The Role of TikTok in Enhancing English Skills: Perspectives from University Students

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Abstract: *This study explores the role of TikTok in enhancing English language skills from the perspectives of university students at Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), a university in northern Malaysia. With the rise of digital platforms as informal learning tools, TikTok's short-form videos present a unique opportunity for language acquisition. The research aims to examine whether students improve specific skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and listening through engagement with TikTok content. A questionnaire was administered to university students to gather insights on their experiences and perceptions of TikTok as an English learning aid. The findings reveal that most respondents view TikTok positively as a platform for enhancing their English skills, particularly in pronunciation and vocabulary development. This suggests that TikTok has significant potential as a supplementary resource for language learners, fostering both skill improvement and motivation in English language learning.*

Keywords: TikTok, English language learning, teaching and learning, university students, online platform

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1. Introduction

The evolution of Web 2.0 technology has revolutionized the way people interact, learn, and communicate. With its emphasis on user-generated content and interactivity, Web 2.0 has fostered the growth of digital platforms that integrate seamlessly into daily life. Driven by advanced Web 2.0 technology and the widespread adoption of smart mobile devices, numerous social media applications have rapidly emerged (Yang, 2020). The proliferation of smartphones has further accelerated this trend, making social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok central to modern communication and content consumption. Among these, TikTok stands out as a rapidly growing platform that combines short-form videos with creative tools, attracting millions of active users worldwide. According to Nguyen and Tan (2024), TikTok has recently risen to become one of the most popular social media platforms under the ownership and development of ByteDance. It fosters creativity, enhances speaking engagement, and encourages interaction with audiences.

Social media platforms were initially designed for entertainment and social connection. With the widespread presence of social networking sites on the Internet, researchers from various fields are increasingly highlighting their importance and impact on different aspects of life, including their growing potential as educational tools (Muftah, 2024). Platforms like Facebook

and Instagram have introduced features that support interactive learning and engagement, but TikTok, with its visually dynamic and highly engaging format, has carved a unique niche. According to Chapple (2020), TikTok made history as the first social media platform to witness remarkable growth within a single quarter; January to April 2020, amassing an additional 315 million downloads across the App Store and Google Play. The app's algorithm promotes exposure to a wide range of content, including educational videos, making it a versatile tool for language learning. This supports Newman (2021)'s assertion that TikTok has become a popular platform for learning and information sharing.

For university students who are often digital natives, TikTok offers an unconventional yet effective medium for improving English skills. This is in line with the claim by Onn et al. (2024) that TikTok can serve as a supplementary tool for learning English by creating a positive learning environment that supports the improvement of students' English language skills. Through its entertaining and relatable content, students can access vocabulary-building exercises, pronunciation guides, and real-life language usage. This paper explores the perspectives of university students on how TikTok aids in enhancing their English proficiency. It examines the platform's features, its impact on language learning motivation, and its ability to complement traditional educational methods. By doing so, it highlights TikTok's growing significance in digital learning.

2. Background of the Study

TikTok, a relatively new player in the social media ecosystem, distinguishes itself through its emphasis on short-form video content combined with creative editing tools and algorithms that personalize content delivery. TikTok is described as a video-sharing application that allows users to create, share, and view a variety of videos (Omar, 2020).

Currently, a variety of media platforms are accessible for independent English learning, with TikTok gaining popularity as a popular option (Susanto et al., 2024). With over a billion active users globally, TikTok has gained popularity for its diverse and engaging content, ranging from entertainment to educational tutorials. It presents an untapped potential for enhancing English language skills through exposure to authentic language use, interactive challenges, and language-learning communities.

Various studies on the use of TikTok indicate that, in addition to enhancing EFL students listening skills, the platform also supports the development of their speaking abilities (Fitria, 2023). By engaging with diverse content creators and topics, EFL students gain meaningful insights into authentic conversational styles. Furthermore, the short-form video format provides an enjoyable and interactive approach to practicing speaking skills. As a result, integrating TikTok into learning activities can effectively encourage students to participate in speaking exercises. University students, as digital natives, often leverage these platforms for informal learning. This study explores the perspectives of university students on TikTok's role in improving English skills. It investigates how its content variety, engagement dynamics, and creative tools support vocabulary development, pronunciation practice, and contextual language learning, thereby complementing traditional language education methods.

3. Problem Statement

Traditional classroom-based language learning often provides limited opportunities for students to practice and apply their skills in real-life contexts. While structured lessons are

essential, language learning should extend beyond class hours to achieve proficiency. This gap emphasizes the importance of supplementary practice, where students engage with the language regularly in informal settings.

In today's digital age, a significant portion of people's time is spent on social media, making these platforms an untapped resource for educational purposes. TikTok, a rapidly growing social media platform, is recognized not only for its entertainment value but also for its potential in education. With its short-form videos and user-friendly tools, TikTok offers an interactive and engaging environment for language practice. However, there is limited understanding of how university students perceive and utilize TikTok to enhance their English skills.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the role of TikTok as a tool for English language enhancement. It investigates how the platform's unique features support informal learning and whether students find it effective in complementing traditional language education. The findings aim to contribute to innovative approaches in integrating technology and social media into language learning practices.

4. Literature Review

In recent years, social media platforms have transformed the education landscape, with TikTok emerging as a particularly influential tool for language learning. This short-form video platform not only captivates users with its engaging content but also offers unique opportunities for language acquisition through its interactive features and diverse community of creators. This literature review aims to examine university students' perspectives on using TikTok for language learning, exploring how the platform influences their motivation, engagement, and language proficiency. By analysing existing research, this review will highlight the benefits and challenges that students encounter while utilizing TikTok as a learning tool, ultimately offering insights into its potential role in enhancing language education in higher learning contexts.

University Students' Perspectives on Using TikTok

The use of social media platforms, especially TikTok, for educational purposes, has gained significant attention in recent years. Studies have highlighted the growing recognition of TikTok's potential to improve various language skills, particularly among university students. TikTok aligns with the aspirations of the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Learning (2015-2025), which emphasizes independent and lifelong learning. Research has consistently shown that students acknowledge the educational benefits of TikTok, particularly in enhancing their English language proficiency.

Several studies emphasize TikTok's ability to facilitate learning engagingly and entertainingly. Nur Ilianis and Berlian Nur (2022) found that students use TikTok not only for entertainment but also for educational purposes. They highlighted the platform's ability to relieve stress and boredom while simultaneously enhancing students' pronunciation and vocabulary. TikTok's versatility, offering resources beyond education, such as life hacks and news updates, also contributes to its popularity among students. This blend of entertainment and informative content makes TikTok an attractive tool for learning, as students are more likely to engage with the platform and absorb information in a fun, interactive environment.

Wang (2020) further supports this idea, noting that TikTok creates a fun learning environment where students can quickly learn about current events through short, entertaining videos. The platform's ability to make learning accessible, interactive, and engaging has been recognized as an important factor in its success as an educational tool. Reindl (2020) also pointed out that TikTok enhances classroom interactivity and facilitates online learning, creating opportunities for collaboration and expanding access to educational resources.

The use of TikTok for learning English has been particularly well-received by students. Dewi Afreliyanna (2023) found that students enjoy using TikTok because it allows them to learn English anytime and anywhere, offering a flexible, user-friendly platform for improving language skills. The app has been particularly effective in increasing students' vocabulary and motivating them to continue learning. Nguyen and Tran (2024) conducted a study among sophomores at Van Lang University in Vietnam, revealing that TikTok significantly improved students' speaking proficiency. Students reported that TikTok made learning more practical and accessible, allowing them to practice speaking English outside of class and at their own pace. The platform also helps reduce anxiety and shyness when presenting in front of an audience, further enhancing speaking skills.

TikTok's role in promoting creativity and engagement is another key finding in the literature. Pratiwi et al. (2021) highlighted TikTok's effectiveness in fostering creativity and improving students' speaking skills by providing a fun, interactive environment for language learning. Similarly, Hengzhi Hu (2022) found that TikTok has a positive impact on language proficiency, motivation, and students' willingness to communicate in English. TikTok's interactive features, such as comments, likes, and duets, allow students to engage with content creators and peers, enhancing their language learning experience.

TikTok's influence on pronunciation has also been widely studied. Anggi et al. (2021) and Tio Hartanto (2023) found that TikTok helps improve students' pronunciation, with students showing a positive attitude toward the platform for enhancing their speaking skills. Pratami and Syafryadin (2023) also emphasized TikTok's effectiveness in supporting English learning, particularly among English-major students, who found the platform to be a creative and innovative tool for learning.

The authenticity of TikTok content is another key strength identified by researchers. Kresnayorga and Suparmi (2024) noted that TikTok exposes students to real-life language usage, including accents, slang, and colloquial expressions, which enhances their language learning experience. TikTok's diverse range of content creators and topics allows students to engage with authentic conversations, helping them build confidence and fluency. Ahmad et al. (2023) further demonstrated that regular interaction with TikTok videos and content creation led to significant improvements in students' oral communication skills.

In addition to speaking and listening skills, TikTok has been found to improve students' reading and writing abilities. Rama et al. (2023) pointed out that watching videos with subtitles on TikTok helps students improve their reading comprehension and expand their vocabulary. TikTok encourages students to write thoughtful comments and create captions for videos, providing opportunities for writing practice in an interactive, fun context.

Overall, the literature suggests that TikTok is a valuable tool for enhancing language learning, particularly in the areas of speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and creativity. By providing a fun and engaging learning environment, TikTok fosters independent learning and

encourages students to take an active role in their education. The platform's interactive features and authentic content further contribute to its effectiveness in promoting language proficiency among university students.

5. Methodology

This study aims to explore the role of TikTok in enhancing English language skills from the perspectives of university students. To gather relevant data, a questionnaire was distributed to 70 students in Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), consisting of 35 males and 35 females. The questionnaire was designed to gather both demographic information and insights into the students' usage of TikTok, as well as its perceived impact on their English language development.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section included four demographic questions, focusing on gender, year of study, program, and MUET (Malaysian University English Test) band. These questions provided background information to contextualize the findings.

The second section focused on TikTok usage, with five questions designed to understand how often students use the app, the types of content they engage with, and their general perception of TikTok as a tool for language learning.

The third section consisted of six questions aimed at evaluating the learning impact of TikTok. These questions explored how students believe the platform has influenced their English language skills, including listening, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition.
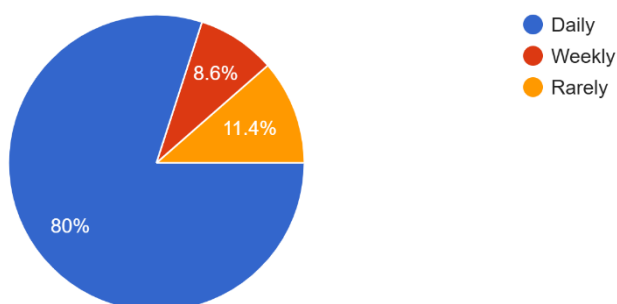
Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively to identify trends and patterns in student perspectives on TikTok's role in enhancing their English proficiency.

6. Results

The first four questions of the questionnaire are designed to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' TikTok usage patterns. These questions focus on key aspects such as the frequency of app usage, the amount of time spent on TikTok daily, and the types of content engaged with. By gathering this information, the study aims to establish a clear picture of how often and in what ways UniMAP students interact with TikTok, providing essential context for exploring its potential impact on their English language skills.
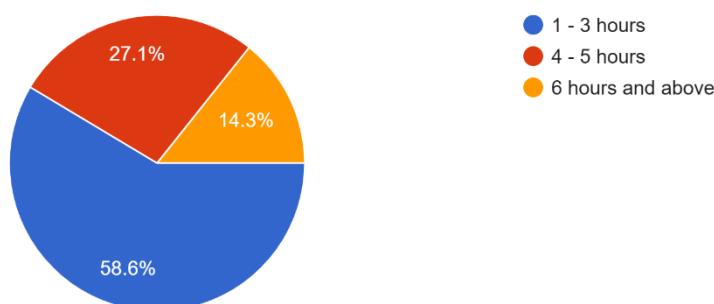

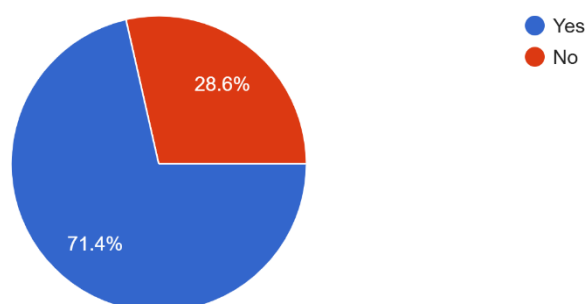How often do you use TikTok?
70 responses

- Daily
- Weekly
- Rarely

Daily: 80%
Weekly: 8.6%
Rarely: 11.4%

In response to the question, "How often do you use TikTok?", 80% of the 70 respondents indicated that they use the app daily, 8.6% reported using it weekly, and 11.4% stated that they use it rarely.

How much time do you spend on TikTok daily?
70 responses

Regarding the question "How much time do you spend on TikTok daily?", 58.6% of the 70 respondents reported spending 1-3 hours on the app each day, 27% spent 4-5 hours daily, and 14.3% indicated that they spend 6 hours or more on TikTok each day.

Do you follow accounts on TikTok that create content in English (use English language as the medium)?
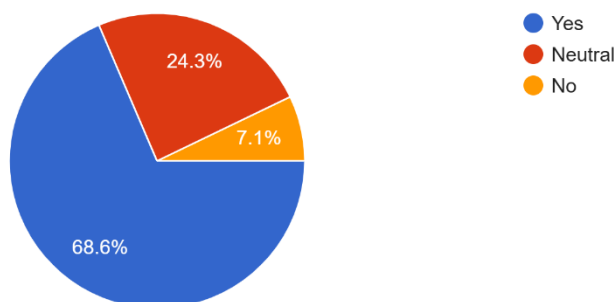70 responses

In response to the question, "Do you follow accounts on TikTok that create content in English (using English as the medium)?", 71.4% of the 70 respondents indicated that they do follow such accounts, while 28.6% reported that they do not.

The next section of the questionnaire focuses on examining the learning impact of TikTok on English language skills, in line with the title of the research paper. This part aims to explore how the use of TikTok influences various aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills. The questions are designed to capture respondents' perceptions of how engaging with English-language content on TikTok may enhance their language proficiency. By analyzing their responses, the study seeks to gain insights into the potential educational benefits of TikTok, particularly in terms of improving English language skills among UniMAP students.

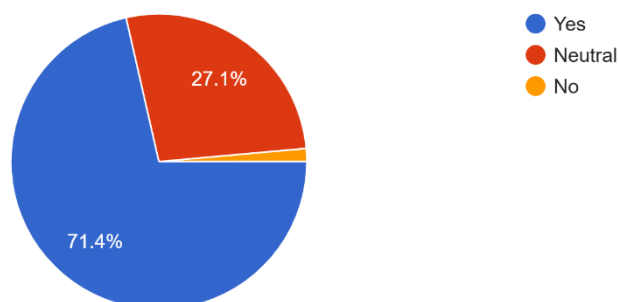**Do you learn new English words by watching videos on TikTok?**
70 responses

The next question in the questionnaire is "Do you learn new English words by watching videos on TikTok?". 68.6% of the 70 respondents indicated that they do learn new English words, 24.3% remained neutral, and the remaining respondents (7.1%) reported that they do not learn new words from TikTok videos.

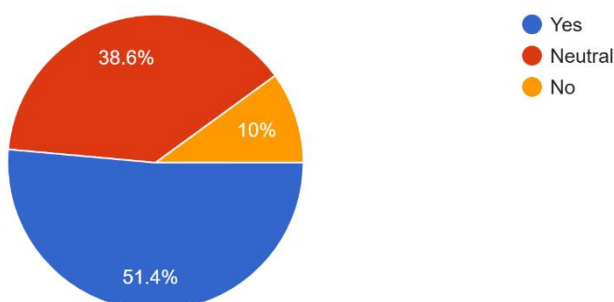**Do you feel TikTok helps you practice English pronunciation?**
70 responses

The responses for the question, "Do you feel TikTok helps you practice English pronunciation?" reveal that a significant majority of respondents, 71.4%, answered "yes", indicating that they find TikTok useful in improving their pronunciation skills. Additionally, 27.1% of participants selected "neutral", suggesting they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Only 1.4% of respondents answered "no", indicating they do not believe TikTok helps them practice English pronunciation.

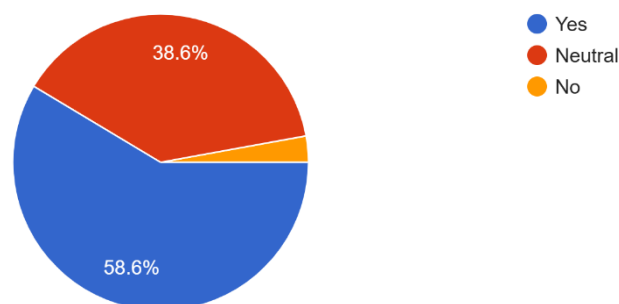**Have you learned new grammar structures through English TikTok content?**
70 responses

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In response to the question, "Have you learned new grammar structures through English TikTok content?", 51.4% of participants agreed that they have learned new grammar structures by watching English TikTok content. Meanwhile, 38.6% were neutral on the matter, and the remaining percentage indicated that they had not learned new grammar structures through this platform.

Do you feel English TikTok content provides authentic language exposure (e.g., slang, idioms, native accents)?
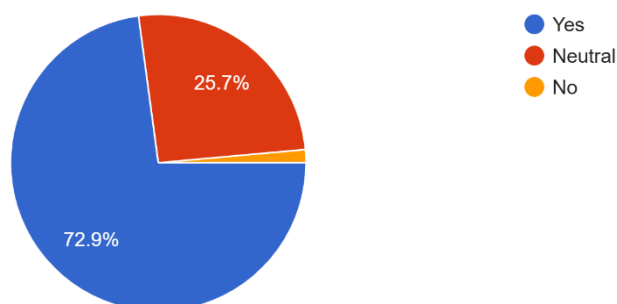
70 responses

When asked in the questionnaire, "Have you learned new grammar structures through English TikTok content?", a significant majority (58.6%) responded positively, indicating that they found TikTok helpful for learning grammar. 38.6% of the respondents remained neutral, and only 2.9% disagreed, showing limited opposition to the idea.

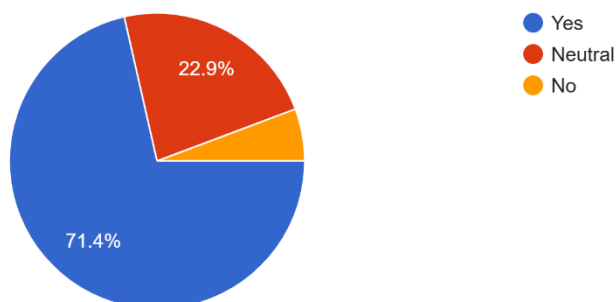Do you think TikTok's short video format is effective in English language learning?

70 responses

The responses the question "Do you think TikTok's short video format is effective in English language learning?" reveal that the majority of respondents, 72.9%, answered "yes", indicating they find the format effective. Meanwhile, 25.7% were neutral on the matter, and only 1.4% believed it was not effective.

Would you recommend TikTok as a learning tool for other English learners?
70 responses

Finally, in response to the questionnaire question "Would you recommend TikTok as a learning tool for other English learners?", 71.4% of participants answered "yes", showing strong support for the platform as a learning tool. Meanwhile, 22.9% remained neutral, and 5.7% said they would not recommend it.

7. Discussion

The results of the questionnaire highlight the growing recognition of TikTok as a valuable tool for English language learning. A significant majority of respondents (71.4%) follow accounts on TikTok that create content in English, suggesting that the platform is widely used for exposure to the language. Additionally, 68.6% of respondents reported learning new English words through TikTok videos, demonstrating its effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition.

When it comes to improving pronunciation, 71.4% of participants agreed that TikTok helps them practice this skill, further supporting its role in enhancing language proficiency. Similarly, more than half of the respondents (58.6%) believe they have learned new grammar structures through English TikTok content, showing the platform's potential for grammar instruction.

TikTok's short video format was also widely regarded as an effective medium for learning English, with 72.9% of respondents agreeing with this statement. This format likely contributes to the platform's popularity as a learning tool due to its engaging and accessible nature. Finally, 71.4% of participants recommended TikTok to other English learners, reinforcing its perceived value as a practical and enjoyable resource.

Overall, the data suggests that TikTok is increasingly recognized as a beneficial tool for English language learners from UniMAP, offering diverse opportunities for vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar improvement.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from UniMAP students' perspectives highlight TikTok as a powerful and effective tool for enhancing English language skills. A significant portion of respondents use the platform to engage with English-language content, with many learning new vocabulary, improving pronunciation, and gaining insights into grammar structures. The short video format of TikTok is widely regarded as an engaging and efficient way to practice English, making learning both accessible and enjoyable. The majority of the respondents also recommend TikTok as a learning tool, emphasizing its potential in language education. Overall,

TikTok plays a valuable role in supporting English language development, offering diverse opportunities for students to enhance their vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar skills in a fun and interactive environment.

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