

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TIKTOK IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LEARNING MOTIVATION AMONG INDONESIAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of TikTok on junior high school students' English learning motivation and identifies effective content types. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with supporting quantitative data, this study involved 7 students from SMPN 2 Pandan Nauli who regularly engaged with English learning content on TikTok. Data was collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and content observation. The findings show that students feel more motivated to learn English through TikTok content, especially vocabulary tips, idiomatic expressions, and pronunciation, which are presented in an interesting, easy-to-understand, and contextually appropriate way. While TikTok cannot replace formal education, its effectiveness as a complementary learning tool depends on the quality of the content and students' ability to integrate it into their learning routines. This study recommends that educators utilize digital platforms like TikTok to foster a more engaging, flexible and meaningful English learning experience for today's generation.

Keywords: Digital Media, Edutainment, Informal Learning, Language Learning Motivation, Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION

In the era of the digital revolution, social media has become deeply embedded in the daily lives of teenagers around the world. One of the most rapidly growing platforms is TikTok, which allows users to create and consume short-form videos, including educational content. With over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2022), TikTok has changed the way Generation Z communicates, learns and interacts with information. Its visually appealing and concise format suits the learning preferences of digital natives (Prensky, 2001; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

In Indonesia, TikTok is particularly popular among junior high school students, many of whom spend more than two hours a day on the platform (survey data, 2025). However, this growing use of social media contrasts with a lingering educational problem: students' low motivation in learning English. Theoretically, motivation is one of the main components in successful language learning. In the context of modern learning, the Technology-Enhanced

Self-Determination Theory developed by (Chen & Jang, 2019) emphasizes that technology can enhance learning motivation if it meets three important aspects: autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. Platforms like TikTok allow students to choose and organize content independently (autonomy), hone skills through language-based challenges (competence), and interact with a global community of learners (social connectedness). In addition, according to (Scherer et al., 2019) motivation in technology-based learning is strongly influenced by students' perceptions of the ease of use and value of the applications used. With its user-friendly interface and socially and culturally relevant content, TikTok has the potential to be an effective medium in increasing students' intrinsic motivation in language learning.

In the current educational psychology literature, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020) remains the basic framework for understanding learning motivation. This theory emphasizes that students' intrinsic motivation will increase when their basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - are supported in the learning environment. Contemporary research highlights that nurturing these needs through student-centered, engaging and digitally supported instruction contributes significantly to sustained academic motivation and engagement. This theory is further developed in the context of technology through the Technology-Enhanced Self-Determination Theory (Chen & Jang, 2019), which highlights that the integration of technology in learning can significantly increase motivation if it is designed to meet these three needs. In addition, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) can also be used to explain how students' intention to use TikTok for learning is influenced by attitudes towards media, social norms, and perceived self-control. In the realm of language education, the theory of Multimodal Learning (Mayer, 2009) also supports the argument that learning that involves a combination of visual, audio, and social interactions such as those provided by TikTok can enrich students' learning experience and increase the effectiveness of language acquisition.

Furthermore, (Fiorella & Mayer, 2021) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) emphasizes the principles of dual-channel processing (audio & visual), cognitive load reduction, and cohesion between presentation elements. We found that TikTok's multimodal channel fits well with classic CTML - with its integrated combination of images, text, narration, and gesture - thus improving comprehension and recall of English vocabulary and sentence structure.

Research in the field of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) in the past decade shows that the integration of digital technologies can increase student engagement and support better language learning achievement (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020). However, most studies still center on the utilization of popular platforms such as Duolingo, YouTube, and Quizlet (Cesarini et al., 2021), while there is limited exploration of the specific impact of TikTok on English language learning motivation. In fact, TikTok as a short video-based media has great potential to support informal learning that is more contextual and engaging, especially for adolescent learners. This gap is important to bridge, especially given TikTok's

high adoption rate among Indonesian students and its ability to create more authentic, flexible and community-based learning experiences.

Recent research also supports TikTok's effectiveness in improving motivation and language skills. (Annapis, 2024) used a mixed-methods approach and found that 50 EFL students who used TikTok showed significant improvements in speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, as well as self-confidence, while lowering language anxiety-evidencing the platform's role in shaping affective and cognitive supportive learning environments. (2024) which focused on TikTok vlogs for young learners, showed a sharp improvement in their speaking ability, especially in terms of spontaneous speech and fluency skills. In addition, research by (Li et al., 2023) in the MICE education domain concluded that the use of TikTok as an online medium significantly improved learning motivation and oral fluency compared to conventional methods-underlining that the visual and gamification elements in TikTok strengthened participants' engagement.

These studies present strong empirical evidence that TikTok is not just an entertainment medium, but an effective pedagogical tool in language development-especially when linked to theories of motivation, rich media, and contextualized learning.

Based on the literature review, most research on social media in English language learning still focuses on platforms such as YouTube, Duolingo, or Quizlet. Very few studies specifically discuss the role of TikTok in the context of English language learning at the junior high school level in Indonesia, especially in terms of increasing learning motivation. In fact, TikTok is unique as a short video media that is very popular among teenagers and is able to present educational content quickly, interestingly and contextually. In addition, there are not many studies that connect the use of TikTok with contemporary learning theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Cognitive Multimedia Learning, and Seamless Learning in an integrated learning framework.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the use of TikTok as an informal learning medium oriented towards increasing motivation to learn English among junior high school students. This study not only evaluates the effectiveness of the content, but also identifies the most popular content types, frequency of use, and how students interpret the learning process through TikTok. It also integrates cutting-edge theoretical approaches with local qualitative data, and provides a new perspective relevant to the learning conditions and habits of digital generation students.

This research shows that TikTok has a significant impact on increasing students' motivation and understanding in learning English. Through interesting and contextualized educational content, this platform is able to bridge the learning needs of generation Z students who like visual, interactive and flexible media. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that students felt more enthusiastic about learning, understood the material faster, and were more involved in the learning process through TikTok content that they chose independently.

However, the effectiveness of TikTok as a learning medium is highly influenced by the

quality of the content available and the support from the formal learning environment. Although students show interest and increased understanding, the application of knowledge to the school context is still low. Therefore, teachers and educational institutions need to create integration between informal learning from TikTok and classroom learning activities, for example by using projects, video assignments, or discussions based on TikTok content. Specifically, this study not only observes usage in general, but also analyzes the specific types of educational content that students consume, such as:



@englishknow



@kampunginggriswe

This study aims to analyze the effect of TikTok usage on students' motivation to learn English at SMP N 2 Pandan Nauli. Specifically, this study will identify the most effective types of content, relevant frequency of use, as well as students' perceptions of TikTok's role as a learning medium. The focus of this study is expected to make a scientific contribution to the development of technology-based English learning strategies that suit the characteristics of the digital generation. Furthermore, the results of this study can serve as a reference for teachers, parents, and policy makers in utilizing social media productively to support students' learning process.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design, which aims to describe and understand phenomena based on participants' real experiences. As explained by (Vogl et al., 2019), this design is ideal for studying behaviors and habits in the use of digital media that occur naturally in the daily lives of students. This design allows researchers to dig deeper into students' meanings, perceptions, and habits when using TikTok to learn English, without manipulating any variables. Although the approach was primarily qualitative, some quantitative elements (e.g. percentages) were used to show initial trends and frequencies within the specific research sample, rather than for broad generalizations.

The subjects in this study were 7 seventh grade students from SMP Negeri 2 Pandan Nauli, North Sumatra. Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique, based on specific criteria: students who actively use TikTok and regularly watch English learning content (such as English vocabulary, pronunciation, or challenges). According to (Etikan &

Bala, 2017), purposive sampling is particularly suitable for qualitative research, as the focus is on the quality and depth of information from participants relevant to the topic, rather than large numbers. Although the sample size was only 7 people, this number was considered sufficient for in-depth qualitative exploration, as each participant provided rich and detailed experiences that aligned with the research objectives (Low, 2019). However, it is important to note that this limited sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider student population.

Data in this study was collected using the researcher administered an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 12 questions through Google Form. The questions aimed to explore students' experiences in using TikTok, their motivation in learning, the type of content consumed, and how they understand and apply learning from TikTok to the school context. The open format allows students to answer freely and according to personal experience. To get more in-depth information, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with some participants. The questions were organized with certain guidelines, but still gave room for students to explain more broadly and flexibly. This method is in accordance with the opinion of (Aspers & Corte, 2019), which states that this type of interview is effective for exploring personal experiences in depth, especially in a digital context. As a form of data triangulation, researchers also directly observed several educational TikTok accounts that were often mentioned by students, such as @englishknow and @kampunginggriswe. The researcher analyzed the style of content presentation, the type of material delivered (e.g. idioms, pronunciation, conversation), as well as user responses. This is important to ensure that students' perceptions match the content they actually access.

The data obtained was analyzed using the thematic analysis method, referring to the stages developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process includes:

- Rereading all data thoroughly to understand its content.
- Identifying and inductively coding the important ideas that emerged.
- Categorizing the codes into key themes (such as motivation, comprehension, and application).
- Reviewing and refining the themes.
- Giving proper names and definitions to each theme.
- Compiling a report with direct quotes from students as supporting evidence.

This analysis allowed the researcher to capture recurring patterns of meaning in the data, explaining how and why TikTok affects student learning. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher also conducted member checking by presenting a summary of preliminary findings to participants for interpretation verification, and source triangulation by comparing information from questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis to ensure consistency and depth of understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the extent to which the use of TikTok app can affect students' motivation and understanding in learning English. Based on the results of data collection from 7 grade VII students at SMP Negeri 2 Pandan Nauli, key findings were obtained through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results were analyzed and categorized into two main themes: motivation to learn and understanding of English materials, which are then explained in the following table and narrative. It is important to note that the percentages presented in the table reflect the frequency of responses in this particular qualitative sample (N=7) and are not intended for broad generalization, but rather to highlight emerging patterns.

Table 1. Aspects of Motivation in English Learning through TikTok

Aspect	Description	Result (%)
Frequency of Use	Students who use TikTok daily 30 minutes to 1 hour per day	68,75%
Content Type	Students follow TikTok accounts that contain educational content such as vocabulary, idioms and conversations.	87,5%
Motivation	Students feel more motivated after accessing English learning content on TikTok.	56,25%
	Some students still feel neutral or hesitant to use active English	43,75%
	Some students prefer learning through TikTok over conventional methods	43,75%

The average contribution of TikTok to student learning motivation is 60%.

Notes: Percentages indicate the frequency of responses in the qualitative study sample (N=7) and are not intended for generalization to the wider population, but rather to provide an initial overview of emerging patterns.

From Table 1, it can be seen that the highest indicator is in Interest in Content (87.5%), which indicates that students are very responsive to the learning content on TikTok. This strengthens the argument that educational content that is attractively packaged is able to build attention and learning engagement. This is in line with the ARCS Model of Motivational Design by (Keller, 2017), which emphasizes the importance of four elements in building learning motivation: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. Interest in the content reflects the success of the Attention and Relevance aspects.

In addition, the Frequency of Use indicator (68.75%) shows that most students access TikTok regularly with a duration of 30 minutes-1 hour per day. Digital learning environments can support the formation of learning habits when learners consistently engage in self-regulated behavior reinforced by timely feedback and adaptive

scaffolding(Schnauber-Stockmann & Naab, 2019) . However, the Self-Confidence and Media Preference indicator, which only obtained 43.75%, shows that students are still in the transition stage from passive content consumers to active language producers. This is in line with Bandura's (2020) Self-Efficacy theory, which states that to significantly increase self-confidence, students need not only vicarious experiences (observing others), but also enactive mastery experiences (direct successful performance) and positive social support. While TikTok provides exposure and observational learning, it may not sufficiently facilitate active language production without additional structured support from a formal learning environment.

Table 2. Understanding Aspects in English Learning through TikTok

Aspect	Description	Result (%)
Understanding	TikTok is considered to help students understand English more easily and contextually.	62,5%
	Some students only sometimes apply what they learn from TikTok at school.	37,5%

The average contribution of TikTok to students' English understanding is 50%

Notes: Percentages indicate the frequency of responses in the qualitative study sample (N=7) and are not intended for generalization to the wider population, but rather to provide an initial overview of emerging patterns.

In Table 2, Contextual Understanding (62.5%) shows that students are able to relate TikTok video content to everyday life. This reinforces the findings of (Wahyuni et al., 2024), who argue that learning becomes more effective when students can relate the material to real-life contexts, particularly those relevant to their personal and social experiences. Their study on the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model demonstrates that contextualizing content enhances student engagement and learning outcomes.

However, the low Application in School Situations (37.5%) indicates that informal learning through TikTok has not been fully transferred into formal contexts such as schoolwork. This reinforces the importance of integrating learning across multiple environments through a mobile borderless learning approach (Chima Abimbola Eden et al., 2024) where technology enables the continuity of learning across classroom, informal and social environments-bridging formal and informal learning to support learning that takes place naturally across time and context. For example, educators can assign projects where students create short TikTok videos explaining grammar concepts or new vocabulary, or conduct in-class discussions where students analyze and present educational TikTok content they find. This approach will encourage students to actively apply their informal knowledge in an academic context.

Research from UIN North Sumatra lecturers also supports this. For example, research

by (Zein et al., 2024) mentioned that students became more enthusiastic and quickly understood English vocabulary after watching TikTok educational videos. Likewise, in Nasution & Rankuti's (2022) study, students felt more confident speaking English after learning through TikTok because they saw real and interesting examples of language use.

TikTok as a Relevant English Learning Media for Generation Z

Generation Z is an age group that has grown up with digital technology and social media. They have a preference for information that is fast, visual and interactive. TikTok, as a short video platform, provides all these elements. Students in this study stated that they were more interested and comfortable learning through TikTok compared to traditional media such as textbooks. This is consistent with the study of Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2021) who explained that microlearning or learning through short content is more effective for digital era students because it is in line with their short attention span.

On the other hand, TikTok allows learning to happen outside the classroom, anytime and anywhere. This concept is known as ubiquitous learning. This flexibility makes learning not limited by the classroom, and instead more integrated with students' daily lives.

Improving Motivation Through Independence and Social Interaction

Motivation is an important element in the learning process. TikTok is able to increase student motivation because students can control their own learning process - choosing an account, determining viewing time, and learning topics that suit their needs. Based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020); (Chen & Jang, 2019), intrinsic motivation will grow when learners feel in control (autonomy), confident in their abilities (competence), and feel socially connected (relatedness).

TikTok features such as commenting, liking, and sharing videos create social interactions that make the learning experience more enjoyable. Students are not only passive consumers, but can also become content creators, which increases their sense of ownership of the learning process. Some students mentioned that they follow certain educational accounts and feel more confident when mastering the material shared.

Contextualized and Visual-based Comprehension

TikTok presents English in a contextualized visual and narrative form. For example, through vignettes, tutorials, or short dialogs, students can learn vocabulary and sentence structures in a real context. This is very helpful for students in understanding the meaning as a whole compared to just reading the text.

Observations of certain educational TikTok accounts frequently mentioned by students, such as @englishknow and @kampunginggriswe, suggest that their effectiveness stems from their dynamic short video format, engaging visual elements (e.g., text overlays, simple animations), and concise delivery of material. For example, pronunciation tip videos often use visual comparisons of tongue or lip positions, while idiom videos are presented in

relevant everyday conversation scenarios. Interactive features such as comments also allow students to ask questions and receive clarifications, thus fostering a more participatory learning environment.

According to Mayer (2020) in the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, information processing is more effective if it is delivered in visual and verbal formats simultaneously. (Fiorella & Mayer, 2021) also added that “dual coding” helps short-term to long-term memory transfer. Therefore, learning through TikTok videos has great potential to improve comprehension of English materials in a practical and sustainable way.

However, the data also shows that despite the increased comprehension, students have not fully applied it at school. This indicates a gap between informal learning and formal learning activities. (Beatty, 2020) developed Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex) as a learning model that gives students great flexibility to choose their own way of learning: in-person, synchronous online, or asynchronous online-without losing a meaningful learning experience.

Students' Confidence Still Needs Environmental Support

Although students understand the content, most of them are still hesitant to speak in English. This indicates that passive understanding is not enough to build language production skills. According to (Bandura, 2020), self-efficacy will only be formed if students get direct experience, positive feedback, and feel safe in trying.

A supportive learning environment is essential. Teachers need to create an atmosphere that encourages students to dare to try speaking, without fear of being negatively corrected. Activities such as assignments to make English videos, speaking practice based on TikTok videos, and small presentations can help to gradually increase students' confidence.

TikTok and Digital Curriculum Transformation

The findings of this study indicate that TikTok can function not only as a supplementary learning tool but also as a vital component of a broader digital learning strategy. Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, project-based learning aligns well with the integration of platforms like TikTok. Teachers can design engaging activities such as having students create short educational videos (1–3 minutes) to explain grammar points, vocabulary, or idiomatic expressions using real-life examples. Another option is assigning English video journals, where students regularly reflect on their language learning experiences, challenges, and progress through brief video entries.

Additionally, educators can incorporate TikTok content into classroom discussions by selecting relevant educational videos and encouraging students to analyze vocabulary, delivery techniques, or the clarity of explanations. Weekly language challenges can also be introduced, prompting students to use targeted vocabulary or expressions creatively in their own TikTok videos. These strategies not only foster motivation and engagement but also help students view English as an integral and practical part of their everyday digital

environment.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research reinforces that contemporary learning theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020), Cognitive Multimedia Learning (Fiorella & Mayer, 2021), and Seamless learning via mobile devices continues to be relevant and applicable in today's technology-driven educational landscape. Recent studies (Setyowati, 2021) emphasize that seamless integration between formal and informal learning spaces-facilitated by mobile and digital technologies-can significantly improve student engagement and learning continuity across multiple environments..

Practically speaking, teachers and educational institutions need to adopt a more flexible and adaptive approach, utilizing digital platforms that are already part of students' daily lives. TikTok, as part of students' digital ecosystem, if used wisely, can be a bridge between entertainment and education.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of TikTok on English learning motivation among grade 7 students at SMP Negeri 2 Pandan Nauli. The findings show that exposure to English educational content on TikTok significantly increases students' learning motivation. The visually appealing, interactive and easy-to-understand short videos, especially those focusing on vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and pronunciation, effectively captured students' interest and built confidence in the contextual use of English. While TikTok serves as a powerful supplementary tool to foster intrinsic motivation that aligns with digital native learning styles, its effectiveness depends on the quality of the content and students' active integration of informal learning into their routines. Therefore, TikTok has strong potential to increase learning engagement if strategically combined with formal educational approaches.

The study found that while students were motivated and actively engaged through TikTok, their ability to apply what they learned in formal classroom settings remained limited. This highlights the need for strategic integration of informal learning tools into structured education. For teachers, TikTok can serve as a supplementary resource to boost student interest. Educators are encouraged to use curated or self-created educational videos, facilitate in-class analysis of TikTok content, or assign speaking tasks modeled after its short video format.

In terms of instructional design, TikTok can be incorporated into project-based learning activities such as student-created videos, vocabulary challenges, or reflective video journals. These approaches promote active learning and help connect informal engagement with curriculum goals. For schools and policymakers, it is essential to acknowledge the role of platforms like TikTok in modern learning. Institutions should offer digital literacy training,

establish usage guidelines, and support the responsible integration of such tools into blended or hybrid learning models.

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