Exploring the Use of Short Video Social Media for Learning ESL in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of TikTok as a social media platform for supporting English as a Second Language (ESL) learning in Indonesia, with a focus on IELTS exam preparation. Grounded in social learning theory and media literacy, the research highlights TikTok's potential to enhance learner engagement and motivation through its interactive features like duets and challenges. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study captures the motivations, experiences, and outcomes of both learners and content creators. Findings suggest that while TikTok shows promise in improving listening, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition, its effectiveness in comprehensive exam preparation, particularly for writing and grammar, is limited. The study recommends the development of more structured educational content on TikTok and emphasizes the importance of media literacy in helping learners navigate the platform effectively. This research contributes to the understanding of how social learning and media literacy frameworks apply to informal language learning in digital environments.

Keywords: Media Social, TikTok, English, IELTS, TELL

1. Introduction

Currently, social media is an essential component of daily life for 5.04 billion individuals globally (Kamp, 2024). Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have transcended their roles as mere communication and entertainment tools, becoming into significant arenas for information dissemination, community development, and education. Short video platforms, especially TikTok, are among the most favoured social media, seeing significant development in Indonesia, with 126.8 million users as of January 2024 (Kamp, 2024). The allure of TikTok is in its algorithmic experience and interactive functionalities, like the For You page, duets, and challenges, which present the distinctive potential for language acquisition. Prior research has demonstrated TikTok's efficacy in facilitating language acquisition, especially in enhancing listening, speaking, and vocabulary competencies (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022; Khlaif & Salha, 2021). TikTok was chosen among numerous short video platforms due to its exceptional interactive features and widespread appeal in Indonesia. In contrast to other platforms, TikTok's algorithm tailors content according to user preferences, facilitating learners' engagement with pertinent educational resources (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Duets promote collaborative learning, while difficulties provide avenues for active language practice—both essential for language acquisition. This study explores how TikTok's unique tools can improve ESL learning in informal settings. Although TikTok is popular in Indonesia, its role in boosting motivation and interaction in ESL learning is unexplored. This research aims to explore this gap by seeing how TikTok's features can enhance learning and motivation for ESL learners in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Literacy for Language Learning

This research follows Bandura (1977)'s social learning theory, which emphasizes observation, imitation, and modeling in social environments. TikTok duets and comments enable peer observation and real-world language use. Constructivist language acquisition approaches, as expressed by Vygotsky (1978), emphasize social interaction in cognitive development. TikTok lets students give feedback and improve their language skills together. Media literacy as defined by Livingstone (2004) underpins this TikTok user engagement study. Media literacy helps learners navigate the platform and identify valuable content from distractions. This theoretical framework guides the study of TikTok's ability to improve language acquisition and student motivation in informal learning contexts. ESL students may benefit from English social media (Tan, 2024). Ulla and Cho et al. (2024) examined how educators utilize social media to build their professional identities and how social media literacy affects users. The insights reported here may help Indonesian educators and students build motivational and interactive instructional techniques. TikTok lets ESL students practice, socialize, and use authentic language (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

2.2 *TikTok as a Tool for Enhance Learning Interaction and Learning Motivation in ESL*

TikTok exhibits significant potential as an educational tool. The utilization of TikTok has been shown to enhance language skills. TikTok has been shown to enhance listening, speaking, and reading skills (Soeharto et al., 2024), with a particular emphasis on speaking abilities (Aldossari, 2024), vocabulary acquisition (Rama, 2023), and the practice of digital storytelling (Febliyansyah, 2023). Research indicates that TikTok serves as a motivational tool and facilitates student learning (Roberd & Roslan, 2022). Recent studies indicate that research has enhanced the quality of scientific writing (Sajonia, 2024; Vai et al., 2023) and improved student pronunciation, concurrently minimizing errors (Khikmah, 2024).

TikTok enhances the interactivity of educational environments. According to researchers, the platform enhances students' comprehension, receives positive feedback, and serves as an effective learning tool (Savitri, 2023). The platform fosters creativity, promotes student engagement, and facilitates self-expression (Oktarini et al., 2022). Further investigation is required to understand the effects on learning motivation and sustained engagement. Khlaif and Salha (2021) posited that the short films on TikTok facilitate nano-learning through the fragmentation of knowledge.

3. Methodology

This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore the use of TikTok for ESL learning, particularly focusing on IELTS preparation on technology to enhance learning interaction and learning motivation. The structured survey questions facilitated the collection of quantitative data about demographics, content engagement, and viewing behaviours. The open-ended questions provided deeper insights into the motivations and obstacles faced by participants. A total of 134 participants, including both content creators and learners, completed the survey. Data were collected via an online survey administered through Google Forms from June to July 2024. The analysis employed descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

4. Result and Discussion

In July 2024, TikTok had 1.1 million #learnenglish, 211.2K #learningenglish, 478.3K #ielts, and 27.3K #ieltstips postings. One English pronunciation video garnered 2.8 million views. The data shows that most respondents are 18–24, proving that TikTok teaches English to young adults. Teen TikTok users. Both sexes learn ESL on TikTok. Although some teachers use the site to lecture or share knowledge, most responders are students.
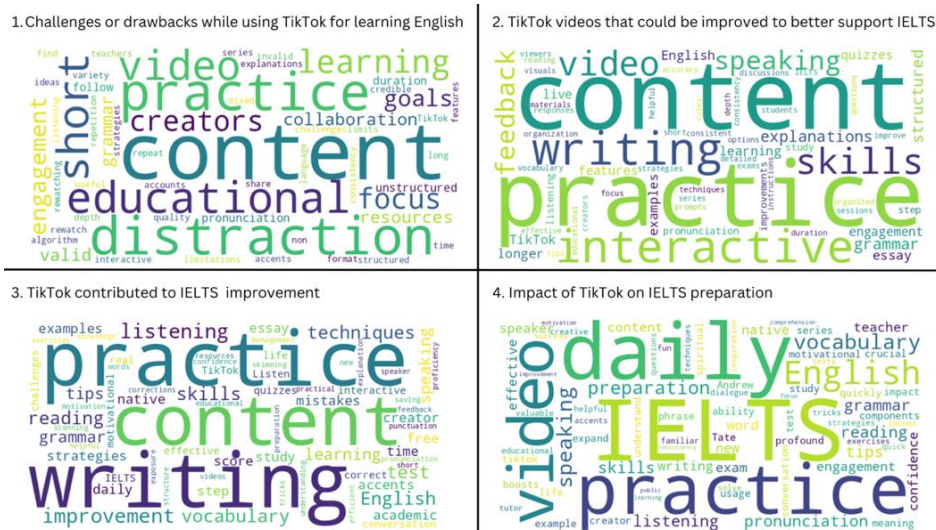
Figure 1. Word cloud of learner responses

4.1 Engagement and Interaction

Table 1. *Learner-watching duration and TikTok specific features*

Q.1 How often do you watch TikTok videos related to learning English?	Qty	Q.2 What specific features of TikTok videos help you the most in learning English?	Qty
Daily	35	Short, focused content	95
Weekly	10	Visual aids (captions, animations)	109
Monthly	3	Interactive elements (duets, comments)	64
Several time a week	50	Relatability of personal stories	34
Rarely	24	Engagement with content creators	20

Table 1 shows that most respondents watch TikTok videos daily (35) or several times a week (50). This suggests that English learners regularly interact with TikTok content. Subtitles and animations (109) are highly desired, followed by concise, targeted content (95). Although less so, interactive elements and personal narratives contribute. The learner faced some drawbacks when using TikTok for English language acquisition. Figure 1 (No.1) shows that TikTok for English learning is plagued by distraction, unstructured content, brevity, quality, and feedback. These suggest that non-educational content, short video lengths, and a lack of organization and feedback are the biggest challenges.The outcomes of this study match social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and constructivist language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). Duets, comments, and challenges on TikTok encourage observational and collaborative learning, making language acquisition in informal settings easier. Users' frequent TikTok use (Table 1) supports the importance of peer learning and social interaction in ESL education (Livingstone, 2004).

4.2 Learner Autonomy

Table 2. *TikTok influence*

Q.4 How do TikTok videos about English learning influence your motivation and study practices?	Qty	Q.5 How has watching TikTok content influenced your IELTS preparation?	Qty
Increase motivation to study	75	Improved listening skills	76
Provide new learning techniques	70	Expanded vocabulary	71
Inspire confidence in speaking English	57	Enhanced speaking confidence	62
Offer practical examples	53	Better understanding of grammar	58
No significant influence	9	Provided motivation and study techniques	44
Other	7	No significant impact	11

This study shows that TikTok videos for English learning excite and provide practical resources for improving listening, vocabulary, and speaking confidence. A minority of respondents thought TikTok did not affect their studying or IELTS preparation. However, most reported positive results, suggest TikTok may be useful for informal language acquisition and exam preparation. Researchers found that students use TikTok for its compact, targeted content and visual upgrades such as captions and animations (109 respondents). This supports Khlaif and Salha's (2021) conclusion that TikTok's appeal lies in its ability to give quick, easily consumable information for nano-learning. Prior research has found various issues, including video shortness, unstructured content, and insufficient feedback (Figure 1) (Oktarini et al., 2022). These limits hinder students from studying for complex tests like the IELTS, which require writing and grammar (Soeharto et al., 2024).

4.3 Usability and Accessibility of Technology

Figure 1 (No. 2) shows that the word cloud was built utilizing input on TikTok film aspects that should be improved for IELTS preparation. TikTok videos for IELTS exam preparation could benefit from improvements in writing skills, engagement, practice, feedback, vocabulary, and video length.

The respondents' claimed improvements in hearing, speaking, and vocabulary match Ibrahim et al. (2023) and Aldossari (2024), who found TikTok effective in improving oral communication. However, only 58 respondents reported improved grammar understanding, and even fewer reported improved writing skills, underlining the challenges of using short-form content for language competency. Khikmah (2024) and Sajonia (2024) found that TikTok improves pronunciation and vocabulary more than language growth.

4.4 Content Relevance and Engagement

Table 3. *English learning content*

Q.7 Which types of English learning content do you find most helpful on TikTok?	Qty
Real-life conversations	63
Vocabulary exercises	79
Pronunciation guides	68
Motivational content	48
Grammar lessons	60
IELTS preparation	48
TOEFL preparation	55
TOEIC preparation	45
Other	5

Table 3 shows that TikTok is valued for vocabulary and pronunciation content. TikTok is also recommended for TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC preparation, showing that many students use it. In Figure 1 (No. 3), the word cloud shows how TikTok improves IELTS learning. Participants who found TikTok content useful for IELTS exam preparation most often mentioned practice, hearing, vocabulary, grammar, improvement, speaking, and writing. TikTok improves language skills, however, few users reported significant IELTS score increases (Table 3, see Q.7). This supports Bhandari and Bimo (2022)'s contention that TikTok's engaging educational content requires more structure for formal exam preparation. It shows that TikTok needs additional tools or platforms for complete learning (Sharif Nia et al., 2023).

4.5 Feedback Assessment and Learning Outcomes

Figure 1 (No. 4) is a word cloud created from replies concerning TikTok videos that influence IELTS preparation. Terms such as IELTS, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, strategies, and practice are essential components that aid users in their preparation for the IELTS examination. The study's findings affirm that TikTok can serve as an effective instrument for inspiring and engaging ESL learners in casual contexts, especially for listening and speaking competencies. Nonetheless, its deficiencies in structured material, writing proficiency, and

grammar training indicate that it ought to be utilized as an ancillary resource rather than an independent educational platform for examinations like the IELTS. The suggestion for enhanced content structure and feedback systems corresponds with the necessity for media literacy training to optimize TikTok's educational capabilities (Livingstone, 2004).

5   Conclusion and Limitation

This study reveals that TikTok could help ESL learners improve listening, speaking, and vocabulary. Interactive aspects like duets and succinct information motivate students. However, the platform's unstructured information, short video time, and lack of feedback hinder exam preparation, notably for the IELTS, especially in writing and grammar. To maximize TikTok's educational potential, structured and focused content and media literacy lessons are needed to help students navigate and use the service.

Despite hopeful results, this study has many limitations. During this exploratory study, restrictions were found. The study's concentration on IELTS-focused TikTok users limits its usefulness. The subjective aspect of qualitative data collection and analysis may prejudice researchers and participants, altering outcomes interpretation. Since the study's descriptive focus provides early insights rather than testing hypotheses, more research is needed to confirm them. The investigation was limited by time and resources, emphasizing the need for future research in this area.

Acknowledgements

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