

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF *TIKTOK* IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This study explores the role of *TikTok* in supporting second language acquisition (SLA) among first-semester university students. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 33 students who actively use *TikTok*. The findings indicate that most students perceive *TikTok* as an entertaining and beneficial platform that provides authentic English input through short videos. *TikTok* supports language learning by enhancing vocabulary acquisition, improving pronunciation, increasing speaking confidence, and fostering learner motivation through engaging and interactive content. Students also reported that features such as daily vlogs, pronunciation videos, and English-learning tutorials contribute to incidental learning and real-life language exposure. However, several challenges were identified, including distraction from entertainment content, limited depth of explanation due to short video duration, and the need for stronger self-discipline. Overall, the study concludes that *TikTok* can serve as a supportive supplementary medium for second language learning when used purposefully and guided appropriately.

Keywords: *TikTok*; Second Language Acquisition; English Learning; Social Media

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran *TikTok* dalam mendukung pemerolehan bahasa kedua (SLA) di kalangan mahasiswa semester pertama. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 33 mahasiswa yang secara aktif menggunakan *TikTok*. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa menganggap *TikTok* sebagai platform yang menghibur dan bermanfaat yang memberikan input bahasa Inggris otentik melalui video pendek. *TikTok* mendukung pembelajaran bahasa dengan meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata, memperbaiki pelafalan, meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara, dan menumbuhkan motivasi pelajar melalui konten yang menarik dan interaktif. Para siswa juga melaporkan bahwa fitur-fitur seperti vlog harian, video pelafalan, dan tutorial pembelajaran bahasa Inggris berkontribusi pada pembelajaran insidental dan paparan bahasa dalam kehidupan nyata. Namun, beberapa tantangan diidentifikasi, termasuk gangguan dari konten hiburan, kedalaman penjelasan yang terbatas karena durasi video yang singkat, dan kebutuhan akan disiplin diri yang lebih kuat. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa *TikTok* dapat berfungsi sebagai media tambahan yang mendukung untuk pembelajaran bahasa kedua jika digunakan dengan sengaja dan dipandu dengan tepat.

Kata kunci: *TikTok*; Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua; Bahasa Inggris; Media Sosial

INTRODUCTION

TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential digital platforms among younger generations, including first-semester university students. As a short-video-based social media application, *TikTok* allows users to access and share diverse content ranging from entertainment to educational materials (see Ibrahim, 2023; Widagsa & Fokatea, 2024; Hasan et al., 2025). In educational settings, *TikTok* is increasingly recognized as an alternative learning medium that enables students to engage with English-language content in flexible, visually rich, and interactive formats beyond the classroom. This aligns with the characteristics of digital-native learners who prefer fast-paced and engaging learning environments (Montag et al., 2021). Given this context, *TikTok*'s role in language learning can be examined through the framework of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

According to Krashen's (1985) SLA theory, successful language acquisition requires continuous exposure to comprehensible input that is slightly above learners' current proficiency level. *TikTok* provides opportunities for such input through authentic short videos that present real-life language use supported by visual cues, audio, and captions (see Tirtayasa et al., 2024; Hamsia, 2024; Diaz et al., 2026). The effectiveness of this input is influenced by factors such as authenticity, variety, and frequency of exposure, as well as contextual support, repetition, learner motivation, and peer interaction (see Arifin, 2015). These characteristics indicate that *TikTok* aligns with core SLA principles by offering meaningful and engaging language input (Susanto & Suparmi, 2024; Mu'awanah et al., 2025).

Learner engagement is another key element in effective language learning (see Qomariyah et al., 2023; Rohmatin et al., 2023; Azizah et al., 2025). *TikTok*'s short and varied content format helps maintain students' attention and increases intrinsic motivation. Repeated exposure to English content such as tutorials, daily vlogs, and informal conversations also supports incidental vocabulary acquisition, which is essential for developing broader language skills (Yuliasri & Faridi, 2024).

In addition to receptive learning, *TikTok* encourages productive language use, particularly speaking. Through video creation, students can practice pronunciation, fluency, and intonation in a relatively low-anxiety environment, which may enhance speaking confidence (Yulita & Hertiki, 2023). *TikTok* also facilitates social interaction through comments and collaborative features, supporting peer learning and communicative practice that are central to language development from a sociocultural perspective (Sari et al., 2024)

Despite these advantages, *TikTok* also presents challenges, including distraction from entertainment content and limited instructional structure. Without proper guidance, learners may struggle to focus on educational purposes (Adhani et al., 2023). Although previous studies have reported positive effects of *TikTok* on vocabulary and speaking skills, limited attention has been given to its role in supporting second language acquisition among first-semester university students. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how *TikTok* facilitates SLA through authentic input, learner engagement, and social interaction in higher education contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to explore how *TikTok* supports second language acquisition among first-semester university students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected participants and documentation of relevant *TikTok* content used for English learning.

The data sources consisted of interview transcripts and *TikTok* videos that reflected students' authentic experiences in learning English through the platform. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis to identify recurring patterns related to authentic language input, learner engagement, vocabulary development, and speaking practice. This analytical approach enabled a systematic interpretation of the data based on established theoretical and academic perspectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that most participants perceived *TikTok* as an entertaining yet beneficial platform for daily use. A large proportion of respondents described *TikTok* as a source of enjoyment that also provides useful information, including English-related content. This perception supports previous studies suggesting that learners are more receptive to learning when it is integrated into enjoyable digital environments. However, a small number of students viewed *TikTok* as time-consuming and distracting, indicating that entertainment-oriented content may reduce its educational value if not managed carefully.

Regarding usage intensity, the majority of students reported moderate to high daily use of *TikTok*, ranging from approximately

two to five hours per day. Frequent exposure increases the likelihood of encountering English content, either intentionally or incidentally. Most respondents reported watching entertainment content most frequently, followed by English daily vlogs and educational videos. English vlogs and tutorials were perceived as particularly helpful because they present language in natural and contextualized forms, which aligns with the principles of authentic input in Second Language Acquisition.

The findings also indicate that *TikTok* contributes to English learning, particularly in vocabulary development and pronunciation. Many participants stated that regular exposure to short English videos helped them acquire new words and improve their understanding of pronunciation and everyday expressions. This supports the concept of incidental learning, where vocabulary is acquired unintentionally through repeated exposure to meaningful content. Nevertheless, several students felt that the short duration of videos limited deeper understanding, suggesting that *TikTok* functions more effectively as a supplementary rather than a primary learning tool.

In terms of productive skills, *TikTok* was found to support speaking practice and confidence development. Some participants reported creating English-language videos, which helped them practice pronunciation and reduced anxiety when speaking. Others, however, felt shy or lacked confidence, indicating that affective factors still influence learners' willingness to produce language. Social interaction through comments, duets, and collaborations further supported communicative practice by allowing learners to engage in authentic exchanges and observe real-life language use, consistent with sociocultural perspectives on SLA.

Motivation emerged as another significant theme. Many respondents felt more motivated to learn English through *TikTok* compared to traditional classroom methods due to its short, engaging, and visually appealing content. However, some students reported similar or lower motivation levels, emphasizing that learning effectiveness depends not only on the platform but also on instructional design and learner self-regulation.

Despite its benefits, several challenges were identified. Distraction from entertainment content, limited depth of explanation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and lack of structured learning pathways were the most frequently reported issues. These challenges highlight the importance of guidance, content selection, and learner discipline in maximizing *TikTok's* educational potential.

Overall, the findings suggest that *TikTok* can support second language acquisition by providing authentic input, enhancing learner engagement, and facilitating vocabulary development and speaking confidence. However, its effectiveness depends on purposeful use, structured integration, and learner self-control. These results reinforce previous studies on *TikTok*-assisted language learning while extending the discussion to first-semester university students, thereby addressing a gap in higher education research.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *TikTok* plays a supportive role in second language acquisition among first-semester university students. The findings indicate that most participants perceive *TikTok* as a beneficial platform that provides authentic English input, supports vocabulary development, and enhances speaking confidence through engaging and accessible content. In addition, *TikTok's*

interactive features contribute to learner motivation and social interaction, which are essential components of effective language learning.

Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified, including distraction from entertainment content, limited instructional depth due to short video duration, and inconsistent learning focus. Therefore, *TikTok* should not be regarded as a primary learning tool but rather as a supplementary medium that complements formal English instruction.

Future research may explore the integration of *TikTok* within structured instructional designs or examine its effectiveness using experimental or mixed-method approaches. Further studies could also investigate different learner levels or specific language skills to provide a more comprehensive understanding of *TikTok's* potential in second language learning.

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