YM: Becomes motivated after watching a live broadcast from "Kampung Inggris" (a famous English village in Indonesia).

       (2) FD: Feels his motivation increases because learning is relaxed and not boring.

       (3) MKK: Is inspired by content creators who are fluent in English and have achieved success, like studying or working abroad. This serves as a strong motivator for him.

2.   Theme 2: Challenges and Negative Impacts of TikTok Learning

Despite the positive aspects, students also identified several challenges and negative impacts, primarily related to distraction and technical limitations.

    a.   Question: What are the negative aspects or challenges you face when using TikTok to learn English? Explain how these challenges affect your learning.

      1) Answer: The main challenges are distraction from entertainment content and technical issues.

        a) FD explained, "When I look for learning content, I get distracted by entertainment content instead," which leads to a loss of focus.

        b) AL and ND mentioned difficulties with content search, as results are not always relevant to their queries.

        c) TPNA and MKK faced technical difficulties, such as problems uploading or editing videos for assignments, which created a barrier to their learning process.

    b.   Question: Can you provide specific examples of how TikTok might hinder your English learning? (e.g., distractions, misinformation, or lack of structure).

      2) Answer: Students highlighted several specific obstacles, including distraction, language barriers, and limited features.

a) FD felt hindered by the constant distraction from entertainment content that appears while he is searching for educational content.

b) AL mentioned that some content uses language that is too advanced and difficult to understand.

c) CAW pointed out the lack of a built-in automatic translation feature, which forces him to leave the app to search for word meanings, making the learning process less efficient.

c. Question: What is your advice for using TikTok more effectively for others who want to learn English?

3) Answer: The advice provided focuses on content selection and structured learning strategies.

a) FD suggests following specific accounts dedicated to language learning.

b) AL recommends that educational content be made more effective and structured.

c) ND advises creating a systematic learning plan to avoid a fragmented approach.

d) TPNA suggests that content creators should make videos that are more creative and improve visual quality to keep learners engaged and prevent boredom.

3. Theme 3: Recommendations for Effective Use

Based on their experiences, students offered practical recommendations for maximizing TikTok's potential as a learning tool.These recommendations focus on a more structured and proactive approach to overcome the platform's inherent challenges.

a. Question: What is your advice for using TikTok more effectively for others who want to learn English?

1) Student Answers: The advice provided focuses on strategic content selection, creating engaging content, and a structured approach to learning.

a) Strategic Content Selection: Students recommend actively following specific accounts dedicated to language learning and prioritizing content with English

subtitles. This suggests that a more deliberate approach is needed to overcome the platform's distracting algorithm.

b) Engaging Content Creation: Students advised content creators to produce videos that are more creative and improve visual quality to keep learners engaged and prevent boredom.

c) Structured Learning: Students proposed that using TikTok should be part of a broader, more systematic and sequential learning plan, rather than relying solely on the platform's spontaneous content.

The findings of this research clearly indicate that TikTok is a powerful and engaging tool for English language learning, particularly for vocabulary expansion, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The platform's accessibility and engaging content, along with the social and community aspects, are key drivers of student motivation. This aligns with modern trends in digital literacy where mobile apps provide flexible, on-the-go learning environments.

However, the identified challenges are critical and underscore the need for a more strategic approach. The prevalence of distractions and irrelevant content highlights the importance of digital literacy skills for focused learning. Students must develop the ability to curate their own learning feeds and implement a personal, systematic learning plan to complement TikTok's unstructured nature. The students' desire for platform improvements, such as integrated translation, also points to a potential area for developers to enhance the pedagogical value of the app.

In conclusion, while TikTok presents navigational challenges typical of social media, its positive impact on student engagement and motivation is undeniable. It functions as a valuable supplementary resource, but its effectiveness is maximized when students adopt strategic approaches to content selection and integrate it into a more structured learning framework. This study provides valuable insights for educators and students on how to leverage this new frontier for language learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis from Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua Barat students, we conclude the following regarding TikTok's role in English language learning:

1. Positive and Engaging Experience: Students overwhelmingly find TikTok a positive, enjoyable, and flexible tool for English learning, significantly boosting their enthusiasm and aiding in vocabulary expansion and foundational English comprehension.

2. Key Pedagogical Benefits: TikTok actively supports language acquisition by enhancing vocabulary, improving pronunciation and listening comprehension, and providing diverse, engaging content. Its motivating format and the utility of English subtitles make it an effective informal learning resource.

3. Identified Challenges: Despite benefits, TikTok presents hurdles including distractions (non-educational content, internal/external), complex language/accents, technical issues (upload/editing), irrelevant search results, unstructured learning, misinformation concerns, and the absence of a direct translation feature. Exposure to negative content was also noted.

4. Significant Motivational Impact: TikTok serves as a powerful motivator, offering free, inspiring educational content that leverages observing others' fluency journeys, transcending traditional entertainment.

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