

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The advancement of digital technology in the twenty-first century has revolutionized virtually every aspect of human life, including education. The growth of social media and video-based platforms has changed how individuals interact, communicate, and obtain information and knowledge. TikTok's rise to popularity as a global cultural and educational force was one of the most noticeable trends over the preceding decade. ByteDance launched TikTok in 2016, and it has since become one of the most popular apps in the world, with over 1.5 billion active users by 2025 (Alghameeti, 2022). This platform is no longer just for amusement; it has grown into a dynamic, participatory, and multimodal learning environment (Jabri, 2024; Moreira et al. (2025).

This occurrence reflected a paradigm shift in the digital era of education. Virtual platforms that promote interactions across cultural, linguistic, and social contexts have superseded traditional classrooms as the primary learning environment. According to Wanthi et al. (2025), TikTok offers a contextualized, visual-based, and authentic learning experience that allows students to access instructional resources on a regular and speedy basis. TikTok's brief video format that integrates text, sound, and visuals has generated a new sort of microlearning that is impactful, brief, and

commensurate with the characteristics of the present digital generation. (Almarshad & Alghammas, 2025).

TikTok usage is becoming increasingly crucial in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), as vocabulary is an important component of language acquisition. To achieve communicative proficiency in English, one must have a thorough understanding of the language's vocabulary. According to worldwide studies, learners' vocabulary can expand through contextual repetition, visual association, and imitation when exposed to English-language content on social media (Alharthy, 2025; Ramadani, 2024). TikTok can thus be a valuable tool for extending one's vocabulary in English, particularly when instructional information like "English tips," "word of the day," or short films with narrative themes is presented in an eye-catching and inventive fashion (Simanungkalit & Katemba, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2021).

This worldwide issue also has an impact on Indonesian education. Indonesia has a substantial penetration rate among students aged 18 to 25, making it one of the countries with the greatest TikTok user base in the globe. Students in higher education are increasingly turning to digital platforms like TikTok for additional learning materials since they are deemed to be more engaging, accessible, and relevant to their requirements (Hutasoit et al., 2025; Juwita, J., & Syahputra, 2024). Students in Raja Ali Haji Maritime University's (UMRAH) English Education Study Program demonstrated this as well by actively adopting TikTok as an informal learning medium to improve their language competence, particularly vocabulary.

Additional learning activities that are easy to understand and enjoyable include "English vocabulary challenge," "daily English words," and "idiom explained." This stage indicates how kids' learning styles have shifted from text-based to multimodal and visual learning. Since social media currently serves as both a source of entertainment and instruction, the distinction between socializing and learning activities is becoming increasingly blurred. It was critical to study how students perceived TikTok as a cognitive tool that helped to the growth of English language competency, particularly vocabulary enhancement, as well as a source of entertainment.

On the other side, some scholars wonder if TikTok is a good tool for language learning. While certain research, including those of Hutasoit et al. (2025), suggest that children find TikTok effective for vocabulary learning because of its visually appealing and easily accessible nature, but other studies point out that TikTok content is usually shallow and not necessarily linguistically accurate (Abidah, 2024; Rita & Subekti, 2023). This puts into question the validity and breadth of the knowledge that students have gained. According to a number of studies, children frequently obtain increased receptive vocabulary, that is, the ability to recognize words, but they may not always be able to use these words effectively in academic or real-world communication (Tirtayasa et al. 2024).

Theoretically, this phenomena shows that using digital media like TikTok necessitates a reflective approach in order to enable meaningful language

acquisition. Although TikTok broadens the language learning experience, Puspitasari (2024) Few research, they maintained, had looked at students' views and judgments of its usefulness in their particular learning context. As a result, it was critical to conduct qualitative research on students' opinions in order to understand how they interpreted and evaluated TikTok's benefits for improving English vocabulary.

The approaches used in previous study also demonstrated the research gap. The majority of research on TikTok's applicability in language acquisition was still quantitative and outcome-oriented, without taking into account users' perspectives and subjective experiences (Desryananda, F., & Akbar, 2025; Ramadani, 2024) In contrast, foreign research such as Pham et al. (2023) and Almarshad & Alghammas (2025) emphasized the importance of sociocultural and cognitive perspectives in understanding the relationship between digital technology and language learning. Furthermore, the majority of research had been conducted at large universities with sophisticated digital infrastructure, leaving a research gap in the context of rural universities with unique social, cultural, and digital access aspects, such as Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH).

This study sought to fill this gap by giving a contextual knowledge of the perceptions of students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji of TikTok as a tool for vocabulary development. This study aimed to demonstrate how students assimilated digital media learning experiences, how they gained linguistic comprehension from the content they

received, and how this medium influenced their overall motivation and learning habits.

The post-pandemic and digital eras have brought significant changes to the language learning landscape, making this research even more vital. Formal institutions no longer have complete control over the learning process, which now occurs in an open and interactive online environment. TikTok has developed a digital learning environment that facilitates informal learning methods by giving brief, visually appealing, and relevant knowledge (Alharthy, 2025). Students in this scenario are active knowledge producers, creating, assessing, and sharing instructional resources depending on their needs rather than passive consumers.

This study was extremely relevant to universities' efforts to integrate digital technology into modern educational systems in accordance with the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (Freedom of Learning-Independent Campus) policy, which emphasises creativity, independence, and innovation in learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate students' opinions of TikTok as a digital platform for expanding English vocabulary, as well as how such beliefs mirrored developments in language learning paradigms in the digital era. As a result, this study used a mixed methods approach to analyze students' impressions, collecting both quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews, providing for a more complete understanding of TikTok's involvement in English vocabulary learning. This study used a descriptive mixed methods approach to evaluate students' perceptions by

combining quantitative and qualitative data, rather than measuring objective vocabulary growth.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the previous facts, the problems identified in this study are as follows:

1. Although many students use TikTok everyday, its impact on improving English vocabulary through informal exposure is unknown.
2. Students' assessments of TikTok's effectiveness in acquiring new English vocabulary may differ.
3. The study aimed to explore students' perceptions of TikTok as an informal tool for improving English vocabulary.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem.

The purpose of this study was to investigate fourth-semester students' impressions of using English-based TikTok content for vocabulary enhancement during the 2025/2026 academic year of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji's English Education Study Program.

1.4 Research Questions

What are students' perceptions of using TikTok as a medium for English vocabulary enhancement at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of students at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, particularly those in the English Education Study Program of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, regarding the influence of TikTok—specifically English-based content—on their English vocabulary enhancement.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study was projected to make both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English Language Education, particularly vocabulary learning via digital platforms.

1. Theoretical Significance:

The findings of this study were expected to strengthen the theoretical understanding that English-based TikTok content could function as a relevant and innovative medium for vocabulary enhancement in EFL contexts. The study was also expected to support the development of further research related to digital platforms and vocabulary learning in higher education.

2. Practical Significance:

a. For Students

This research helped students recognize the benefits and challenges of using English-based TikTok content for vocabulary learning, which might have increased their motivation, interest, and engagement in learning English.

b. For Teachers

The study provided insights that might have encouraged teachers to consider TikTok content as supplementary learning material, helping make vocabulary learning more contextual and engaging.

c. For Future researchers

This study could be used as a reference for future researchers who intended to examine the use of TikTok or other digital media in English language learning, particularly in vocabulary learning, in different research contexts.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity and ensure conceptual clarity, some key concepts used in this work are defined as follows:

1. Students

Students referred to the undergraduate students who took part in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji. They were the participants whose perceptions of TikTok as a medium for improving English vocabulary were explored.

2. Perceptions

Perceptions refers to students' interpretations, ideas, beliefs, and evaluations of TikTok as a tool for improving English vocabulary. Perceptions in this study represented how students saw the benefits and limitations of using TikTok to help them acquire vocabulary.

3. TikTok

TikTok was a social media platform that allowed users to make, share, and view short-form videos. In this study, TikTok particularly referred to English-language content that introduced students to English vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, and contextual language use for learning objectives.

4. English Learning Medium

An English learning medium was defined as any tool, platform, or resource that helped people learn English. In this study, TikTok was used as a digital English learning medium, providing English-language content to help students improve their English vocabulary.

5. English Vocabulary

The collection of English words and expressions was referred to as English vocabulary, which included their definitions, pronunciation, spelling, and contextual usage. The vocabulary gained by pupils through English TikTok material was the focus of this study.

6. Enhancement

The term "enhancement" referred to students reported improvement in English vocabulary knowledge as a result of using TikTok. It included students' perceived ability to learn, comprehend, recall, and apply new English language found in English TikTok material.