

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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## EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF TIKTOK AS A SUPPLEMENTARY TOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The use of social media as a profound educational platform holds great potential in augmenting students' mastery of the English language, thereby facilitating substantial advancements in their linguistic competence. The introduction of TikTok has led to its rapid acceptance and preference among youth as a favoured social media platform. To explore the potential of TikTok as a supplementary tool for English as a Second Language (ESL) learning, a set of questionnaires was distributed to 150 students from various courses at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam Campus. The results revealed that there was a strong preference for utilising the platform in language learning as it fosters a sense of comfort and effective learning, allowing students to enhance their English language skills and establish familiarity with the language. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate the considerable potential of TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning among university students. However, further research is required to explore the pedagogical implications of integrating TikTok as a tool in language learning curricula.

**Keywords:** English language learning, second language learning, social media, TikTok, language learning tool

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## **Introduction**

The utilisation of social media as a means to enhance students' English language proficiency demonstrates alignment with the objectives and strategies outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. The Malaysian education system focuses on 21st-century learning to ensure that Malaysian students are well-equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) skills. This includes awareness of the opportunity they can seize when using social media and social networking sites. For example, they could work independently using social media to gain knowledge, search for information on current issues, and socialise (Khan et al., 2016)<sup>2</sup>.

With existing technologies, social media has become the most convenient solution for students with lower proficiency to enhance their English language skills. For instance, Anankulladetch (2017)<sup>3</sup> recommended Twitter as an educational tool that supports active participation and collaboration. Students could form groups to discuss topics, expand on previous discussions, and trade ideas. Jassim and Dzakiria (2019)<sup>4</sup> also found that students favour using Facebook to enhance their proficiency in the English language since the platform allows them to construct their learning based on feedback from their friends through comments and likes. Thus, utilising social media in appropriate educational ways can positively contribute to student engagement. Therefore, this study aims to examine TikTok's potential as a tool for language learning and explore whether it can foster student engagement.

## **Statement of Problem**

Social media can serve as a valuable tool to enhance English language skills among learners. It provides opportunities for exposure to language use, interaction with native or proficient speakers, and access to diverse resources. Nasution (2022)<sup>5</sup>, for instance, claimed that the use of social media in language learning is reported to increase students' reading, writing, and vocabulary mastery, as well as their participation in language learning and motivation to improve their performance in each skill. Another study by Rahmat and Zainal (2020)<sup>6</sup> also reported that students claimed that social media had provided them with proper grammar usage as they are exposed to genuine and meaningful English content such as videos, posts, captions, and tweets when using social media.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge the potential drawbacks associated with its usage. These include the potential for distraction and exposure to inaccurate or informal language forms. For example, Rahmat and Zainal (2020)<sup>6</sup> discovered that students used informal contractions such as "gonna", "ain't", and "gimme" in their academic essays. Similarly, Babanoğlu (2017)<sup>7</sup> and Hassannudin and Mohd Kenali (2022)<sup>8</sup> reported that contractions were often found in students' formal writing. Both studies emphasised that contractions should only be employed in informal writing or speeches and not for academic purposes, business reports, or journal articles. Another concern is that social media platforms allow people worldwide to share and exchange opinions and views on various topics. As a result, students are exposed to a wide range of reading materials and writing genres, which can potentially result in a rapid but shallow and inaccurate comprehension of the content (Md Yunus et al., 2013; Md Zolkapli et al., 2022; Md Zolkapli et al., 2023)<sup>9,10,11</sup>. Moreover, the utilisation of computer technology can potentially cause laziness among students. For instance, students may resort to using social media extensively during lectures for non-learning purposes, resulting in distractions. This can lead to a decline in performance as students shift from focusing on a single task to engaging in multitasking, which prolongs the time required to complete the learning tasks (Al-Faris et al., 2018, Anyau et al., 2023)<sup>12,13</sup>. Consequently, students must possess the knowledge and skills to employ social media suitably and efficiently and leverage it to enhance their English proficiency while avoiding academic misconduct.

Despite the arguments above, Al-Rahmi et al. (2021)<sup>14</sup> disagreed that social media significantly impacts students' language performance, as they discovered that Facebook has minimal or no impact on students' academic performance. Students were found to rarely utilise Facebook to enhance their writing skills. They also reported that they log into their Facebook accounts only once daily and allocate less time per week for regular studying than non-users. An earlier study by Zachos et al. (2018)<sup>15</sup> revealed that social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are predominantly used by students in Malaysia for informal learning purposes, such as to seek for help or discuss challenging topics. Therefore, this signifies that it is crucial to investigate the utilisation of social media among Malaysian university students to gain insights into its prevalence in their lives and their perspectives on using it to enhance their language learning. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the potential of TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning among students. Specifically, this study was done to answer the following research questions:

- a. What is the prevalence of social media usage among UiTM students?
- b. What are the students' perceptions of enhancing language learning through social media?

## **Literature Review**

### **Past Studies on Social Media in Learning**

Many studies have investigated the relationship between social media and learning. Zgheib and Dabbagh (2020)<sup>16</sup> conducted a study focusing on social media learning activities (SMLAs), the cognitive processes involved, and students' engagement in completing the SMLAs. The study involved five different faculties in social science and science and technology. One hundred and fifteen (115) participants selected through random sampling consented to observe their course-related social media posts. The results revealed that popular social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube were considered the best platforms to instill creative learning outcomes among students. Lecturers were also encouraged to design SMLAs that can best be integrated into social media platforms. This signifies the importance of developing social media learning activities that effectively utilise the features of popular social media platforms. Such activities can create a dynamic learning environment for students, enabling them to fully maximise their learning capabilities by producing videos, interacting with audiences using live features and posts, and participating in educational trends.

Moreover, due to the rapid development of technology and the high demand for implementing social media in learning in Malaysia, many studies have looked at how social media can be used to create an informal learning environment. A study by Al-Sabaawi et al. (2021)<sup>17</sup> focused on the issue of how lecturers can create an informal learning environment when teaching Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Physics subjects by using social media from the perspective of researchers. A survey was conducted and distributed to 170 academic researchers using paper-based questionnaires. The results showed two positive outcomes for educators and students. Firstly, educators can communicate with peers easily, share creative knowledge with colleagues or people from different universities locally and internationally due to the hashtag (#) functions, and enhance collaboration between educational institutions and potential partners from industries. Next, students can gain knowledge by making a practical approach to the theory and formulae that they learned in class through experiments or projects, and they can share their insights with a wider audience through comments. This highlighted the need to use social media in learning due to the advantages that educators and students can gain, which can provide a more comfortable learning environment where students can share their creative insights to develop their learning capabilities further.

### **Past Studies on Social Media in Language Learning**

Many studies have also investigated the relationship between social media and language learning. The study by Khan et al. (2016)<sup>2</sup> focused on the issue of social media's role in English language vocabulary development at the university level. Thirty-six (36) university teachers who participated in the study were selected via the random sampling technique. A set of questionnaires was distributed to the participants, and the results revealed that social media has a notable impact on the vocabulary development of English language learning among university students. This

phenomenon can be attributed to the accessibility of social media, which offers students a wide range of sources in various formats, including text, images, and videos.

Next, the study by Sukri et al. (2018)<sup>18</sup> explored how social media aids in encouraging language learners to actively use the target language in informal settings. This study focused on Twitter and Instagram and investigated how these platforms can effectively engage students in using the target language. The study concluded that these two platforms have the potential to be used as a tool in language learning. They further suggested that language instructors should view these platforms as an opportunity to incorporate social media in the classroom setting as it can act as a catalyst to enhance their English skills.

**Methodology**

This quantitative study was conducted to explore the potential of TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning among university students. One hundred and fifty (150) students from various courses at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam Campus, participated in this study. The sampling technique used was random sampling. According to Kamarul Azlan et al. (2021)<sup>19</sup>, the minimum sample size required was 150 following Krejcie and Morgan’s table, similar to Raosoft’s Sample Size Calculator. Consequently, a margin error of 5% can be expected, with a confidence level of 95%. A lower margin of error or higher confidence level would require a larger sample size. The questionnaire distributed to these students employed a 5-point Likert scale and was adapted from Azlan and Yunus (2020)<sup>20</sup>, Al-Khalidi and Khouni (2021)<sup>21</sup> and Sharlovych et al. (2023)<sup>22</sup>. The questionnaire comprises three sections; Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B includes four questions related to the frequency of social media usage, user engagement, time spent on the platforms, and users’ preferred platforms. Finally, Section C consists of 16 questions on students’ perceptions of social media usage in enhancing English skills.

Table 1  
*Distribution of items in the survey*

<b>Distribution</b>	<b>List of Items</b>	<b>No. of Questions</b>
Section A (Demographic)	Gender Field of study/Faculty Semester	3
Section B (Social Media Engagement)	Social media usage User engagement Time spent Users’ preferred platforms	4

Section C (Students' Perceptions on Social Media Usage)	Questions related to writing skills (4)	16
	Questions related to reading skills (4)	
	Questions related to speaking skills (4)	
	Questions related to listening skills (4)	
Total no. of items		23

Table 2 displays the survey's reliability, indicating a Cronbach alpha value of .960, which suggests that the items in the instruments are highly reliable. Further analysis using SPSS version 28 was conducted to address the research questions through descriptive statistics.

Table 2  
*Reliability of Survey*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.835	23

## Results

### Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3 displays the frequency distribution of the respondents' demographic profile, including gender, fields of study, faculties, and semester in which they are currently enrolled. The demographic profile revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (53.3%) compared to male (46.7%). Most of the students were students in the field of Business and Management (39.3%), followed by 37.3% from Social Science and Humanities and 23.3% from Science and Technology. The majority of the respondents were in their third year of degree, which was 40.7%, followed by second year of degree (26%), first year of degree (16%), and fourth year of degree (17.4%).

Table 3  
*Findings for Demographic Profile*

Variables		Percentage (N=150)
Gender	Male	46.7% (70)
	Female	53.3% (80)
Field of study	Social Science & Humanities	37.3% (56)
	Business & Management	39.3% (59)
	Science & Technology	23.3% (35)

Faculties	Accountancy	14% (21)
	Film, theatre & animation	4.7% (7)
	Architecture	11.3% (17)
	Pharmacy	4.7% (7)
	Education	9.3% (14)
	Dentistry	4.7% (7)
	Business & management	23.3 (35)
	Art & design	7.3% (11)
	Medicine	6% (9)
	Information management	8.7% (13)
	Health science	6% (9)
Current semester	1	10.7% (16)
	2	5.3% (8)
	3	11.3% (17)
	4	14.7% (22)
	5	18.7% (28)
	6	22% (33)
	7	6.7% (10)
	8	10.7% (16)

### Findings for Social Media Engagement

This section presents data to answer the first research question, “What is the prevalence of social media usage among UiTM students?” Table 4 reveals that the respondents indicated a high frequency of social media usage with a mean score of 3.92 for ‘often used’, followed by 2.87 for ‘seldom used’ and 1.42 for ‘rarely used’.

Table 4

*Mean for Social Media Usage*

No.	Range	Mean
1	Often	3.92
2	Seldom	2.87
3	Rarely	1.42

Table 5 displays the mean for respondents’ social media engagement. Most respondents claimed that they considered themselves active social media users (M: 3.62).

Table 5

*Mean for User Engagement*

No.	Response	Mean
1	Yes	3.62
2	No	3.17

Table 6 supported the previous data in Table 5, where the majority of respondents spent five to six hours on social media (M: 3.73), followed by two to three hours (M: 3.55), four to five hours (M: 3.22), and one to two hours (M: 2.95).

Table 6

*Time Spent on the Platforms*

No.	Time Spent	Mean
1	5 - 6 hours	3.73
2	2 - 3 hours	3.55
3	4 - 5 hours	3.22
4	1 - 2 hours	2.95

Table 7 shows that TikTok is the most preferred social media platform among the majority of the respondents with a mean score of 3.80. Next is Instagram with a mean score of 3.67, YouTube with 3.62, Twitter with 3.10, and finally Facebook with 1.77.

Table 7

*Users' Preferred Platforms*

No.	Platforms	Mean
1	TikTok	3.80
2	Instagram	3.67
3	YouTube	3.62
4	Twitter	3.10
5	Facebook	1.77

### Findings for Students' Perceptions on Social Media

This section presents data for the second research question, "What are the students' perceptions of enhancing language learning through social media?" In the context of this study, their perceptions of social media usage were based on its impact on their English language learning skills. Therefore,



Table 8 reveals that the highest total mean score was associated with statements related to enhancing one's speaking abilities (M: 14.56). For instance, Item 11: "When I interact (call, voice note, video call) with people on social media, it helps me improve my speaking ability", Item 10: "Social media allows me to improve my pronunciation by watching English videos", Item 9: "Social media helps me improve my speaking skills" and Item 12: "Watching videos on English makes me anxious to speak in English due to the fluency of the English speakers in the videos". This is followed by statements related to listening with a total mean score of 14.55 (i.e., Items 14, 13, 15, and 16), reading with a total mean score of 14.47 (i.e., Item 5, 6, 7, and 8) and finally writing with a total mean score of 13.96 (i.e., Item 1, 2, 3, and 4). This signifies that the students perceived the social media platforms of their choice to be particularly effective in improving their speaking skills.

Table 8

*Mean for Students' Perceptions of Social Media Usage*

Items	Item Description	Mean
14	I felt comfortable using social media to learn English by listening to videos and music	3.84
5	Social media helps me improve my reading skills	3.81
11	When I interact (call, voice note, video call) with people on social media, it helps me improve my speaking ability	3.81
6	Reading subtitles on social media videos can enhance my English language	3.80
10	Social media allows me to improve my pronunciation by watching English videos	3.80
13	Social media helps me improve my listening skills	3.77
15	I prefer to watch English content videos to practice my listening skills in the English language	3.77
7	Reading a caption on social media helped me increase my vocabulary	3.73
9	Social media helps me improve my speaking skills	3.73
1	Social media helps me improve my writing skills	3.59
2	I felt comfortable posting ideas or opinions in the English language on social media	3.59
3	Using instant messaging applications is a perfect way to practice my formality writing in English	3.55
4	The online chatting format has caused me to be unsure of my academic writing	3.23
12	Watching videos on English makes me anxious to speak in English due to the fluency of the English speakers in the videos	3.22
16	I found it challenging to understand the meaning of English videos and songs on social media when listening to them	3.17
8	Reading captions on social media is hard to understand because of the slang of the English language	3.13

## **Discussion**

The findings indicate that the respondents of the study frequently engaged with social media and considered themselves as active users of these platforms. They reported dedicating a substantial amount of time, ranging from five to six hours, to social media activities. Notably, TikTok emerged as the most preferred social media platform among the respondents. These results highlight the significant presence and influence of TikTok in the lives of these young adults, emphasizing its relevance and impact. Hence, this signifies that the learning process would be more effective as they are well-versed in the features of the social media application, specifically TikTok. This is supported by Zgheib and Dabbagh (2020)<sup>16</sup>, where the active learning engagement of students through the social media platform can optimise their learning potential through producing videos, interacting with audiences, and participating in educational trends.

Moreover, utilising social media such as TikTok would create an informal learning environment which could increase students' engagement and motivation in learning. This was further supported by Al-Sabaawi et al. (2021)<sup>17</sup>, who posited that there is a need to employ social media in learning as it provides a more comfortable learning environment to students where they can share creative insights to foster their learning capabilities. Furthermore, it is evident that incorporating social media in language learning could enhance their English language acquisition as suggested by Sukri et al. (2018)<sup>18</sup> due to its reliability in facilitating students to use English in informal settings. However, in contrast to the findings of Khan et al. (2016)<sup>2</sup> where social media has a notable impact on vocabulary learning, this study denotes that students believe learning English through social media could foster their speaking abilities due to the visual and aural input from TikTok which incorporates multimedia elements such as videos, images, and audios.

## **Conclusion**

These findings have proven the importance of utilising TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning as it could foster a positive learning environment which leads to students' English language skills enhancement. Nonetheless, further research is imperative to explore areas of investigation, including effective instructional strategies for utilising TikTok in the classroom, learners' attitudes and perceptions towards TikTok as a language learning tool, and the role of teachers' guidance and support. In addition, further exploration of TikTok as a supplementary tool in English language learning may uncover precise approaches which can lead to positive enhancement of language acquisition and overall language proficiency among students. Therefore, it is notable that further research on the potential of TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning among students can provide valuable insights and highlight its pedagogical approaches in order to fully leverage the use of TikTok as an effective and innovative tool for language learning.

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