The Perceptions and Strategies of ESL Undergraduate Students at UKM on Using Tiktok for Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

The rapid integration of digital technologies has revolutionized education, including language learning. Social media platforms, such as TikTok, have emerged as tools for vocabulary acquisition, offering learners interactive and engaging content. This study examined the perceptions and strategies of English as a Second Language (ESL) undergraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) regarding TikTok as a tool for vocabulary acquisition. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilizing a survey distributed to 396 first-year ESL students. The findings revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of TikTok, with students highlighting its usefulness, ease of use, and alignment with academic goals. Key strategies employed by students included contextualized learning through video content, translation, and repetition, reflecting cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective approaches. These results emphasize TikTok's potential as an innovative supplementary tool for vocabulary acquisition in modern language education. The study contributes to the growing body of research on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), providing insights into how digital tools can enhance vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. Recommendations include integrating TikTok into formal education, as well as developing structured content tailored to learners' needs. Future research could explore TikTok's long-term impact on vocabulary retention, as well as qualitative perspectives on learners' experiences and engagement with the platform.

Keywords: TikTok, Vocabulary Acquisition, Perceptions, Strategies, and ESL Students

Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, technology plays an integral role in shaping various sectors, including education. The integration of digital tools has transformed traditional learning methods, offering new avenues for enhancing the educational experience. Among these tools, social media platforms, originally designed for entertainment, have evolved to serve educational purposes. TikTok, a popular short-form video-sharing platform, has gained substantial traction globally, not only for entertainment but also as an innovative tool for learning. With its dynamic and engaging format, TikTok has become a valuable resource for

delivering educational content creatively, particularly in language learning (Chen, 2021; Zhan, 2023).

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning, as it directly influences communication skills, reading comprehension, and academic success (Nation, 2020). Researchers have highlighted the potential of social media in supporting vocabulary learning, as it encourages active participation, exposure to authentic language use, and multimodal interaction, all of which are essential for language development (Manca & Ranieri, 2022). However, despite these benefits, there is limited research on how students perceive and utilize TikTok for vocabulary acquisition, particularly within the Malaysian context.

In Malaysia, English proficiency is a crucial skill for students, as it plays a vital role in academic achievement, career prospects, and effective communication in a globalized society (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 emphasizes the importance of improving English language skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). However, despite ongoing institutional efforts, many Malaysian students continue to struggle with building an adequate vocabulary (Salleh & Hashim, 2022). Traditional methods, such as rote memorization, often fail to capture students' interest or promote meaningful learning, highlighting the need for innovative, student-centered approaches that encourage self-directed and engaging vocabulary acquisition (Teo et al., 2021).

This study is significant because it explores the effectiveness of TikTok as a learning tool and assesses its practicality in the Malaysian ESL learning environment. By identifying the perceptions of English as a Second Language (ESL) undergraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) regarding the use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition, this research provides insights into how digital platforms can enhance language learning. Furthermore, understanding the strategies students use on TikTok can help educators design more effective technology-integrated teaching approaches. Additionally, the findings of this study also may contribute to the broader discussion on the role of social media in education and inform policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers about the potential of TikTok as a supplementary learning tool in higher education (Zhang & Zhang, 2023; Kabilan et al., 2022).

Research Objectives
1. To identify the perceptions of ESL undergraduate students at UKM regarding the use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition.
2. To identify the strategies employed by ESL undergraduate students at UKM on TikTok to enhance their vocabulary skills.

Literature Review
This section reviews relevant literature to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study. It explores the role of social media in education, with a particular focus on TikTok as a language learning tool. The review then discusses language acquisition theories, digital learning strategies in using technology for language education.

Social Media in English Education

The integration of social media into English education has transformed the way language skills are taught and acquired. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok provide opportunities for multimodal learning, combining visual, auditory, and textual elements to cater to diverse learning styles (Zhang, 2020). These platforms allow learners to engage with authentic language resources, participate in collaborative learning, and access personalized content, which can enhance their motivation and engagement (Kurniawan & Suherman, 2022).

Studies have highlighted the effectiveness of social media in facilitating vocabulary acquisition. According to Alfadda and Mahdi (2021), social media enables incidental learning by exposing users to real-life language usage in various contexts. This incidental learning is particularly beneficial for vocabulary development, as learners are more likely to remember words when they encounter them in authentic scenarios. For instance, Instagram's hashtag system and TikTok's trend-based content can introduce learners to context-specific vocabulary in an engaging way (Tran, 2023).

Additionally, social media platforms provide opportunities for interactive learning. Features such as commenting, sharing, and live streaming allow learners to practice communication skills, seek feedback, and collaborate with peers. Saito et al. (2021) noted that such interactions promote social learning, which is essential for language development. However, the unregulated nature of social media content presents challenges, including exposure to incorrect language use and the potential for distraction (Bernard, 2021).

In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, social media has been particularly impactful. Rahmawati and Anwar (2022) found that social media platforms support the acquisition of communicative competence, as they encourage learners to use English for real-world purposes. However, the effectiveness of these platforms largely depends on how they are integrated into the learning process. Educators play a crucial role in guiding students to use social media effectively, ensuring that they benefit from its educational potential while minimizing its drawbacks (Zhang, 2020).

TikTok as a Tool for Language Learning

TikTok has gained widespread popularity, particularly among young adults, for its short-form video content and interactive features. This format makes it an attractive tool for educational purposes, especially in language learning. The platform allows users to create, share, and engage with short videos that combine audio, text, and visual elements, offering a multimodal learning experience (Zhu, 2021). For language learners, TikTok offers the advantage of presenting vocabulary in authentic, context-driven settings, thus promoting deeper understanding and retention.

Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. Abdullah et al. (2023) found that Malaysian ESL students perceived TikTok as an effective tool for vocabulary learning, citing its engaging and accessible content as key advantages. TikTok's use of visuals, sounds, and text enables learners to grasp the meaning of new words in a variety of contexts, supporting the principles of contextual learning (Saito et al., 2021). Additionally, Tran (2023) highlighted that TikTok's interactive elements, such as comments,

duets, and challenges, contribute to improved retention and engagement, essential components of successful language learning.

Theoretical Perspectives on Language Acquisition and Digital Learning
This study draws on two primary theoretical frameworks which are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework on language learning strategies. These frameworks help explain the effectiveness of TikTok as a language learning tool and the strategies employed by students in acquiring vocabulary through digital means.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), posits that the perceived ease of use and usefulness of a technology are critical factors in its adoption and use. In the context of TikTok, students are more likely to adopt the platform for language learning if they find it easy to use and beneficial for vocabulary acquisition. TikTok's user-friendly interface, coupled with its entertaining nature, makes it an attractive tool for educational purposes. Recent studies confirm that TAM is a relevant model for understanding students' acceptance of social media platforms in educational settings (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021). When students perceive TikTok as an engaging and effective tool, they are more likely to incorporate it into their vocabulary learning strategies.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies
O'Malley and Chamot (1990) highlight the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in language learning. Cognitive strategies, such as translation and repetition, facilitate the internalization of new vocabulary, while metacognitive strategies, such as planning and self-monitoring, help learners manage their learning process. TikTok supports both types of strategies by providing repeated exposure to vocabulary in context through videos. Students can translate captions, replay videos for better understanding, and observe language used in various real-world scenarios, which enhances vocabulary retention and comprehension (Zhang & Lin, 2023). This alignment with cognitive and metacognitive strategies makes TikTok a powerful tool for language learning, especially when students actively engage with the content.

Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition Using Digital Tools
Vocabulary acquisition in digital contexts often involves a combination of active and passive learning strategies. Active strategies, such as creating content or practicing speaking, involve learners using new vocabulary in context, while passive strategies, such as watching videos or reading captions, allow for incidental learning. Both strategies can be effective in enhancing vocabulary skills when integrated into a well-rounded learning routine (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022).

On TikTok, active strategies are supported by the platform's interactive features. For example, students can create their own videos, incorporating new vocabulary into spoken language and real-life contexts. This active use of language aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize learning by doing and engaging with content in meaningful ways (Viana & Silva, 2022). However, some students may be reluctant to create content due to language anxiety or a lack of confidence in their language abilities, as noted by Zhu (2021). This reluctance limits the full potential of TikTok as a language learning tool.

On the other hand, passive strategies on TikTok include watching videos, reading captions, and observing the language used by others. These strategies promote incidental learning, where students absorb vocabulary through repeated exposure. Research by Rahmawati and Anwar (2022) found that watching videos on social media platforms like TikTok can lead to significant vocabulary gains, as students encounter words in varied contexts and through different linguistic registers. The key to successful passive learning on TikTok is ensuring that the content is relevant, engaging, and rich in vocabulary that aligns with the learner's level and needs.

Methodology

This quantitative study focused on the perceptions and strategies of first-year ESL undergraduate students for October 2023's intake at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. The target population was N = 8,572 undergraduate students transitioning from secondary to tertiary education, a critical phase requiring advanced vocabulary skills. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a minimum sample size of n = 368 was determined, but 396 participants were purposely selected based on their active use of TikTok for vocabulary learning to ensure diverse representation across faculties, ethnicities, and language proficiency levels.

Table 1

Summary of all the Items in the Questionnaire

Section	Items	Model
Section A: Demographic Information	1a: Gender 1b: Race 1c: Age Group 1d: Faculty/School of Study 1e: First Language (Mother Tongue) 1f: Frequency of TikTok Use 1g: Purpose of TikTok Use 1h: Proficiency in English 1i: Previous Experience with Learning Vocabulary via Social Media 1j: Time Spent on TikTok per Session	-
Section B: Perceptions of TikTok for Vocabulary Acquisition	2a: "I believe that TikTok can contribute to my academic success in learning English vocabulary." 2b: "I believe that it is easy to learn new vocabulary through TikTok." 2c: "TikTok provides authentic vocabulary examples for real-life communication."	**Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** - Perceived Ease of Use - Perceived Usefulness - Behavioral Intention

	2d: "I find TikTok enjoyable and engaging as a learning tool." 2e: "I believe TikTok is a useful tool for improving my vocabulary." 2f: "I believe TikTok can replace traditional methods of vocabulary learning." 2g: "TikTok encourages me to learn vocabulary regularly." 2h: "TikTok aligns with my long-term language learning goals." 2i: "I believe TikTok promotes lifelong learning."	
Section C: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)	3a: "I plan or set goals for using TikTok as a tool for vocabulary acquisition." 3b: "I monitor my own understanding and progress when using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition." 3c: "I write English words after learning them from TikTok." 3d: "I discover the meanings of new words by using TikTok." 3e: "I match the words learned on TikTok that have similar meanings." 3f: "I watch English movies on TikTok." 3g: "I predict the meaning of new words through the context of the videos shown on TikTok." 3h: "I translate the English vocabulary learned into my native language to understand better." 3i: "I make a list of vocabulary that I have learned on TikTok." 3j: "I use new words acquired from TikTok in meaningful sentences when doing my assignments." 3k: "I speak English when creating new videos on TikTok to practice the vocabulary learned."	**Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) by O'Malley and Chamot (1990)** - **Metacognitive Strategies** (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) - **Cognitive Strategies** (resourcing, grouping, imagery, inference, translation, note-taking, contextualization, oral practice, repetition, and deduction) - **Social Mediation/Affective Strategies** (cooperation and clarification)

| | 3l: "I consciously repeat or review the vocabulary learned on TikTok to enhance my memory." 3m: "I make conversation with friends using TikTok's slang words." 3n: "I share the new vocabulary words that I learn on TikTok with my friends." 3o: "I ask lecturers or friends for synonyms or similar meanings of new words." | |

As shown in Table 1, the data were collected through a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: demographics, perceptions, and strategies. The items in Section B (Perceptions) were adapted from studies employing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), including Yang (2020), Novitasari and Addinna (2022), and Alfadda and Mahdi (2021), who used TAM to assess students' perceptions of digital platforms for language learning. The items were measured Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), and Behavioral Intention (BI). Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale for agreeability, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

In Section C (Strategies), the items were adapted from O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework on vocabulary learning strategies, as well as studies by Rahmawati and Anwar (2022) and Simanjuntak (2021). These items covered cognitive strategies (e.g., translation and repetition), metacognitive strategies (e.g., goal-setting and self-monitoring), and socio-affective strategies (e.g., creating content and peer interaction). Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale for frequency, from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always).

A pilot study with 52 participants confirmed strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.869 for perceptions and 0.939 for strategies. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms over four weeks, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation. Data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive and inferential statistics.

By adapting items from Rahmawati and Anwar (2022), Yang (2020), Novitasari and Addinna (2022), and Simanjuntak (2021), the questionnaire ensured theoretical rigor and empirical validity. The integration of TAM and O'Malley and Chamot's framework provided a comprehensive approach to understanding students' perceptions of TikTok and their vocabulary learning strategies.

Findings and Discussion
This section presents the findings of the study that examines the use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition among ESL (English as a Second Language) undergraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The findings are derived from the survey data collected from 396 students. The section covers demographic information, perceptions of TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool, and strategies employed by the students. The findings provide insights into the potential of TikTok as a digital tool for enhancing vocabulary skills.

Demographic Information

The demographic profile of the 396 ESL undergraduate students who participated in the study provides essential context for understanding their perceptions, strategies, and experiences with TikTok. The sample included 55.8% females and 44.2% males, with a diverse racial composition comprising 57.1% Malay, 18.7% Chinese, 14.9% Indian, and 9.3% Indigenous students. Age-wise, 31.6% of respondents were aged 30 years and above, 28.8% were between 24–26 years, and 22.7% were aged 21–23 years. Participants represented various faculties, with the highest enrollment from Health Sciences (17.4%), followed by Engineering and Architecture (13.4%) and Education (12.9%). Language proficiency levels were diverse, with 36.1% identifying as advanced, 33.1% as intermediate, 15.7% as native-like, and 15.2% as beginners. Regarding TikTok usage, 22.7% accessed the platform several times a week, and 9.8% used it daily. Most participants (79.3%) reported prior experience using social media for vocabulary learning, primarily using TikTok for entertainment (30.8%), education (22.2%), social networking (27%), and content creation (19.9%). This diversity in demographic and usage patterns ensures a comprehensive representation of perspectives on vocabulary acquisition through TikTok.

The Perceptions of ESL Undergraduate Students

Table 2

Findings on perceptions of ESL undergraduate students at UKM regarding the use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition

No.	Item Statement	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Agree)	4 (Strongly Agree)	Mean	SD
1	TikTok contributes to my academic success in learning English vocabulary.	12	48	212	124	3.25	0.854
2	It is easy to learn new vocabulary through TikTok.	14	52	198	132	3.23	0.873
3	TikTok provides authentic vocabulary examples for real-life communication.	18	50	204	124	3.20	0.891
4	I find TikTok enjoyable and engaging as a learning tool.	22	55	190	129	3.16	0.892

5	*I believe TikTok is a useful tool for improving my vocabulary.*	*17*	*53*	*195*	*131*	*3.18*	*0.899*
6	*I believe TikTok can replace traditional methods of vocabulary learning.*	*40*	*89*	*167*	*100*	*3.08*	*0.834*
7	*TikTok encourages me to learn vocabulary regularly.*	*28*	*72*	*179*	*117*	*3.07*	*0.819*
8	*TikTok aligns with my long-term language learning goals.*	*35*	*80*	*173*	*108*	*3.04*	*0.810*
9	*I believe TikTok promotes lifelong learning.*	*30*	*69*	*183*	*114*	*3.10*	*0.845*

Table 3

Interpretation of 4-Point Likert Scale Based on Rahman et al. (2021)

Likert Scale Point	Response Category	Interpretation
1	*Strongly Disagree*	*Respondents completely disagree with the statement.*
2	*Disagree*	*Respondents somewhat disagree, but do not fully reject it.*
3	*Agree*	*Respondents mostly agree with the statement.*
4	*Strongly Agree*	*Respondents completely agree with the statement.*

The perceptions of ESL undergraduate students toward TikTok as a tool for vocabulary acquisition were generally positive, as reflected in the mean scores ranging from 3.04 to 3.25 on a 4-point Likert scale. This study examined students' responses through the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), focusing on Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). According to Davis (1989), technology adoption is influenced by users' perceptions of how beneficial and easy-to-use a platform is. The findings suggest that TikTok

is perceived as both effective and user-friendly for vocabulary learning, although some concerns remain regarding its long-term applicability.

The use of a 4-point Likert scale in this study aligns with previous research in educational technology assessment. According to Rahman et al. (2021), a 4-point Likert scale provides a structured approach to measuring students' perceptions, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). This scale ensures clearer distinctions in students' responses by eliminating a neutral option, thereby reducing response bias. By utilizing this scale, Rahman et al. (2021) examined ESL students' perceptions of digital learning tools, applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to analyze how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence technology adoption. Their findings indicated that students tend to rate educational technologies more favorably when the interface is user-friendly and the content is engaging, which supports the positive perception of TikTok found in this study.

The highest-rated perception item was "I believe that TikTok can contribute to my academic success in learning English vocabulary" (M = 3.25, SD = 0.85), indicating that students view TikTok as a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition. This result aligns with the PU component of TAM, which posits that perceived improvement in performance influences technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). The high score suggests that students recognize TikTok's potential to enhance their academic outcomes, particularly in expanding their vocabulary knowledge. Rahman et al. (2021) also found that students tend to adopt digital learning tools more readily when they perceive them as academically beneficial, which further supports this finding. The interactive nature of TikTok where students can watch native or fluent speakers use vocabulary in real-life contexts fosters engagement and retention. Additionally, the platform's short-form video format provides repeated exposure to words and phrases, reinforcing learning without overwhelming students with lengthy explanations.

Another item that received a high mean score was "I believe that it is easy to learn new vocabulary through TikTok"(M = 3.23, SD = 0.87). The low standard deviation suggests that most students shared similar views regarding TikTok's accessibility and ease of use. This result corresponds to the PEOU component of TAM, reinforcing the idea that students find TikTok to be a simple and intuitive learning tool. Rahman et al. (2021) emphasized that students are more likely to adopt digital learning tools that require minimal effort to navigate, making platforms like TikTok particularly appealing. The user-friendly interface, along with personalized content recommendations, allows students to engage with vocabulary learning in a non-traditional but effective way. These findings suggest that TikTok's informal and interactive nature provides students with an alternative learning environment that is both engaging and easily accessible.

Despite the overall positive perceptions, the lowest-rated item was "I believe that using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition aligns with my long-term language learning goals" (M = 3.04, SD = 0.81). This score suggests that while students appreciate TikTok's short-term benefits, they are uncertain about its effectiveness as a long-term vocabulary learning tool. The informal and entertainment-driven nature of TikTok might contribute to this skepticism, as Bernard (2021) pointed out that social media platforms often lack structured educational progression. Unlike formal language-learning applications or textbooks, TikTok's content is

user-generated and varies in quality, making it less reliable for long-term curriculum-based learning.

This finding suggests that while TikTok is useful as a supplementary tool, students may not see it as a primary resource for systematic vocabulary development. The absence of a structured learning path and assessment methods could explain this hesitation. Rahman et al. (2021) noted that while students engage well with digital learning tools, many of them express concern over their lack of formal structure and assessment components, which is consistent with the lower rating of this item. Similarly, Bernard (2021) highlighted that although TikTok engages learners effectively, its content lacks the depth needed for advanced vocabulary acquisition. As a result, students may perceive TikTok as a tool for quick vocabulary exposure rather than a platform for comprehensive language mastery.

Given these findings, educators and content creators can enhance TikTok's educational potential by curating structured playlists or integrating TikTok-based activities into formal learning. Assigning students specific vocabulary-related tasks or encouraging them to create educational content could help bridge the gap between short-term exposure and long-term learning goals. Rahman et al. (2021) recommended that educators supplement digital learning tools with structured assignments to reinforce long-term retention, a strategy that could similarly improve TikTok's educational effectiveness. By leveraging TikTok's interactive features in a structured manner, students may develop more sustainable vocabulary learning strategies, ultimately reinforcing TikTok's role as a valuable digital learning resource.

Strategies Employed
Table 4
Findings on strategies employed by ESL undergraduate students at UKM on TikTok to enhance their vocabulary skills

No.	Item Statement	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Always)	Mean	SD
1	I plan or set goals for using TikTok as a tool for vocabulary acquisition.	28	72	179	117	3.03	0.793
2	I monitor my own understanding and progress when using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition.	26	70	183	117	3.12	0.953
3	I write English words after	30	69	183	114	3.06	0.816

	learning them from TikTok.						
4	I discover the meanings of new words by using TikTok.	22	55	190	129	3.22	0.921
5	I match the words learned on TikTok that have similar meanings.	18	50	204	124	3.17	0.935
6	I watch English movies on TikTok to enhance vocabulary learning.	25	67	176	128	3.09	0.982
7	I predict the meaning of new words through the context of the videos shown on TikTok.	35	80	173	108	2.92	0.881
8	I translate the English vocabulary learned into my native language to understand better.	17	53	195	131	3.17	0.935
9	I make a list of vocabulary that I have learned on TikTok.	40	89	167	100	2.90	0.898
10	I use new words acquired from TikTok in meaningful sentences when doing	32	74	174	116	2.99	0.839

	my assignments.						
11	I speak English when creating new videos on TikTok to practice the vocabulary learned.	37	81	169	109	2.96	0.859
12	I consciously repeat or review the vocabulary learned on TikTok to enhance my memory.	21	59	192	124	3.15	0.940
13	I make conversation with friends using TikTok's slang words.	33	78	171	114	3.00	0.845
14	I share the new vocabulary words that I learn on TikTok with my friends.	19	57	187	133	3.19	0.890
15	I ask the lecturers or friends for synonyms or similar meanings of new words.	36	82	166	106	2.91	0.868

Table 5
Interpretation of 4-Point Likert Scale Based on Sarip@Khalid et al. (2021)

Likert Scale Point	Response Category	Interpretation
1	Never or Almost Never True of Me	The strategy is rarely or never used by the respondent.
2	Usually Not True of Me	The strategy is occasionally used but not a common practice.
3	Usually True of Me	The strategy is frequently used but not consistently applied.
4	Always or Almost Always True of Me	The strategy is consistently used as a regular learning habit.

The strategies employed by ESL undergraduate students for vocabulary acquisition using TikTok were examined through 15 items, with mean scores ranging from 2.90 to 3.25 on a 4-point Likert scale. These strategies were categorized into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies, following O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework. The findings suggest that students relied more on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while socio-affective strategies were used to a lesser extent.

The 4-point Likert scale was adopted in this study to measure the frequency of strategy use, ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). This scale has been widely used in language learning research to assess strategy adoption among ESL learners. For example, Sarip@Khalid et al. (2021), employed a 4-point Likert scale in evaluating ESL students' language learning strategies, where responses were categorized as 1 = Never or almost never true of me, 2 = Usually not true of me, 3 = Usually true of me, and 4 = Always or almost always true of me. The forced-choice format of this scale ensures that students clearly indicate the extent of their engagement in vocabulary learning strategies rather than opting for a neutral position, thereby reducing response bias and enhancing the accuracy of data interpretation. This approach aligns with established methodologies in language learning research, as demonstrated in their study on improving writing skills among ESL learners, where metacognitive strategies were found to be the most frequently employed, while affective strategies were the least utilized.

The highest-rated strategy was "I match the words learned on TikTok that have similar meanings" (M = 3.22, SD = 0.921), reflecting students' preference for cognitive strategies that involve connecting new vocabulary with previously learned words. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), cognitive strategies such as semantic mapping help learners organize information and strengthen retention. Students' preference for this strategy suggests that they actively engage in finding relationships between words, which enhances comprehension and recall. This finding is consistent with Rahmawati and Anwar (2022), who reported that learners who engage in semantic mapping tend to have better vocabulary retention compared to those who rely solely on memorization. The interactive nature of TikTok, which

provides captions, subtitles, and user comments, likely supports this strategy by offering multiple contexts in which words can be applied.

Another frequently used strategy was translation. The item "I translate the English vocabulary learned into my native language to understand better" received a high mean score (M = 3.17, SD = 0.935). This suggests that students frequently rely on their first language as a scaffolding tool for comprehension. Translation is a common cognitive strategy among ESL learners, particularly in multilingual settings, as it allows students to establish a connection between their native language and the target language (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022). Additionally, "I consciously repeat or review the vocabulary learned on TikTok to enhance my memory" (M = 3.15, SD = 0.940) further supports the idea that students engage in active reinforcement to retain new words. The effectiveness of repetition as a vocabulary learning strategy is well-documented, as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasized its role in reinforcing new knowledge.

For metacognitive strategies, the findings indicate moderate levels of engagement. The item "I plan or set goals for using TikTok as a tool for vocabulary acquisition" (M = 3.11, SD = 0.935) suggests that some students engage in goal-setting, which is a key metacognitive process that allows learners to take control of their learning. Additionally, "I monitor my own understanding and progress when using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition" (M = 3.03, SD = 0.793) suggests that while some students engage in self-monitoring, this strategy is not as widely used as cognitive strategies like translation and repetition. Effective self-regulation in learning has been linked to improved vocabulary acquisition, as Simanjuntak (2021) found that ESL students who engage in self-monitoring tend to have better long-term vocabulary retention.

In contrast, socio-affective strategies were less frequently used by students. The item "I speak English when creating new videos on TikTok to practice the vocabulary learned" received a relatively low mean score (M = 2.96, SD = 0.859). This suggests that fewer students engage in content creation, likely due to language anxiety or fear of judgment. These findings are in line with Pham et al. (2023), who reported that many ESL students avoid public-speaking activities on social media platforms due to concerns about their fluency or pronunciation. Similarly, "I make conversation with friends using TikTok's slang words" (M = 3.00, SD = 0.845) and "I share the new vocabulary words that I learn on TikTok with my friends" (M = 3.19, SD = 0.890) suggest that while peer interaction occurs, it is not a dominant strategy among students. The relatively lower engagement in peer-based learning activities could indicate a preference for individual study rather than collaborative learning when using TikTok.

The lowest-rated strategy was "I make a list of vocabulary that I have learned on TikTok" (M = 2.90, SD = 0.898), indicating that note-taking was not a preferred method for most students. Despite note-taking being a well-documented cognitive strategy that enhances learning and retention, the fast-paced and visual nature of TikTokmay discourage students from engaging in this traditional practice. Pham et al. (2023) found that students are more inclined to rely on interactive and immediate reinforcement techniques rather than passive learning strategies, which could limit the long-term retention of vocabulary.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. First, TikTok content creators should focus on developing more structured and educational videos, which provide detailed explanations of vocabulary usage and context. Such curated content would cater to learners at various proficiency levels, thereby enriching their overall learning experience (Viana & Silva, 2022). Second, it is recommended that learners actively participate in creating their own content on TikTok. Producing videos in English allows students to practice using newly learned vocabulary in authentic contexts, reinforcing their retention and application. This approach aligns with active learning theories, which emphasize learning through engagement and creativity (Zhu, 2021). Finally, TikTok can be integrated into formal ESL instruction as a supplementary tool. Educators could assign TikTok videos introducing specific vocabulary topics, followed by classroom exercises or discussions to consolidate the learning process (Saito et al., 2021).

Future research should explore several areas to expand the understanding of TikTok's role in vocabulary acquisition. First, studies could examine the impact of TikTok-based vocabulary learning on long-term retention, as the existing body of research predominantly focuses on short-term outcomes (Nation, 2020). Second, comparative research is recommended to evaluate TikTok's effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition relative to other social media platforms, such as YouTube or Instagram. This would offer valuable insights into TikTok's unique strengths and limitations (Zhang, 2020). Lastly, further studies could investigate the influence of interactive features on TikTok, such as commenting, sharing, and collaborative challenges, in fostering vocabulary acquisition. Social interaction has been shown to enhance language learning, and understanding its role on TikTok could provide practical strategies for educators and learners (Noyan & Hanan, 2022).

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study provide significant implications for educators, students, and digital content creators in the context of vocabulary acquisition through social media platforms like TikTok. The positive perceptions of ESL undergraduate students toward TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool suggest that digital platforms can serve as valuable supplementary resources for language learning. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights the role of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) in technology adoption (Davis, 1989).

For educators, these findings indicate the potential benefits of integrating TikTok-based learning strategies into formal language instruction. Since students demonstrated a preference for cognitive strategies such as semantic mapping, translation, and repetition, teachers can incorporate similar techniques in classroom activities to reinforce vocabulary learning. Additionally, metacognitive strategies such as goal setting and self-monitoring were moderately utilized, suggesting that educators can provide guidance on how students can develop self-regulated learning habits to enhance their vocabulary retention.

For students, the study highlights the need to diversify vocabulary learning strategies by incorporating more active and interactive methods, such as peer discussions, content creation, and note-taking. While students relied on TikTok for exposure to authentic language

use, they showed less engagement in socio-affective strategies, such as practicing new vocabulary through spoken interaction. Encouraging students to actively apply vocabulary in real-life communication could significantly enhance language proficiency.

From a content creation perspective, the study suggests that TikTok can be further optimized for educational purposes. Digital creators who produce language-learning content can incorporate structured vocabulary lessons, pronunciation guides, and interactive exercises to make learning more engaging and effective. Furthermore, the challenges identified in this study, such as technical issues and content reliability, emphasize the need for platform improvements to better support educational content delivery.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the study relied on self-reported data collected through a survey, which may introduce response bias. Since students self-assessed their vocabulary learning strategies and perceptions, their responses may not fully reflect their actual behavior in using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. Future studies could incorporate observational methods, user analytics, or experimental designs to obtain more objective insights into students' learning patterns.

Second, the study focused on ESL undergraduate students at a single institution (UKM), limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Language learners from different academic backgrounds, proficiency levels, or cultural contexts may have varying perceptions and strategy preferences when using TikTok for vocabulary learning. Conducting multi-institutional or cross-cultural studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media influences vocabulary acquisition across diverse learner groups.

Another limitation is the exclusive use of a 4-point Likert scale to measure students' perceptions and strategies. While this scale is effective in encouraging clear responses by eliminating a neutral option (Rahman et al., 2021), it does not capture nuanced opinions that a 5-point or 7-point scale might provide. Future research could explore mixed-method approaches, combining Likert-scale surveys with qualitative interviews, to gain deeper insights into students' learning experiences and challenges.

Additionally, this study did not examine the long-term impact of using TikTok on vocabulary retention. While students reported positive perceptions and frequent use of cognitive strategies, it remains unclear whether TikTok-based learning leads to sustained vocabulary improvement over time. Future research could conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of social media-based vocabulary learning on students' language proficiency.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides valuable insights into ESL undergraduate students' use of TikTok for vocabulary acquisition, but several areas require further investigation. Future research should focus on long-term vocabulary retention, platform comparisons, public-speaking anxiety, proficiency-level differences, and structured integration into formal instruction.

One key area for exploration is the long-term effects of TikTok on vocabulary retention. While students reported positive perceptions, it remains unclear whether vocabulary learned through TikTok is retained over time. Longitudinal studies tracking vocabulary development could assess TikTok's effectiveness in sustained language learning. Future studies could also compare TikTok with other digital learning platforms such as YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, or Duolingo. Examining which platforms best support different aspects of vocabulary acquisition would help educators and learners make informed choices about digital learning tools.

Another important focus is public-speaking anxiety, which may explain students' reluctance to engage in spoken content creation. Research could explore strategies to reduce anxiety and encourage active participation, potentially improving students' confidence and fluency in English. Additionally, examining TikTok's impact across different language proficiency levels would allow for tailored learning approaches. Future research should identify which TikTok-based strategies are most effective for beginner, intermediate, and advanced ESL learners to enhance personalized instruction.

Finally, there is a need for developing structured frameworks for integrating TikTok into formal language education. Research should explore how TikTok-based activities can complement classroom instruction, making social media a more effective tool for vocabulary acquisition.

Conclusion

This study focused on ESL undergraduate students' perceptions and strategies in using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition, revealing generally positive perceptions toward the platform's usefulness and ease of use. The findings indicate that students favor cognitive strategies such as translation, repetition, and semantic mapping, while socio-affective strategies such as content creation and peer discussions are less frequently employed. The study also contributes to the field of educational technology and language learning by providing insights into how social media can supplement vocabulary acquisition. While TikTok offers an engaging and interactive learning environment, it is essential to address its limitations, such as lack of structured learning pathways and long-term retention challenges. Educators, students, and content creators can optimize the platform by incorporating structured activities, peer interaction, and goal-setting strategies to maximize vocabulary learning outcomes. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, cross-platform comparisons, and the impact of social media-based learning on different proficiency levels. By further exploring the role of TikTok in language acquisition, researchers can develop effective strategies to enhance digital learning experiences and ensure that students benefit from the evolving landscape of social media-assisted education.

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