

## BEYOND ENTERTAINMENT: TIKTOK'S INFLUENCE ON EFL VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how TikTok affects English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' vocabulary acquisition at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The research was prompted by the growing use of social media in everyday life and the potential of digital platforms to help students learn vocabulary in informal settings. Prior research has shown that social media can help with language learning. However, there aren't many studies that focus on students' experiences in Aceh and how TikTok helps them learn vocabulary outside of school. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach. Fourteen students from the English Education Department's 2022 cohort were selected through purposive sampling based on their active use of TikTok and engagement with English-language content on the platform. Data collection involved an open-ended questionnaire, and thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The research indicates that TikTok impacts vocabulary development through four primary mechanisms. Vocabulary acquisition often occurs incidentally, driven by repeated exposure to entertaining and subject-specific content. Moreover, TikTok promotes learning by using different types of input, such as sound, text, and images. At the same time, the platform's algorithms help people remember things better. Third, the platform creates an engaging and accessible learning environment because its short videos are practical, appealing, and easy to access. Fourth, its effectiveness remains conditional, as distractions, limited depth, random content exposure, and a lack of active practice may reduce learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** TikTok, vocabulary acquisition, EFL students, social media, informal learning

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana TikTok memengaruhi proses penguasaan kosakata siswa Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh semakin maraknya penggunaan media sosial dalam kehidupan sehari-hari serta potensi platform digital dalam membantu siswa mempelajari kosakata di lingkungan informal. Penelitian sebelumnya menunjukkan bahwa media sosial dapat membantu pembelajaran bahasa. Namun, belum banyak penelitian yang berfokus pada pengalaman siswa di Aceh dan bagaimana TikTok membantu mereka mempelajari kosakata di luar sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Empat belas siswa dari angkatan 2022 Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris dipilih melalui pengambilan sampel purposif berdasarkan penggunaan TikTok yang aktif dan keterlibatan mereka dengan konten berbahasa Inggris di platform tersebut. Pengumpulan data melibatkan kuesioner terbuka, dan analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa TikTok memengaruhi pengembangan kosakata melalui empat mekanisme utama. Penguasaan kosakata sering terjadi secara tidak sengaja, didorong oleh paparan berulang terhadap konten yang menghibur dan spesifik subjek. Selain itu, TikTok mendorong pembelajaran dengan menggunakan berbagai jenis input, seperti suara, teks, dan gambar. Pada saat yang sama, algoritma platform ini membantu orang mengingat hal-hal dengan lebih baik. Ketiga, platform ini menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang menarik dan mudah diakses karena video-video pendeknya bersifat praktis, menarik, dan mudah diakses. Keempat, keefektifannya tetap bergantung pada berbagai faktor; karena gangguan, kedalaman materi yang terbatas, paparan konten yang acak, serta kurangnya latihan aktif dapat mengurangi hasil belajar.*

**Kata kunci:** TikTok, penguasaan kosakata, siswa bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, media sosial, pembelajaran informal.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is important for learning any language, especially for Indonesian English as a foreign language (EFL) student. Vocabulary is regarded as vital for the improvement of students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities (Nation, 2011). To learn a language, there are numerous components of the language that should be learned, such as pronunciation, writing system, sentence structure, pragmatics, modes of discourse, and even the spelling of the language. However, the most essential component of language learning is vocabulary (Folse, 2004). Without having enough vocabulary to learn how to understand and convey their ideas, it will be hard for EFL students to effectively communicate in their target language. Knowing how to use the appropriate vocabulary for certain situations is more important than having perfect grammar in most instances of language use. Vocabulary is not just one part of language; it is the core of it. Wilkins (1972, p. 111, as cited in Yildiz, 2023) stated, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". In Indonesia, English is taught in the formal education system, especially in schools.

However, according to Mustafa (2019), vocabulary remains a challenge for many students, affecting their performance in school and making it difficult to find the confidence to use English in the real world. Some students may have difficulty understanding texts, following directions, and writing complete sentences simply because they are not used to seeing some of the words. This is why vocabulary learning should be stressed in formal education and self-study. Students cannot effectively comprehend others' ideas or communicate their own without a broad vocabulary, and learners who are acquiring a second language and possess limited vocabulary often encounter difficulties in comprehension (Wilkins, 1972). These vocabulary limitations indicate that an alternative approach is needed, such as the use of information technology. In this regard, information technology has made rapid progress, and the development has changed the way humans interact, learn, and even work.

Today, technology has become a necessity in our lives. It affects every part of our lives, from science to management to routine tasks, making everything easier and faster (Lachhwani, 2022). Various types of information technology have been used in teaching and learning activities, both directly and indirectly. Muluk et al. (2025) indicated that the integration of information technology within a Synchronous Virtual Flipped Classroom setting enhanced students' speaking abilities while simultaneously mitigating their anxiety levels. This prior investigation implies that social media platforms, a subset of information technology, may

facilitate the enhancement of English language proficiency. Within this framework, certain social media platforms could offer readily accessible resources, encompassing educational videos, interactive discussions, and language skill exercises. TikTok, a highly utilized social media platform, has become a prominent feature of contemporary life. Consequently, building upon the conclusions of preceding studies that underscore the beneficial impact of social media on language acquisition, TikTok presents the potential to exert diverse influences on students.

Several studies have highlighted its influence on English skills. For example, a study by Hongsa et al. (2023) found that TikTok was effective in improving EFL students' English-speaking skills. Furthermore, positive perceptions towards the TikTok application were reported by students. It was agreed by most students that utilizing TikTok is enjoyable, promotes creativity, and provides new ways to learn English. In addition, interaction with varied content on TikTok allows students to understand the use of words in a broader context, enriching their learning experience. Another study by (Mei & Abdul Aziz, 2022) shows that when comparing TikTok to textbooks, which are viewed as more traditional forms of education, English learning that was presented in the form of videos on TikTok could make the learning process more enjoyable and engaging, as reported by the majority of students.

The findings indicate that the entertaining and appealing videos that can be found on TikTok can capture students' attention and make the process of learning English more enjoyable. Due to this, they were able to comprehend and retain the information presented in the short video more effectively. However, there is limited research conducted in a local context, particularly among EFL students in Aceh, especially at UIN Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh. Students' use of TikTok for learning is influenced by cultural differences, the environments where they learn, and how they use social media. Furthermore, previous studies mostly employed quantitative approaches that emphasize learning outcomes, but did not provide information about the students' experiences and perceptions on the use of TikTok for English language learning. Yet this process is important, especially in the context of technology-based learning.

Given the increasing popularity of TikTok and potential benefits for education, more research is needed to assess its effectiveness in increasing vocabulary acquisition. By exploring students' experiences and perspectives, this study will fill the gaps and search for another evidence of how TikTok can improve vocabulary learning. It is also important to explore whether students view TikTok as a learning tool or just a source of entertainment.

Based on the phenomenon above, this study focuses on using TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool in the context of EFL students. Therefore, this study examines the reality of its use

and the relationship between exposure to English-language content on TikTok and students' vocabulary development. Instead of relying on textbooks or traditional classroom methods, students are exposed to a variety of multimedia content that might help their vocabulary acquisition on the internet. As such, this study was designed to investigate the influence of TikTok on EFL students' vocabulary acquisition.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. The Importance of Vocabulary in EFL**

Vocabulary is the core in language proficiency. According to Nation (2001), learners cannot communicate or make sense of others effectively without sufficient vocabulary. If grammar is the structure of language, then vocabulary is the substance of communication. Without enough vocabulary, students will fail to express their ideas even if they have mastered the basic rules of grammar.

Folse (2004) stated that learning a language involves understanding many parts of that language, such as pronunciation, writing systems, grammar or syntax, pragmatics, reading and writing styles, culture, and spelling. Among all these elements, vocabulary is the most important. In the EFL context, vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in shaping learners' proficiency in the four main language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In listening, the knowledge of vocabulary of words contained in the spoken text ensures that its meaning is grasped in context (Bonk, 2000).

When speaking, the effective expression of ideas hinges on the judicious selection of words. The size and depth of one's vocabulary are paramount for reading comprehension; a substantial number of words must be both recognized and understood to enable the grasp of written material (Qian, 2002). Likewise, in writing, a robust vocabulary empowers learners to generate texts that are meaningful, cohesive, and diverse, thus enhancing both clarity and impact (Astika, 1993). As a result, vocabulary transcends its status as a mere component of language; it constitutes a foundational element that substantially enhances overall communication skills within the framework of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

The efficacy of TikTok in language learning is contingent upon its capacity to furnish learners with authentic, visual, and interactive content. The platform's short, eye-catching videos set it apart. Much of the content is designed to engage students, prompting them to take part, whether by attempting a challenge, repeating phrases, or interacting with the creator. This

instructional method closely aligns with microlearning principles, which emphasize learning through short, focused teaching sessions that provide practical information (Conde-Caballero et al., 2024). Instead of lengthy lectures, learners can access many brief video presentations, each lasting only a few minutes, and thus gain new knowledge from each segment.

Sely and Priyatmojo's (2026) research examines TikTok as an informal learning environment, focusing on how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners acquire English vocabulary incidentally. This conceptual study design analyses various theories and literature related to incidental vocabulary learning, informal language learning, and digital media learning in language learning contexts. The analysis shows that non-educational TikTok content like vlogs, entertainment videos, and social media trends can contribute to learning English vocabulary, by presenting it through a variety of different ways such as pictorial, textual, and audio means. Algorithmic repetition is a further cognitive mechanism reinforcing lexical recognition and familiarity. Also, lexical and semantic issues can be negotiated socially through code-switching between English and Indonesian languages, and by conversing amongst themselves in the comments. Thus, TikTok acts as an informal digital learning environment, allowing users to learn new words through natural interactions online.

In addition, Alharthy's (2025) study, "Exploring the Impact of TikTok on Second-Language Vocabulary Acquisition: Benefits, Challenges, and Learner Perceptions," used a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research. The researcher used several data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, class discussions (both in-person and online), and survey questionnaires. Finally, data were analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The results show that students who watch a lot of TikTok in English improve their vocabulary in spelling and pronunciation. The study also recognized that the TikTok mobile app could make a person have a higher motivation to learn by giving interactive and contextualized content. However, it can also be distracting and misdirected about formal and non-formal language. Another study was conducted by Tari et al. The 2026 study, "Students' Perceptions of Using TikTok page @Nofreedi for English Vocabulary Learning in an EFL Context," used a descriptive qualitative approach. It included twelve students from the English Language Education program. The researchers used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to gather data, which was then subjected to thematic analysis to identify trends in the opinions of the students. According to the students, TikTok provides interesting and contextual content, making the platform a user-friendly and helpful tool for learning vocabulary. The researchers also identified several

limitations, such as non-interactive communication and fast pacing of materials, that limit the volume of explanation feasible. The study's overall conclusion suggests that TikTok can be a somewhat useful tool for learning vocabulary, especially when teachers carefully include it in their regular teaching methods. A descriptive qualitative study was conducted by Indah and Suhartatik (2025) entitled "TikTok as a Medium for Contextual Vocabulary Learning in EFL: Students' Perception and Learning Experience".

This study used a thematic analysis approach to figure out the students' experience and perception of TikTok as a Medium in EFL vocabulary learning. With the data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 first-semester students who use TikTok, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis steps by Braun and Clarke. The findings reveal that through TikTok, the learners were finding the contextual vocabulary learning effective as it gives authentic examples, increases motivation, and improves cognition of the words' use in everyday. Nonetheless, this research reveals several challenges such as entertainment distractions (i.e. watching movies), and that other strategies (e.g. note-taking and repetition) will help in vocabulary retention. Hence, TikTok is seen more as an adjunct tool rather than a replacement for the school classroom.

#### **A. TikTok in Language Learning**

The use of TikTok in language learning is connected to its strength in giving learners authentic, visual, and interactive content. The short and captivating videos on TikTok set it apart from many other platforms. Most of the content encourages students to participate, either by trying a challenge, repeating phrases, or interacting with the creator. This style of learning is very close to the idea of microlearning, which means learning in small pieces and focusing on simple but useful information (Conde-Caballero et al., 2024). Instead of sitting through a long lesson, students can watch many short videos in just a few minutes and learn something new from each one.

A study conducted by Sely and Priyatmojo (2026) discusses TikTok as an informal learning environment for the incidental acquisition of English vocabulary by EFL learners. This conceptual study design analyses various theories and literature related to incidental vocabulary learning, informal language learning, and digital media learning in language learning contexts. The analysis shows that non-educational TikTok content like vlogs, entertainment videos, and social media trends can contribute to learning English vocabulary by presenting it through a variety of different ways, such as pictorial, textual, and audio means. Algorithmic repetition is a further cognitive mechanism reinforcing lexical recognition and familiarity. Also, lexical and

semantic issues can be negotiated socially through code-switching between English and Indonesian languages, and by conversing amongst themselves in the comments. Thus, TikTok acts as an informal digital learning environment, allowing users to learn new words through natural interactions online.

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### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **A. Research Design**

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. This method focuses on giving a straight description of what is happening, based on the data collected from participants. It does not try to give a deep interpretation. Instead, it presents facts and experiences as they are, using the participants' own words as much as possible (Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

In the context of this study, the qualitative descriptive method can be used to explore the topic in a clear and simple way based on participants' real experiences. This method is suitable because the researcher wants to understand how people feel about a certain issue, especially in an educational setting. In this case, the researcher is not trying to build a new theory or give a deep interpretation, but instead to describe the situation as it is.

#### **B. Population and Sample**

According to Sugiyono (2013), a population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects that share certain characteristics defined by the researcher as the focus of a study, from which conclusions are drawn.

In this study, purposive sampling was used by the researcher to select students from batch 22, which consists of around 187 students. The criteria to be chosen as the samples are as follows: 1. An active student of the PBI 2022 batch, 2. Students who had been actively using TikTok, 3. using TikTok to watch content in English, or using TikTok with the purpose of learning English. These participants were chosen because they were considered suitable for providing relevant data about the influence of TikTok on vocabulary acquisition. Based on these criteria, the researcher selected 14 students as the sample.

### **C. The Technique of Data Collection**

In this study, the researcher will use an open-ended questionnaire as the instrument for collecting data. An open-ended questionnaire is different from a closed-ended questionnaire, which limits answers to fixed options like “yes” or “no.”. An open-ended questionnaire is a way of collecting data by asking questions that let respondents answer in their own words. This method gives participants the chance to share their ideas, feelings, and experiences more freely and in detail.

### **D. The Technique of Data Analysis**

According to Mezmir (2020), qualitative data analysis is the process of organizing and understanding information that is written, spoken, or visual. This process helps researchers find both clear and hidden meanings in the data. It involves looking at what people say, how they say it, and what their words or actions might mean. The main goal is to explore how people give meaning to their experiences, either as individuals or as part of a group.

This study will use thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed thematic analysis as a method for analyzing qualitative data by identifying, examining, and reporting themes within the data. This method helps the researcher to organize the data and describe it in a clear and detailed way. In a basic form, thematic analysis helps show what is found in the data. However, it can also give a deeper understanding by explaining different parts of the research topic. This is why thematic analysis is not only useful for describing the data, but also for exploring the meanings behind what participants say or experience.

To apply this method in the current study, the researcher followed the steps of thematic analysis as introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step in the process was to become

familiar with the data. After conducting the data collection, all the recorded data were transformed into written form. The researcher then read the transcripts carefully to understand the overall content. During this stage, the researcher also took simple notes and marked any points that seemed important or repeated across different responses.

The second step was to create initial codes. The researcher looked at the interview transcripts and selected words, phrases, or sentences that were relevant to the research focus. After that, the researcher grouped similar codes into larger themes. Themes are bigger ideas that appear many times in the data. Once the themes were formed, the researcher reviewed and improved them. The goal was to check if each theme made sense. Then, the researcher defined and named each theme. Each theme had to show what it meant.

Finally, the last step was writing the research findings. In this step, the researcher explained each theme using a simple explanation and included direct quotes from the participants to support the points. The discussion of the findings also showed how the themes helped answer the research questions

#### **4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

##### **A. Findings**

This study investigated the influence of social media platforms, specifically TikTok, on the vocabulary acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The main goal is to find out how interacting with TikTok content helps students learn new words in English. In accordance with this aim, the study objective is to answer the research question.: What is the influence of TikTok on EFL students' vocabulary acquisition?

To address this research question, this study employs a qualitative research methodology rooted in Constructivism, conceptualizing learning as an active process wherein students construct knowledge through interaction and experience. An open-ended questionnaire was used in collecting data, which allowed participants to share their thoughts and experiences freely. The study targeted 14 students, whose responses were collected and analyzed to discern recurring themes associated with vocabulary acquisition via TikTok utilization.

To protect privacy, the identities of all participants were replaced with initials, ranging from P1 to P14. The gathered data underwent a systematic analysis, emphasizing students' perceptions regarding TikTok's influence on their vocabulary development. The following section presents a detail about the results.

The analysis of the data collected from participants revealed four recurring themes that explain the influence of TikTok on students' vocabulary acquisition. These include:

- a. Incidental and Content-Dependent Vocabulary Acquisition
- b. Multimodal and Repetitive Learning Support
- c. Engagement and Ease of Access Learning Environment
- d. Conditional and Constrained Learning Outcomes.

### **1. Incidental and Content-Dependent Vocabulary Acquisition**

The first theme indicates that vocabulary acquisition through TikTok largely occurs incidentally (incidental learning) when students watch various types of content. Many participants did not specifically open TikTok for the purpose of learning English, but they still acquired new vocabulary through exposure to the content they consumed daily. Participant (P6) stated that:

*"...The content was stand-up comedy... In my opinion, you can gain a lot depending on what content you watch."*

This suggests that the learning process occurs naturally during leisure activities such as watching short videos or scrolling through the app. Some participants explicitly stated that they acquire vocabulary while watching entertainment content or content that appears randomly on the For You Page (FYP). For example, Participant (P8) stated that new vocabulary is often acquired unintentionally while watching content that interests them:

*"Entertainment... I learn new vocabulary incidentally. Usually from content I like."*

A similar view was expressed by Participant (P11), who said they rarely use TikTok specifically to learn English but are still exposed to new vocabulary from content appearing on their feed:

*"...I usually use TikTok just to watch videos and do not specifically look for content to learn English... Basic vocabulary as well as slang in English."*

In addition, the type of vocabulary learned is heavily influenced by the type of content users watch. Participant (P3) explained that the vocabulary acquired can include both basic vocabulary and vocabulary related to specific topics, depending on the videos that appear on the FYP:

*"It can be basic vocabulary or topic-specific, depending on what video we're watching and also depending on FYP."*

For example, Participant (P3) also mentioned that content, such as “Get In addition to vocabulary related to content topics, many participants also reported that they frequently pick up slang and informal expressions used by native English speakers. Participant (P5) explained that they often come across everyday vocabulary and slang through TikTok content:

*“In my opinion, the vocabulary acquired through TikTok is basic everyday vocabulary, as well as slang.”*

Overall, these findings indicate that TikTok can serve as a source of incidental, content-dependent vocabulary acquisition. Exposure to various types of videos that appeal to users allows them to acquire new vocabulary naturally, particularly everyday vocabulary, slang, and vocabulary related to specific topics. This suggests that TikTok can create a contextual language learning experience closely aligned with students’ daily experiences.

## **2. Multimodal and Repetitive Learning Support**

The second theme indicates that TikTok supports vocabulary learning through multimodal input, that is, a combination of visuals, audio, and text in a video format. This combination helps students understand word meanings because they not only read the vocabulary but also see the context of its use and hear how it is pronounced.

Some participants explained that the short and engaging video format makes the learning process easier to understand. Participant (P10) stated that the use of videos helps improve understanding and retention of new vocabulary:

*“It is quite effective because learning through videos is easier to remember and understand than just reading.”*

*“... because TikTok is more practical and the explanation videos are shorter than YouTube, so they are easier to understand.”*

This indicates that the visual and audio elements in videos provide additional cognitive support that helps students connect word forms and meaning simultaneously.

In addition to multimodal support, the repetition of content through TikTok’s algorithm also plays a role in reinforcing vocabulary recall. When the same words or expressions appear repeatedly on the For You Page (FYP), students receive repeated exposure that aids the memorization process. Participant (P13) described this experience as follows:

*“...Since similar videos appear repeatedly on my feed, I see the same words more often, which helps me memorize them faster...”*

This finding is further supported by the experiences of other participants who noted that they frequently encounter the same vocabulary repeatedly while watching content on TikTok.

For example, Participant (P5) stated that the frequent exposure to vocabulary on the FYP makes those words easier to remember.

*“I feel like I’ve improved, because I often come across the same words on my FYP, so they’re easier to remember.”*

This repeated exposure serves as reinforcement, allowing students to remember vocabulary more effectively without having to learn it through normal methods.

Thus, these findings suggest that the combination of audio-visual input and repeated exposure through the platform’s algorithm helps strengthen cognitive processes in vocabulary learning. Visuals, examples of word usage, and pronunciation models make it easier for students to understand vocabulary in the context of everyday use.

### **3. Engagement and Ease of Access Learning Environment**

The third theme concerns how TikTok’s high level of engagement and ease of access create a more captivating and comfortable learning environment for students. Based on interview data, many participants stated that TikTok provides content that is engaging, easily accessible, and not boring, making more enjoyable learning process.

The main factors that boost student engagement are the short and engaging video length. Some participants explained that the short video format makes them more interested in watching and understanding the content. Participant (P1), for example, stated that they like TikTok because the videos are short and engaging.

*“I like it because it’s short, and the content is really eye-catching.”*

A similar view was expressed by Participant (P13), who explained that short videos presented in an engaging way make the material easier to understand and less boring.

*“Yes, I enjoy using TikTok to learn new English words because the videos are short and explained in a fun way. The material is easier to understand and not boring.”*

This is also supported by Participant (P10), who compared TikTok with other platforms like YouTube. They noted that TikTok is more practical because the explanatory videos are shorter, making them easier to understand.

*“TikTok is more practical, and the explanation videos are shorter than YouTube, so they are easier to understand.”*

In addition, some participants described their learning experience through TikTok as a blend of learning and entertainment. Participant (P5) explained that learning vocabulary through TikTok feels relaxed because it is done while enjoying entertainment content.

*“Yes, I like it, because the learning feels relaxed, like watching entertainment while also picking up new vocabulary.”*

A similar view was also expressed by Participant (P8).

*“...it serves as entertainment, so the usage is voluntary and involves incidental learning.”*

These findings indicate that TikTok’s entertainment-based design, short videos, and easy access create a low-effort learning environment. This environment makes students feel more motivated to be exposed to English more frequently because the learning process feels relaxed, practical, and not boring. Consequently, high engagement levels can increase students’ chances of acquiring new vocabulary through the utilization of TikTok.

#### **4. Conditional and Constrained Learning Outcomes**

Although TikTok has the potential to support English vocabulary learning, the data collected indicate that its effectiveness is conditional and inconsistent. Learning outcomes are significantly influenced by factors such as content type, user focus, and usage conditions.

One of the main hurdles is the high level of distraction caused by the diversity of content. Some participants emphasized that TikTok is not entirely designed as a learning platform, so users are easily distracted by other videos. As stated by Participant (P3):

*“It might be effective if all the content is educational. Otherwise, you will get distracted.”*

This point was further reinforced by Participant (P11), who noted that it is difficult to stay focused due to the abundance of irrelevant content:

*“It is difficult to stay focused because there are many distractions from other content.”*

Similarly, Participant (P13) also stated that:

*“I often get distracted when using TikTok for learning because I end up watching unrelated videos.”*

In addition to distractions, the short duration of the videos also poses a limitation in the learning process. Although this format is engaging, some participants felt that it hinders deeper understanding. Participant (P2) stated:

*“The difficulty is that the videos are short.”*

Another limitation relates to understanding the context of vocabulary, particularly slang or new words that appear sporadically. Participant (P5) explained that:

*“Sometimes it’s hard to understand the context of words or new slang, and you can forget them if they only appear once.”*

In addition, some participants also faced difficulties in understanding meanings without additional help, such as a dictionary. Participant (P8) noted that:

*“Sometimes, for vocabulary that cannot be understood without a dictionary, I have to look up the meaning.”*

Meanwhile, other linguistic aspects, such as variations in accent, also posed a challenge, as expressed by Participant (P12):

*“Different accents can be challenging, and sometimes it is difficult to understand the meaning from the context.”*

Technical factors also influence the effectiveness of learning, particularly regarding internet access. Participant 1 noted:

*“When we can’t access it because of internet issues, or when we don’t have mobile data.”*

One participant emphasized that TikTok’s effectiveness heavily depends on motivation. Participant (P4) stated that:

*“It’s very effective if we truly want to learn vocabulary.”*

This means internal factors like intent to learn and active engagement determine whether or not learning through this platform is successful.

Therefore, TikTok can be an engaging way for a student to learn vocabulary, but the result may not always be optimal. Its effectiveness is situational and depends on various factors, including distractions, insufficient depth of the explanation, exposure quality, limited learning features, as well as user intents and learning strategies.

## **B. Discussion**

This discussion aims to interpret the research findings in relation to the research question and by relating them to previous studies and relevant literature.

First, TikTok influences incidental authentic vocabulary acquisition. Watching and scrolling, for instance, is a medium in the process of linguistic acquisition. The variety of videos watched, such as make-up, gaming, and other entertainment, determines the kind of vocabulary one learns, from general vocabulary, content-specific vocabulary, to slang words. These findings reinforce the fact that digital media can provide an authentic environment of contextual learning, where language is not only learnt formally, but through exposure to its real-world usage. This matches with the principles of Vygotsky’s social constructivism theory, which holds

that learners construct their understanding, knowledge is subjective and is based on individual experiences and perspectives, besides interactions with others, in this case, the digital environment. This finding also aligns with previous studies, such as Sely and Priyatmojo (2026), which showed that TikTok enables incidental vocabulary acquisition through contextual and real-world entertainment content. Further, findings by the Indah and Suhartatik (2025) also confirmed that TikTok provides vocabulary understanding with authentic contexts of everyday usage.

Second, TikTok's influence on acquisition is strengthened by its use of multimodality and repetition. It was found that these elements ensured that the learning of new words that accompany the videos was comprehensible, and the words could be remembered. In addition to lexical forms, students are exposed to their phonological aspects as well as contextual meanings. This fits within the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2005), which asserts that learning is effective when two channels (visual and verbal) receive information at the same time. Additionally, algorithm such as the For You Page (FYP) enables repeated exposure to specific content topics and vocabulary, indirectly reinforcing the process of memorization. These findings are in line with findings by Sely and Priyatmojo (2026), which posit that repeated exposure to TikTok content helps in better vocabulary comprehension.

In addition, Alharthy (2025) also concluded that the mastery of vocabulary, both in terms of pronunciation and spelling, is enhanced by repeated viewing of TikTok videos with English content. Therefore, TikTok offers a learning environment that is not only input-rich but also caters to the continuous cognitive mechanisms.

Third, regarding a learning environment based on engagement and accessibility, this study shows that TikTok is creating a more relaxed, engaging, and accessible learning atmosphere. The short-form video format and attractive visual presentation make the learning process feel less daunting and seamlessly integrated with entertainment activities. This circumstance enhances student engagement. From the perspective of social constructivism by Vygotsky (1978), high engagement indicates that learning occurs actively through user participation. This is consistent with findings from previous studies, such as the research by Tari et al. (2026). TikTok is perceived as a user-friendly, engaging, and contextual medium that enhances students' learning motivation. Additionally, Alharthy (2025) also demonstrated that the interactive and contextual nature of TikTok content can boost motivation and learning participation.

However, concerning conditional and constrained learning outcomes, this study has also revealed that TikTok's effectiveness is inconsistent and is determined by many factors. Distractions from other content are the primary obstacle to distraction. From Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning point of view, high levels of distraction can interfere with cognitive processes, more so in the information selection and organization stages. In addition, the limited duration of videos sometimes reduces a deeper understanding of linguistic contexts. Other factors, such as variations in accents that may hinder understanding, limited opportunities for active practice, and technical challenges, also influence learning outcomes. These findings aligned with the previous research, such as Alharthy's (2025) study, which identified distractions and the potential for language misconceptions as the main challenges in utilizing TikTok in language learning. Research by Tari et al. (2026) as well as Indah and Suhartatik (2025) also found similar limitations, such as limited depth of material due to short video durations and a lack of direct interaction. Therefore, the success of utilizing TikTok comes down to the self-directed learning strategies and the user's ability to harness distractions, and hence, TikTok is better positioned to complement rather than replace formal learning.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated how TikTok influences English vocabulary acquisition among fourteen EFL students from the 2022 cohort at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The findings reveal that TikTok serves as a valuable supplementary tool for incidental learning within students' daily entertainment routines. Thanks to its multimodal nature—combining visual, auditory, and textual elements—the platform enhances word comprehension and memory retention by showcasing language in authentic contexts with correct pronunciation. Furthermore, its algorithmic delivery provides natural repetition, while the short-video format offers an enjoyable, low-pressure environment that reduces cognitive burden and language anxiety compared to traditional classrooms.

However, the study also highlights significant limitations, including distractions from unrelated content, shallow information depth, inconsistent exposure, and a lack of structured practice or technical reliability. Ultimately, TikTok's effectiveness depends heavily on learner intentionality and active focus rather than passive consumption. Therefore, it should be viewed as a dynamic, context-rich complement to formal instruction rather than a replacement. To maximize its educational potential, educators should consider integrating selected content for

authentic language examples, while students must develop self-regulation strategies to minimize distractions.

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