

TikTok and Vocabulary Learning: A Survey Study of Indonesian Students from English Departments

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ABSTRACT

The present study intends to investigate the attitudes of English department students on the use of TikTok for English vocabulary learning. The participants of this study were 116 Indonesian students from the English Language Education and English Letters Departments from 26 different universities in 10 provinces. This study employed an online survey as the method of collecting data. It found that generally, the participants reported highly positive attitudes toward using TikTok for learning vocabulary. However, they seemed to have ambivalent attitudes towards the effectiveness of using the platform for vocabulary learning, perhaps attributed to the default nature of TikTok as a social media rather than a learning media. Informed by the findings, the study suggested teachers incorporate TikTok in skill-based and vocabulary-building classes in the first semesters of English department curricula. Limitations and contributions of this study are stated along with the suggested direction of future relevant studies in the field.

Keywords: *attitudes; English language departments; English vocabulary; survey; TikTok*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is essential in the process of second/foreign language (L2) learning. In one of the canon works on vocabulary, Thornbury (2002) stated that vocabulary is paramount for the development of all language skills. It is essential language production such as writing and speaking (Alqahtani, 2015). Without it, one cannot achieve successful language learning (Maximo, 2000; Zhi-liang, 2010). However, the teaching of vocabulary may not have been responsive to this paramount role of vocabulary. Regarding vocabulary learning, furthermore, in this modern era, various technological tools have been utilised for educational purposes including teaching and learning vocabulary. This includes the utilisation of social media such as *Facebook* (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020), *Instagram* (Baruti & Subekti, 2023; Damaryanan & Subekti, 2023; Rahman, 2021), and *TikTok* to learn vocabulary (Ining, 2021).

Specific about *TikTok*, it came to Indonesia in 2017 and has become the fastest-growing social media application, with users in over 150 countries (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022). *TikTok* has many interesting features that can be used by users, such as face filters or effects, and sound effects, users can also enter audio or music, do live, stitch videos or duet challenges, and share posts to other applications (Pratiwi et al., 2021). *TikTok* is considered to have a user-friendly interface because users can easily create and edit

video content on *TikTok* (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022). *TikTok* users can act as content surfers, content makers, and learner-creators (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022). *TikTok* users can simply view or even create their various videos, such as dancing, mimicking, singing, telling stories, selling, teaching, and others (Rahman, 2021).

With the aforementioned features, it may become understandable that this platform has been popular among students and young generations in general. Related to vocabulary learning, several studies have also been conducted in various learning contexts (Alghameeti, 2022; Anumanthan & Hashim, 2022; Ining, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022; Yang, 2020), perhaps fuelled by its popularity among students. Yang (2020) conducted a quantitative study involving 187 Chinese secondary school students in Australia. The study reported that participants generally agreed that the use of short videos on *TikTok* could help them in mastering English vocabulary. Furthermore, Ining (2021) conducted a qualitative study involving eight Malaysian non-English major students. The study found that participants showed positive attitudes toward using *TikTok* to enrich their vocabulary. Moreover, the study also reported that *TikTok* helped students increase their attention, interest, and understanding of subject content. Similarly, a study by Alghameeti (2022) involved 50 secondary school students in Saudi Arabia. The study reported that students had

positive attitudes toward using *TikTok* for their vocabulary learning. The students also noted that the features of *TikTok* helped them enrich their English vocabulary. Another recent study was conducted by Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) in Malaysia. They involved 45 primary school students, conducted a pre-test, intervention on using *TikTok* for teaching regular verbs, and post-test afterwards. The post-test results suggested that the students improved tremendously in constructing sentences with regular verbs. The interview results also suggested that the participants enjoyed the lesson when *TikTok* was used. In Thailand, involving nine primary school students, a study by Rahmawati and Anwar (2022) also reported that the participants' grades in vocabulary tests increased by 95% compared to that of the pre-test after the teacher used *TikTok* to teach it.

Despite the seemingly uniform findings favouring *TikTok* as a good learning medium, a quantitative study by Mekler (2021) involving 111 participants found a negative impact of the platform on students' behaviours. The study reported that the more students spent their time on *TikTok*, the harder they could focus and pay attention in class. The contradictory finding may lend an explanation for the default nature of *TikTok* as a social media rather than a learning media. Hence, some supporting factors should exist for *TikTok* to be a useful medium for learning. These factors could be teachers' inclusion of

TikTok in-class instruction as well as students' motivation to learn independently outside class using the platform.

In Indonesia, studies on *TikTok* for vocabulary have been available (Cahyono & Perdhani, 2023; Erwani et al., 2022; Hastomo et al., 2022; Novitasari & Addinna, 2022; Pratami & Syafryadin, 2023; Rahman, 2021). A small-scale quantitative study by Erwani et al. (2022) involved 17 Junior High School students. They found that all of the participants agreed that *TikTok* could help them learn vocabulary through English teachers from all over the world who make content on *TikTok*. Another recent small-scale quantitative study involved 25 students from an English language education department (Hastomo et al., 2022). The study reported that students agreed that *TikTok* helped them in learning English vocabulary. They could use it anytime and anywhere and it also allowed them to choose certain vocabulary areas that they wanted to improve. Fairly similar findings were reported by an earlier study and a more recent study, both of which involved high school students (Rahman, 2021; Sirait & Hutasuhut, 2023). Studies on *TikTok* have also been conducted qualitatively. For example, a study by Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) involved six university student participants, that of Novitasari and Addinna (2022) involved 27 English department students, that of Pratami and Syafryadin, (2023) involved 30 English

department students. They generally reported favourable results regarding *TikTok* as a vocabulary learning media and resource. Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) found, among others, that students accessed diverse content provided by multiple content creators and learned many new words in *TikTok* by using the hashtag feature.

Despite the contributions of the aforementioned studies in the Indonesian context, an empirical study on *TikTok* for vocabulary learning may still be necessary for several reasons. Indonesia has one of the biggest numbers of *TikTok* users at a staggering number of 99.79 million as of July 2023 (Statista, 2023) and many of them were people from a young age including college students. This popularity among the young generation can potentially be leveraged for educational purposes including vocabulary learning. Second, previous studies on *TikTok* in Indonesia were typically conducted either qualitatively (Cahyono & Perdhani, 2023; Novitasari & Addinna, 2022; Pratami & Syafradin, 2023) or quantitatively yet involving a limited number of participants either in a certain university or a class (Erwani et al., 2022; Hastomo et al., 2022; Rahman, 2021; Sirait & Hutasuhut, 2023). For this reason, it is deemed necessary to conduct a quantitative study involving more participants with a wider scope, for example, involving students from several different universities and provinces in Indonesia. Such a study can potentially

provide an overview of the phenomenon and based on the results of such a study, further in-depth studies can be carried out.

The aforementioned rationales being said, the present study intends to answer this research question: What are English department students' attitudes towards the use of *TikTok* for English vocabulary learning?

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

The present study employed a quantitative method of conducting an online survey. The method was used to find out students' attitudes toward the use of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning. Several previous studies on *TikTok* in various contexts have been conducted quantitatively (Alghameeti, 2022; Hastomo et al., 2022; Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022; Sivagnanam & Yunus, 2020; Yang, 2020). This indicated the popularity of this method in the field, further implying support for using a quantitative in this study.

The target participants of this study were students from English departments, either from English Language Education or English Letters, who were active users of *TikTok* either as regular content surfers or content creators. A total of 116 students from English departments participated in the present study, with 37 male participants and 79 female participants. Of these 116 students aged 18 up to 29, 90 were from English Language Education Departments

and the other 26 were from English Letters. These participants were from 26 different universities from 10 different provinces. The details of the participants' domiciles can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. The Details of Participant's Domiciles

No.	Provinces	Number
1.	Bali	14
2.	Yogyakarta	60
3.	Jakarta	4
4.	West Java	3
5.	Central Java	8
6.	East Java	7
7.	West Kalimantan	6
8.	Lampung	6
9.	South Sulawesi	7
10.	West Sumatra	1
Total		116

As to why students from English departments were involved in this study, several reasons can be highlighted. First, as they have taken English as their major they inevitably learned English in their respective departments' curricula and had a higher probability of learning English outside class than, for example, non-English department students (Sinnema et al., 2020). Secondly, as they had chosen English as their future career choice, they were likely more motivated and had the initiative to learn English more extensively using various technological tools around them, including *TikTok*.

Instruments

The instrument for this study was a ten-item close-ended questionnaire on students' attitudes toward the use of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning. The ten questionnaire items were adapted from a study by Alghameeti (2022) in Saudi Arabia. There were several minor changes from the original questionnaire by Alghameeti (2022), for example, item 9 "It is not easy using *TikTok* for learning English vocabulary" was adapted from the original questionnaire "*TikTok* makes obstacles in learning vocabulary." The participants were required to choose one of the following possible responses: "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Undecided", "Disagree", or "Strongly Disagree". Before being distributed, the questionnaire was piloted to fifteen students from English departments where they gave suggestions for the improvement of the questionnaire, for example, regarding clarity. This questionnaire piloting aimed to ensure that the questionnaire was clear and easy to complete. In this study, the questionnaire produced a .84 Cronbach's alpha coefficient and .85 McDonald's omega coefficient, both suggesting a high internal reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed in the form of a Google Form link accompanied with an information poster regarding the study and it was shared freely through social media such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *WhatsApp*. The

poster contained information such as the criteria of participants: English-majored students and active *TikTok* users. The questionnaire distribution lasted around five weeks from 7 March 2023 up to 18 April 2023. After that, the questionnaire data were downloaded in the form of an Excel file and the data were recorded into SPSS 25 for further analyses. "Strongly Agree" responses were recorded as 5 points, "Agree" as 4 points, "Undecided" as 3 points, "Disagree" as 2 points" and "Strongly Disagree" as 1 point. Negative items, items 2 and 9 where "Strongly Agree" responses indicated a negative attitude towards *TikTok*, were reverse-scored. To answer the research question of this study on the students' attitudes towards the use of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning, a descriptive formula was executed and the results are presented in the forms of mean scores, percentages, and standard deviations.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to the autonomy and justice principles of research ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006; Thomas, 2013). The autonomy principle was implemented through the use of a consent form at the beginning of the online questionnaire. The consent form detailed the purposes of the study as well as the participant's rights and responsibilities (Bryman, 2012). Participation was voluntary without any coercion. Those who did not agree to participate after reading the consent form

could simply stop filling out the online questionnaire. The justice principle was implemented by prioritising the participants' needs, for example, by ensuring that the questionnaire was quick and easy to complete.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study intends to investigate English department students' attitudes toward the use of *TikTok* for English vocabulary learning. To this end, it distributed an online *Google Form* questionnaire through social media. 116 students from 26 different universities in ten different provinces participated in this study.

The study found that the overall mean score of the participants' responses on the ten items was 40.25, suggesting an average of 4.03 for each item. This finding indicated that generally, the participants had a very positive attitude towards the use of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning. This finding was in line with the findings of some previous studies (Pratiwi et al., 2021; Yang, 2020). Pratiwi et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study about utilising *TikTok* to improve students' pronunciation in Indonesia. She involved eight English major students as the participants and found that the students had positive attitudes toward the use of *TikTok* to improve their pronunciation. A quantitative study involving 187 Chinese secondary school students in Australia was conducted by Yang (2020) about the students' attitudes toward *TikTok* to learn

English. The study found that students held positive attitudes towards introducing *TikTok* as a video aid in language classrooms and using it as a learning strategy outside class. Though these previous studies were not exclusively on vocabulary, the certain degree of similarity between the findings of this study and those of these previous studies may suggest

the potential of utilising *TikTok* as a language learning media for students.

The detailed results on each of the questionnaire items can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Attitudes towards the Use of *TikTok* for Vocabulary Learning

No.	Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Undecided	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1.	<i>TikTok</i> can improve English vocabulary knowledge.	4.28	.75	39.70	54.30	0.00	6.00	0.00
2.	I am sceptical of using <i>TikTok</i> for English vocabulary learning.	3.00	1.19	9.50	37.90	0.00	48.30	4.30
3.	<i>TikTok</i> is very effective for improving English vocabulary learning.	3.99	.91	26.70	59.50	0.00	13.80	0.00
4.	<i>TikTok</i> is convenient to use for learning English vocabulary.	4.15	.84	33.60	56.90	0.00	9.50	0.00
5.	Watching English <i>TikTok</i> videos can enrich the vocabulary.	4.50	.59	53.40	44.80	0.00	1.70	0.00
6.	I am excited about using	4.04	1.02	35.50	50.0	0.00	12.90	1.70

No.	Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Undecided	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
7.	<i>TikTok</i> to learn English vocabulary.	4.22	.77	35.30	57.80	0.00	6.90	0.00
8.	Learning English vocabulary through <i>TikTok</i> is a fun way to learn the language.	4.22	.73	33.60	60.30	0.00	6.00	0.00
9.	<i>TikTok</i> is easy to use to learn English vocabulary.	3.50	1.13	8.60	16.40	0.00	66.40	8.60
10.	It is not easy to use <i>TikTok</i> for learning English vocabulary.	4.36	.66	43.10	53.40	0.00	3.40	0.00
	Learning English vocabulary through <i>TikTok</i> is a good idea.							

Questionnaire item 1 with the statement "*TikTok* can improve English vocabulary knowledge" received support from 109 participants (94%). It produced a mean score of 4.28. This finding was consistent with a finding of a qualitative study by Ining (2021) involving eight participants in Malaysia. One of the findings suggested that *TikTok* helped students increase their understanding of subject content. *TikTok* provides many features and there are varieties of sources on it. Hence, students may utilise these features and various

language contents for language learning (Erwani et al., 2022).

Item 2, a negative statement, "I am sceptical of using *TikTok* for English vocabulary learning" with a rather low mean score of 3.00 obtained agreement from 55 participants (47.4%) and disagreement from 61 participants (52.6%). This finding suggested those who had negative and positive attitudes were relatively balanced in number. Related to the negative attitude towards *TikTok* in this item, a quantitative study involving 111 participants in the US by

Mekler (2021) reported that the more students spent their time on *TikTok*, the harder they focused on materials and paid attention in class. Liu (2023) stated that false information and video content on *TikTok* could hurt students' development. The finding on this particular item may serve as a reminder that some participants had a certain degree of scepticism towards the optimal use of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning, perhaps attributed to its nature as a social media primarily for entertainment.

Furthermore, item 3 "*TikTok* is very effective for improving English vocabulary learning" produced a mean score of 3.99 obtaining the agreement from 100 participants (86.2%). A study involving 50 secondary school students in Saudi Arabia by Alghameeti (2022) also found that students reported positive attitudes toward *TikTok* with its various features and options as a supporting media to expand their English vocabulary. In line with that, a qualitative study in Indonesia by Pratami and Syafryadin (2023) reported that *TikTok* had some features enabling students to sharpen their mastery of the English language, including vocabulary.

Item 4 "*TikTok* is convenient to use for learning English vocabulary" obtained the agreement from 105 participants (90.5%) and produced a mean score of 4.15. The convenience may be attributed to the student participants'

familiarity with *TikTok* and its features. This possibly enabled them to learn English vocabulary without hassle using the platform. A qualitative study involving six students in Indonesia by Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) reported that students gained the advantage of using *TikTok* for language learning. They, for example, reported discovering new phrases, finding numerous content materials, gaining new words, improving their skills, and practising their skills with abroad buddies. This finding perhaps also implies the student participants' feeling comfortable using the platform for learning English.

Item 5, "Watching English *TikTok* videos can enrich the vocabulary" obtained support from 114 participants (98.2%) and produced a mean score of 4.50. Almost all of the participants agreed with the statement. This finding was in line with a finding of the study by Ining (2021) in Malaysia. Involving eight non-English major students, the study reported that the participants' acknowledgement that *TikTok* videos could enrich their vocabulary. Ining (2021) added that the brief duration of *TikTok* videos as well as their hilarious yet useful content made them engaging teaching and learning resources.

Next, item 6, "I am excited using *TikTok* to learn English vocabulary" produced a mean score of 4.04 and obtained agreement from 99 participants (85.5%). A study involving six

elementary school students in Thailand by Rahmawati and Anwar (2022) reported the participants' excitement about being taught English using *TikTok*. "I feel so happy because learning English using video through the *TikTok* application is fun and entertaining," one of the participants commented (p. 617). The post-test results also suggested that their grades increased by 95% compared to the pre-test results before *TikTok* was used in class. The authors stated that the participants found *TikTok* to be easy to use and they could interestingly learn things.

Item 7 "Learning English vocabulary through *TikTok* is a fun way to learn the language" produced a mean score of 4.22 and obtained support from 108 participants (93.1%). This finding was similar to that of a study involving primary school students by Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) in Malaysia. The results suggested that the students enjoyed English lessons when *TikTok* was used, they found it effective and simple to use in generating their verb videos, and most of them were interested in creating educational content in the future. These findings could give some kind of support that *TikTok* can be used to enhance language learning of students of varied levels of education evidenced by the finding of this study in a university context and that of the study by Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) in primary school context.

Furthermore, item 8 "*TikTok* is easy to use to learn English vocabulary" produced a mean score of 4.22 and obtained agreement from 109 participants (93.9%). This finding was similar to a study in the Indonesian context by Cahyono and Perdhani (2023). They reported that participants found it easy to use *TikTok* because they could access diverse content provided by multiple content creators and learn many new words in *TikTok* by using hashtags. It can be said that *TikTok* is easy to use because students can easily watch English content on *TikTok*.

Item 9, a negative item, "It is not easy to use *TikTok* to learn English vocabulary" produced a rather low mean score of 3.50. 29 participants (25%) agreed with the statement whilst 87 participants (75%) disagreed with it. It means that the majority viewed *TikTok* as an easy-to-use platform to learn English vocabulary. This finding was similar to the finding of a study by Sirait and Hutasuhut (2023) in the Indonesian context. They found that most participants agreed that *TikTok* is very easy to use because it provides user-friendly features. Besides that, there have been several studies also reporting that *TikTok* is easy to use (Alghameeti, 2022; Cahyono & Perdhani, 2023; Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022). Nonetheless, 29 participants (25%) indicated their agreement with this negative statement should also be

highlighted. It is speculated that this was attributed to the nature of *TikTok* as a social media. Hence, whilst the participants may be active *TikTok* users, they may not always find themselves using the platform for English learning, especially vocabulary learning. This particular finding may call for further teachers' role in directing students' use of *TikTok* for language learning.

Finally, item 10 "Learning English vocabulary through *TikTok* is a good idea" produced a mean score of 4.36. It obtained agreement from 112 participants (96.5%). A study by Novitasari and Addinna (2022) also found that *TikTok* made learning English enjoyable. It was because the platform has several advantages such as quick access, diverse video materials, intriguing information that is easy to grasp, the ability to learn from native speakers, and many more. From these findings, it can be concluded that *TikTok* has the potential to offer a more enjoyable language learning atmosphere and as evidenced by the overwhelming support from the participants, students' acceptance of the platform was particularly high. This acceptance could be capitalised for the success of language learning, including vocabulary learning.

All in all, several points can be highlighted regarding the findings of this study concerning vocabulary instruction. It was found that the

participants had generally positive attitudes toward using *TikTok* as a platform for learning English vocabulary. Therefore, English teachers might need to start making vocabulary learning scenarios in the class by using *TikTok* as a learning resource and media. Moreover, results on the negative statements suggested the participants' rather ambivalent attitudes on the effectiveness of using of *TikTok* for vocabulary learning. Hence, bringing *TikTok* into English classes could be a way to enhance more use of *TikTok* for educational purposes. For example, teachers could ask the students to make *TikTok* videos using the vocabulary they learned in the classroom, or they could use *TikTok* videos as their media or teaching resources in their classes. In the case of English department students, the context of this study, *TikTok* can be incorporated in some skill-based and vocabulary-building classes at the beginning of their study to facilitate the laying down of the foundation of their English mastery readying them to take up more academic challenges in their respective English department curricula.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the participants had highly positive attitudes toward using *TikTok* to learn English vocabulary. Despite that, in two negative items, it was also found that their attitudes were rather ambivalent

splitting those who were sceptical and thought using *TikTok* for vocabulary learning was not easy and those who thought otherwise. It is speculated that these ambivalent attitudes were attributed to the default nature of *TikTok* as a social media rather than a learning media, which made some participants question its effectiveness as a vocabulary learning media to a certain extent.

This study has the following possible contributions. Considering the number of participants and their origins in terms of universities and provinces, this study has well surpassed the existing studies on *TikTok* in Indonesia in terms of scale considering such previous studies only involved participants in a certain institution or a class. Hence, this study may contribute to giving an 'eagle-eyed' view on the Indonesian English department students' attitudes toward using *TikTok* for vocabulary learning.

Furthermore, possible limitations should be acknowledged and based on these limitations, future studies in the field can be suggested. This study employed a survey method as the only method of collecting data. Hence, this study inherently depends on the participants' self-report and degree of honesty which could be or could not be reflective of the real situations. Secondly, the quantitative nature of this study may bring consequences that the results, whilst portraying a general tendency about a phenomenon, may be

superficial. This particular limitation warrants further studies employing qualitative methods, for example, interviews and document analysis, to see the extent to which students learn vocabulary using *TikTok*. A classroom action research study on the possible effects of using *TikTok* for vocabulary learning can also be conducted to see whether students had a significant improvement in vocabulary mastery after being taught and learning vocabulary using *TikTok* in class.

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The manuscript was jointly written by R and ASS. R completed her thesis, the embryo of this manuscript, under the advisory of ASS.

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