

INCIDENTAL VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH BEAUTY INFLUENCER CONTENT ON TIKTOK: EXPERIENCES OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

Tahtida Niska Zahriya^{1*}, Sri Wahyuni²
^{1,2,3} Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

tahtidaniskazahriya20@students.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Although TikTok has increasingly been discussed in EFL learning, limited attention has been given to how non-educational beauty influencer content supports incidental vocabulary learning. This study addresses this gap by exploring Indonesian EFL students' experiences and perceived benefits of encountering English vocabulary through beauty content on TikTok. Using a qualitative survey design, data were collected from 12 English Language Education students through open-ended questionnaires, followed by semi-structured interviews with three selected participants. The data were analyzed thematically. The findings show that students encountered English vocabulary incidentally while watching makeup tutorials, skincare and beauty product reviews, product recommendations, and Get Ready with Me videos. Vocabulary noticing and understanding were supported by captions, subtitles, repetition, product demonstrations, visual context, and influencer explanations. Students also used strategies such as re-watching videos, checking dictionaries or translation tools, reading comments, and searching online to clarify unfamiliar words. The study reveals that beauty TikTok content can provide meaningful, interest-driven, and low-pressure vocabulary exposure outside the classroom. It contributes to EFL learning by highlighting the pedagogical potential of everyday digital content as a supplementary resource for contextual vocabulary development.

Keywords: Beauty Influencer Content, EFL Learners, TikTok, Incidental Vocabulary Learning, Qualitative Survey

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because vocabulary knowledge significantly influences students' ability to communicate, comprehend texts, and engage in meaningful interactions. Vocabulary in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning is crucial because vocabulary size affects one's linguistic performance, whether it is their L1 or L2 (Andriani & Sriwahyuningsih, 2019). Also, vocabulary assists the learners in understanding what people say or what they read. In EFL instruction, learners who lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge may struggle to achieve effective language learning outcomes and develop their language proficiency (Macis & Schmitt, 2017). Apart from that, learners will be able to express their ideas better. For that

reason, having a good mastery of vocabulary will greatly help an individual when learning English. The skill does not appear overnight; instead, it comes suddenly through the process of continuous learning (Jasmine et al., 2025). Therefore, vocabulary learning should not only be viewed as the memorization of word meanings, but also as a gradual process in which learners notice, understand, and reuse words through both classroom instruction and everyday language exposure.

Most vocabulary instruction is presented during lectures, vocabulary drills, and courses like Lexical Studies. Students are still nervous about speaking and using that vocabulary in daily conversation. Another problem is that there is limited class time, so students hear less variation of how vocabulary is used in daily situations. Mastering English vocabulary is not easy because learners also need to understand the various ways words are pronounced, which often poses a challenge in the learning process (Rosyada & Apoko, 2023). So students also need supplemental learning materials that relate to everyday language. This condition shows an important problem in EFL learning: students may learn vocabulary formally, but they do not always have enough opportunities to meet the same words in natural, repeated, and meaningful contexts. As a result, vocabulary knowledge gained in class may remain passive if learners rarely encounter or use the words beyond instructional settings.

Technology these days grows so fast in various aspects, including the education sector (Hakim & Yulia, 2024). In recent years, the rise of social media has transformed the way people around the world communicate and access information in their daily lives (Alshenqeeti, 2018). Social media and digital platforms are increasingly influencing how EFL learners acquire English vocabulary outside the classroom. Since students always carry smartphones and use social media, they also learn English faster since they get exposed to it outside the classroom (Herman, 2024). Because social media often is made up of new words/terms that are not recognized in formal language (Wowoseko et al., 2025). Social media creates new terms/vocab that we don't see often used in formal language settings. Students tend to pick up and use new vocabulary more quickly because they frequently interact with social media and are always keeping up with ever-changing trends (Febriamita et al., 2024). Students are able to learn vocabulary subconsciously when watching videos for entertainment, looking up information, or watching channels they like. Social media can help the education process of learning English, not just for fun. This reflects the growing relevance of informal digital learning, where learners engage with English through daily online activities rather than through planned classroom tasks.

Among the various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular apps among young students. TikTok is known as a short-form video social media app that offers a variety of engaging features, such as audio, visual effects, filters, and creative editing tools that users can use when creating content (Rahardaya & Irwansyah, 2021). TikTok has become viral these days because it is simple to operate, has various catchy and funny videos, and creates trends that easily catch people's eyes (Aubryla et al., 2023). Other than entertaining content, students can also learn English vocabulary from TikTok. They can easily learn from short clips, subtitles, audio, and other content that pop up on their homepage. The multimodal nature of TikTok is especially relevant for vocabulary learning

because learners are exposed to spoken language, written captions, subtitles, gestures, images, sounds, and visual demonstrations at the same time. These elements can help students connect unfamiliar words with context and meaning without relying only on direct translation.

There are many types of content available on TikTok, content related to beauty is one of the most popular among users (Kusdemawati, 2024). Students often access a variety of beauty-related content on TikTok, ranging from makeup tutorials and skincare product reviews to beauty product recommendations. When presenting this content, beauty influencers often use Indonesian interspersed with English terms or expressions when explaining products, sharing experiences, or discussing beauty routines. Aslim (2024), found that many beauty influencers on TikTok naturally incorporate English words or phrases when discussing beauty products, offering recommendations, or explaining trends that are currently popular among their followers. Students can pick up the language while watching this type of content that aligns with their interests. In beauty content, English words are often attached to visible actions and product results, such as applying, blending, reviewing, comparing, or explaining the function of a product. This makes beauty influencer content a meaningful site for examining how vocabulary is noticed and understood incidentally.

Previous studies have extensively examined the role of TikTok and other social media platforms in English language learning. Research conducted by (Olli, 2024), concludes that TikTok could improve students' speaking skills because they become active creatively can speak English confidently. The conclusion is also similarly done in Syari et al. (2024), which stated that social media like Instagram could be one of the innovations and flexible media to learn the English language. By seeing the visual and interactive context, such as we can see the videos, short conversations, and word explanations, students can learn how to use the language more contextually. Other than that, research by Salsabilla and Perdhani (2025), proved that the TikTok trend of English songs could help students to acquire vocabulary. Students are able to interpret the meaning of the word contextually with the help of song melody, lyrics, repetition, and images.

These studies show that social media has been increasingly recognized as a useful space for English learning. However, much of the discussion still tends to focus on platforms or content that are intentionally used for language learning, such as speaking practice, Instagram-based learning, educational videos, or English songs. Less attention has been given to how students experience vocabulary learning through ordinary entertainment content that they consume because of personal interest rather than academic purposes.

Although there is an increasing amount of discussion about TikTok in research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, existing studies have largely focused on intentional language learning activities and educational content specifically designed to improve English proficiency. Most of the previous studies have emphasized speaking practice, pronunciation exercises, educational TikTok videos, or song-based vocabulary learning. Only a few studies have examined how EFL learners acquire vocabulary unintentionally while interacting with non-educational entertainment content in informal digital environments. In particular, beauty influencer content on TikTok remains under-explored despite its popularity among young users and its rich potential for multimodal

language exposure through captions, repetition, visual demonstrations, and contextual explanations. In this case, vocabulary learning that occurs indirectly is defined as vocabulary acquisition that happens through exposure to content that focuses on meaning, where students focus more on understanding the content than on purposefully memorizing the new words (Webb et al., 2023). Furthermore, few studies have examined how EFL learners attend to, interpret, store, and use vocabulary encountered unintentionally while consuming entertainment-oriented social media content.

This gap is important because incidental vocabulary learning in digital spaces is not only determined by the presence of English words, but also by how learners notice those words, connect them with visual context, and decide whether the words are useful for their own communication. Therefore, beauty influencer content offers a specific and under-examined context for understanding the relationship between incidental vocabulary learning, multimodal exposure, and informal digital learning.

This study, therefore aims to investigate EFL students' experiences in learning vocabulary indirectly through beauty influencer content on TikTok. This study specifically explores how students discover, recognize, understand, recall, and use vocabulary when interacting with beauty-related content in an informal digital learning environment. This study also aims to contribute to the growing discussion regarding informal digital learning and indirect vocabulary acquisition through non-educational social media content. By focusing on beauty influencer content, this study offers a more specific contribution to EFL vocabulary research by showing how everyday digital content, which is not primarily designed for teaching, may still provide meaningful vocabulary exposure for learners outside the classroom.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative survey method to explore EFL students' experiences in vocabulary acquisition through beauty influencers' content on TikTok. A Qualitative approach is suitable as it allows researchers to understand individuals' interpretation of a phenomenon based on the experiences they have in a certain context Creswell & Poth (2018). I chose this approach because it allowed me as a researcher to better understand how students experience coming across, noticing, making sense of, and reacting to English words when viewing digital media. This method was considered appropriate because the focus of this study was not to measure students' vocabulary improvement statistically, but to describe how they experienced incidental vocabulary learning in a natural and informal digital context. Through a qualitative survey, participants could explain their own experiences in detail, while the interview data helped provide deeper clarification of the responses obtained from the questionnaire.

The population in this study was comprised of the English Language Education Program students of Universitas Negeri Semarang. The sampling technique used was convenience purposive sampling, which was chosen based on their availability and experience with the topic studied. In this study, the criteria for choosing the participants were students who knew about the topic of the research. So, the participants had to be EFL students who are active on TikTok, watch beauty influencers, and have experienced coming

across English vocabulary in that type of media. With the criteria above, the researcher was able to obtain information from students who experienced the phenomenon. The participant criteria were applied to ensure that the data came from students who had direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon being examined. Therefore, the participants were not selected randomly, but based on their ability to provide meaningful information about incidental vocabulary learning through beauty influencer content on TikTok.

The researcher gathered all information during three phases. Phase one was the screening of 20 individuals to decide whether they qualified or had experience relevant to the study. This was not considered to be data for the survey but was used only to determine which respondents would be used in phase two. According to phase one, 12 individuals were used to respond to the qualitative questionnaire. The decision to involve 12 questionnaire respondents was based on the qualitative nature of the study, in which the emphasis was placed on the relevance and depth of participants' experiences rather than on the size of the sample. These 12 respondents had fulfilled the selection criteria and were considered sufficient to provide varied descriptions of how English vocabulary was encountered through beauty-related TikTok content. This questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions. Using open-ended questions is usual practice when conducting qualitative surveys research to use open-ended questions, as they allow participants to provide descriptive, experience-based answers (Cohen et al., 2018).

The questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions which were utilized in order to gather main data regarding participants' experience, perception and interpretation of incidental vocabulary learning via TikTok. The questionnaire had open-ended questions so that the participants could answer them however they wanted and elaborate on their experience. Upon reviewing the questionnaires, three participants were chosen for interviews because their answers were substantial and on-topic. The three interviewees were selected because their questionnaire responses showed clearer and richer information related to vocabulary exposure, noticing, understanding, remembering, and using English words from beauty influencer content. Thus, the interviews were used to deepen the findings rather than to represent all respondents statistically. Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one in order to acquire further information and validate the questionnaire data. Interviews were approximately 15–20 minutes each so that participants had ample time to discuss their experiences. The interview guide included 15 questions, which aimed to inquire about their experience further.

The instruments used in this study included an open-ended questionnaire and an interview guide. Both research tools were modified versions of Abdullah et al. (2023) questionnaire and interview guide used in a study applying TAM to learn English on TikTok based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Instead, for the purpose of this study, those two factors were used to construct the research questions and then slightly modified to accommodate questions around incidental vocabulary acquisition when using TikTok to view content by beauty influencers. Perceived usefulness was used to address how TikTok allowed participants to find, understand, and remember English words. Perceived ease of use was altered to address how TikTok facilitated vocabulary exposure for students. Questions from both the questionnaire and interview were also related to language

exposure, comprehensible input, and incidental vocabulary acquisition to ensure they aligned with the intent of the study.

The adaptation was made by adjusting the original focus of TikTok-based English learning into the specific context of incidental vocabulary learning through beauty influencer content. In this study, the adapted instruments were not used to measure TAM quantitatively, but to guide open-ended questions about how students perceived the usefulness and ease of TikTok beauty content as a source of vocabulary exposure. The instruments were also reviewed before data collection to ensure that the questions were understandable, relevant to the research objectives, and appropriate for qualitative responses.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to get immersed in the data. Then, notable sections of the participants' answers were highlighted and coded. Similar codes were placed under potential categories. Categories were grouped into themes that represented trends in participants' experiences. Lastly, themes were interpreted according to the study's focus. These steps followed the thematic analysis method, as used to identify and interpret the meaning patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Patterns of students' experiences with incidental vocabulary learning through beauty influencer content on TikTok emerged and enabled the results to be displayed clearly and with meaningful information based on real-life experiences. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher compared data from the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to check the consistency of participants' responses. Participant identities were also protected by using codes, so the respondents could share their experiences more freely. In addition, the coding process was carried out carefully through repeated reading, highlighting relevant statements, grouping similar responses, and connecting the themes with the research questions. These steps were used to improve the credibility and dependability of the qualitative findings.

RESULTS

This chapter displays the results acquired from twelve responses of open-ended questionnaire and three semi-structured interviews. Patterns found in the responses to the open-ended questionnaire were analysed while identifying common trends among students' experiences. Interviews were then analysed and implemented to further explain those common trends.

Four major themes were discovered through thematic analysis: students' experience with beauty influencer content and incidental vocabulary acquisition, noticing and comprehension of vocabulary with multimodal input, students' recall and production of vocabulary outside of TikTok, and benefits and restrictions of TikTok beauty videos for vocabulary acquisition.

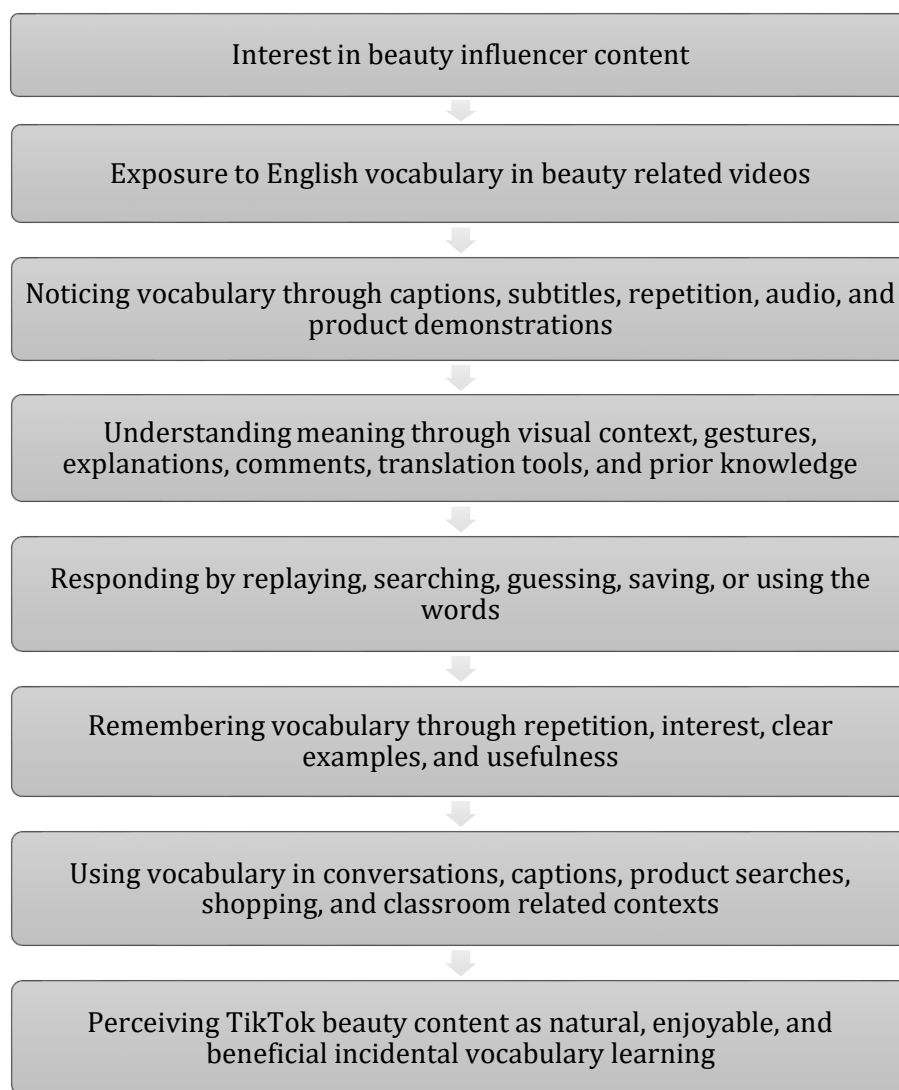


Figure 1. Conceptual flow of incidental vocabulary learning through TikTok beauty influencer content

Students' Engagement with Beauty Influencer Content and Incidental Vocabulary Exposure

The first finding revealed that students' incidental vocabulary learning stemmed from watching beauty influencer content on TikTok on a normal basis. According to their responses to the questionnaire, the participants didn't frequent TikTok specifically for learning English. The respondents found beauty content entertaining, interesting, aesthetically pleasing, and engaging since it correlated to their interests. Some noted that they watched beauty influencers while on their leisure time, at night, or when the videos

popped up on their For You Page. Watching videos is not directly correlated to explicitly studying English or vocabulary.

Beauty content includes videos such as makeup tutorials, skincare reviews, skincare routines, product reviews, product recommendations, Get Ready with Me, beauty tips, makeup transitions, and trends. Students were able to incidentally learn vocabulary while they watched their favourite videos on repeat. Students came into contact with English words not from a pre-made vocabulary list, but rather through influencer explanations, video captions, product names, subtitles, hashtags, and product demonstrations.

Students were exposed to English words such as blend, coverage, shade, glow, glowy, dewy, pigmented, brightening, hyperpigmentation, niacinamide, occlusive, hydrating, matte finish, dewy finish, glass skin, cloud skin, demure, and preppy. Questionnaire respondents were able to identify these words because they either pertained to the products used, techniques they demonstrated, functions of skincare, complexion results they received, and beauty trends. For example, blend and coverage were words frequently seen and heard while watching makeup tutorials and foundation reviews. Brightening, hyperpigmentation, and niacinamide were terms that students heard more while watching skincare-related videos.

Their interview responses revealed similar facts to the questionnaire. IP1 stated that they would frequently watch makeup tutorials, skincare routines, and product reviews because the videos were fun and easy to look at. IP2 also noted that they weren't explicitly learning English, but they would hear it while watching TikTok videos of beauty influencers.

Excerpt 1

"I use TikTok pretty frequently every day. I watch beauty influencer content the most. I watch makeup tutorials, skincare reviews, and Get Ready With Me videos because they're fun and I can learn new things at the same time. A lot of the influencers that I watch speak in English and casual day-to-day speech, so I learn English naturally while browsing." (IP2)

The above excerpt demonstrated that incidental learning occurred. The participant was not intentionally seeking out content to learn English. Exposure to English occurred because there were English words and phrases spoken daily within the beauty videos they watched. Beauty creator content became an informal setting where students could encounter vocabulary through videos they were already interested in watching.

Similar to how students forgot the vocabulary, interview data also showed that students were able to remember vocabulary when it was associated with certain beauty situations. IP1 cited words like brightening, hyperpigmentation, niacinamide, and occlusive when watching skincare routine videos. When talking about lipstick or eyeshadow review videos, IP2 was able to remember pigmented. Meanwhile, when discussing foundation review videos, IP3 mentions coverage, blendability, a matte finish, and a dewy finish. These examples demonstrate that students learned the vocabulary related to the products and situations they saw in the videos which helped students make sense of the word.

How Students Noticed and Understood Vocabulary in TikTok Beauty Content

Theme two focuses on when and how students noticed and learned English vocabulary while watching beauty videos on TikTok. Respondents indicated on the questionnaire that they recognized new vocabulary in different parts of the videos. Influencers tended to repeat some words, use captions/subtitles/on-screen text, talk about the products they used, use gestures, and physically demonstrate how to use beauty products. Students indicated that these strategies made words stand out to them while watching TikTok videos that were not intended for learning.

Repeated exposure was a common trend among the data. Several participants wrote that they noticed certain English words because the influencers repeated the same words multiple times during one video. Students also noticed words when they repeated them across other beauty TikTok videos. Captions/subtitles also allowed students to see how words were spelt. Product demonstrations allowed students to understand the meaning of words because the influencers performed an action while saying the word or students were able to see the result. Students were able to understand blends when the influencer was physically blending the product on their faces. Similarly, coverage was easier to understand when the influencer used the word while demonstrating how well the product covered their face.

The following interview excerpts illustrate how repetition, on-screen text, and product demonstrations allowed students to notice vocabulary.

Excerpt 2

"Because the words are usually repeated, and then it's shown as on-screen text and the direct related product is also being demonstrated."

(IP1)

Excerpt 3

"Because the influencer said the word repeatedly while demonstrating the product live, I noticed the word. Also, since the word was included in the subtitle and caption, it caught my attention."

(IP2)

These examples demonstrate that students were able to notice English vocabulary not just from the influencer's speech, but other elements of the video. Captions, on-screen writing, visuals of products, and repeated words emphasized the vocabulary and encouraged students to pay closer attention to it. This suggests that TikTok videos help facilitate vocabulary noticing through sound, text, and visuals.

Once they noticed the vocabulary, students attempted to figure out the word's meaning from context. According to the questionnaire data, learners inferred meaning by closely looking at the video's visuals, reading captions or subtitles, watching the influencer's gestures, guessing from the situation, searching for definitions on Google, using a

dictionary/translator, reading comments, and linking their existing knowledge to the new word.

Students also comprehended the vocabulary found in the videos with the help of visuals. When influencers spoke about a certain word while displaying a product, students were able to associate the meaning with what they saw on screen. For instance, descriptive words like glowy, dewy, matte finish, etc. Were easier to understand because students could see the result on the influencers' skin. Students were also able to understand what pigmented meant when the influencer applied the product once to demonstrate how heavily the colour showed up.

The interview data supported this finding as well.

Excerpt 4

"So, I think I understood the meaning by connecting the vocabulary with the actions and context shown in the video. So, sometimes I also guessed the meaning from the situation."

(IP3)

This indicates that students were learning vocabulary by associating words with the context and activities they were presented with in the video. They were not memorizing vocabulary terms and their definitions. Instead, they took notice of what they heard, read, and viewed when watching these videos. Thus, students were learning comprehension of vocabulary through multiple modalities in TikTok beauty videos such as audio, closed captions, images, gestures, and product application.

Students' Responses, Retention, and Use of Vocabulary beyond TikTok

The third theme focuses on learners' subsequent behaviours after encountering unfamiliar words and how some of these words were retained and used outside of TikTok. Although initial exposure occurred incidentally, learners were not completely passive. Many questionnaire participants reported that when faced with words they did not know, their first reaction was to infer the meaning of words from context. If they were still unclear, they would look up the meaning using Google, Google Translate, dictionary apps, or other internet resources. Some would also rewatch the video, read subtitles/captions, read comments, save the video, or write down the word.

These findings suggest that while incidental vocabulary learning occurred in this study, it was not completely passive and included brief follow-up actions. Students initially encountered these words incidentally through watching beauty videos for entertainment purposes. However, they sometimes took additional steps to verify meaning or aid retention of these words.

Excerpt 5

"Of course, I need to pause the video and then check the caption or the subtitles and then search the word on Google or read the comments."

(IP1)

The coded subsections also demonstrated that students utilized TikTok features and resources outside of the application when they encountered unknown vocabulary. Behaviours such as pausing the video, reading captions, searching for word meanings, and reading comments allowed students to further clarify words they had recognized as unknown.

Students generally noticed that they were able to recognize certain words with greater ease if they were repeated many times, had clear visual examples, were related to beauty topics they enjoyed, or had real-world applications. Repetition was a common theme among many of the students. Some participants of the questionnaire mentioned that they were able to recognize certain vocabulary with greater ease if the same words were used across multiple videos or used by multiple influencers. Additionally, many students enjoyed talking about makeup, skincare, and beauty trends, which made them pay closer attention to the vocabulary they heard/read.

Similar responses were seen in the interviews. IP1 stated that they remember certain words if they are repeated many times, have a strong visual context, or can be applied to real-world situations. IP2 found that makeup and skincare-related terminology was easier to recognize because they heard it multiple times from different influencers. IP3 also noted that they remembered pigmented because they heard it frequently when describing makeup products and the examples provided in the videos helped them understand the meaning.

In addition to recognizing vocabulary, many students mentioned that they implemented English words from TikTok beauty videos into their daily lives. From the questionnaires, students used the vocabulary when talking to friends, writing captions on social media, discussing different products, searching for specific products, shopping, recommending products to friends, and classroom discussions. This indicates that not only were students recognizing vocabulary from TikTok, but they were using it in their spoken/written English.

Excerpt 6

"Yep. I find myself saying things like "blend", "glowy" or "coverage" when talking about makeup with friends/family or posting on social media. I'll even catch myself slipping those words into regular conversations sometimes because TikTok has me saying them so much."

(IP2)

This excerpt proves that vocabulary picked up from TikTok beauty videos did not stay within the context of the video. Learners were able to incorporate the words into their daily conversation. Students used the vocabulary not only if they understood the meaning of the word, but also if they spoke about things related to the word in their daily lives. TikTok beauty videos allowed for both receptive and productive use of vocabulary.

Table 1. Thematic matrix of questionnaire and interview findings

Theme	Pattern from the open-ended questionnaire	Deepening from the semi-structured interviews
Engagement and incidental vocabulary exposure	The respondents watched beauty influencers for entertainment purposes, to learn about products, get makeup inspiration, skincare advice, follow trends, or because the video showed up on their For You Page. By watching these videos they picked up on English words/subscript naturally.	IP2 also said that they learned English incidentally while browsing beauty content. IP1 and IP3 also mentioned beauty videos as being fun and informative, as opposed to feeling like learning materials.
Noticing and understanding vocabulary	Respondents noticed vocabulary through repeated words, captions, subtitles, on -screen text, product names, and demonstrations. They understood meanings through context, visuals, gestures, translation tools, comments, and prior knowledge.	IP1 and IP2 emphasised the role of repetition, subtitles, captions, and product demonstrations. IP3 explained that they connected vocabulary with actions and context shown in the video.
Response, retention, and use	Participants rewatched videos, checked captions, looked up definitions, read comments, saved videos, or attempted to memorize words. Words were memorized if they were repeated, written clearly, of personal interest, or practical.	IP1 looked up definitions on Google or the comment section and paused videos. IP2 mentioned words like “blend”, “glowy”, and “coverage” to friends or on social media. IP3 incorporated phrases/terms they learned from TikTok tutorials into conversations, captions, and class discussions.
Perceived benefits and limitations	Beauty videos on TikTok were viewed as useful, natural, enjoyable and reduced stress among learners studying outside the classroom. However, learners found that due to rapid speech, slang expressions, unclear pronunciation, background music and lack of subtitles, some vocabulary was incomprehensible.	IP2 found TikTok beauty content helpful because it did not feel like studying. IP3 saw it as learning because they acquired vocabulary and could understand meanings from context clues, and used words in real-life scenarios.

Perceived Benefits and Limitations of TikTok Beauty Content for Vocabulary Learning

Fourth, this study investigated students' perceived benefits from incidental vocabulary learning through TikTok beauty videos. Responses to the questionnaire demonstrated that most students thought TikTok beauty videos were helpful for English vocabulary learning. Learners reported that TikTok allowed them to learn new words, particularly beauty-related words, see how words were used in context and helped them familiarize themselves with common English words spoken in daily life. Some students also noticed that watching TikTok beauty videos expanded their knowledge of pronunciation.

Students also commented that vocabulary learning through TikTok was stress-free and fun as opposed to studying vocabulary in class. Students did not feel pressured to memorize words formally. Instead, students were able to learn new words without the pressure of studying while they watched content they enjoyed. One of the reasons participants identified TikTok as a tool that aided their out-of-class vocabulary learning was that they saw words used in real life, not just in books or exams.

The interview data also supported this benefit.

Excerpt 7

"I believe TikTok beauty is very beneficial for vocabulary expansion because I am able to learn vocabulary organically through enjoyment. I don't feel like I'm studying so I'm more relaxed when learning the vocabulary."

(IP2)

Excerpt 8

"I think TikTok beauty videos are helpful for learning English vocabulary because they show you actual use, pronunciation and have pictures to go along with it. allows me to remember more."

(IP3)

From these excerpts, it can be understood that students liked beauty-related content on TikTok because it allowed them exposure to English vocabulary in a space that they found enjoyable and related to their interests. The vocabulary was not taught in isolation from actual usage. Students were able to see words used with relevant images, pronunciation, captions, and example sentences being repeated. These aspects allowed students to easily follow along and remember new words, thus allowing them to acquire new vocabulary naturally.

Students also differentiated their vocabulary learning on TikTok from vocabulary learned in class. Students described learning vocabulary in the classroom as more structured, academic, and taught from textbooks, while learning from TikTok was described as casual, visual, contextual, and connected to real life. However, students did not view learning English on TikTok as an alternative to classroom learning. Students perceived it as an additional space where they can encounter English vocabulary outside of the classroom.

Nonetheless, there were some conflicts found in the data. Students described how there were some instances where they would not understand vocabulary if the influencers were speaking too fast, using slang, had poor pronunciation or heavy accents, had loud background music, or did not provide subtitles. This indicates that while TikTok beauty content can aid in vocabulary exposure, comprehension of new vocabulary is still contingent on the clarity of the content and the inclusion of features that can aid the learner such as captions/subtitles.

Excerpt 9

"Captions/Subtitles, repetition on the FYP, and audio help me learn vocabulary. However, sometimes rapid speaking slang, or background music can obscure some words."

(IP2)

This section emphasized two sides of TikTok when it came to supporting vocabulary learning. Features such as captions/subtitles, repetition, audio, and TikTok's For You Page supported exposure to vocabulary. However, fast speech, slang, and background music hindered understanding at times. TikTok beauty content allowed for helpful language exposure, but had its drawbacks as well.

In conclusion, the results of this project suggest that TikTok beauty influencer content allowed EFL learners to informally encounter English vocabulary incidentally in a digital space. Learners were watching content they enjoyed when they encountered vocabulary. They noticed these words through repetition and multimodal inputs. Learners could understand the new vocabulary through pictures and context. Sometimes they were even able to recall these words to use outside of TikTok. The benefits of this vocabulary learning weren't just in word quantity, but also in how the students felt they were learning English outside of school in a stress-free way that provided context and meaning. There were challenges to this learning as well. Speech was sometimes too fast, people used too much slang, and some words were mispronounced or covered by music. Thus, TikTok beauty influencer content should be considered a supplemental tool for incidental vocabulary acquisition.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed that incidental vocabulary acquisition did not occur immediately but occurred gradually through repeated and contextual exposure. Students reported watching beauty videos on TikTok initially for fun, interesting, and useful reasons such as obtaining product knowledge. During repeated exposure to beauty content, students were exposed to English words through product reviews, makeup tutorials, skincare routines, captions, subtitles, and influencer explanations. This finding suggests that incidental vocabulary learning occurred because students were repeatedly exposed to meaningful input in a context that was already familiar and personally relevant to them. Rather than learning vocabulary through direct instruction, students encountered words while trying to understand beauty-related information. Findings are consistent with the concept of comprehensible input in Krashen's (1985) input-based theory, which states that language

acquisition occurs when learners understand the meaning of the input. In practice, this comprehensible input becomes far more effective when supported by multimedia tools such as image captions, subtitles, product demonstrations, and product-related contexts (Webb et al., 2023). Therefore, the role of TikTok beauty content in this study is not merely as entertainment, but as a source of repeated, contextual, and multimodal input that helps learners connect English words with visible meanings.

An Interest-Driven Experience of Incidental Vocabulary Learning through TikTok Beauty Content

Students indicated they were not using TikTok for vocabulary acquisition. They instead viewed beauty content videos out of interest, interest in trends, interest in reviews, or as references. However, vocabulary was incidentally acquired through the videos they were watching. This shows that students' personal interests played an important role in creating sustained exposure. Because the content matched their interests, students were more willing to watch similar videos repeatedly, and this repetition increased their chances of noticing recurring English vocabulary. Many of the words encountered, such as *blend*, *coverage*, *pigmented*, *brightening*, *hyperpigmentation*, *niacinamide*, and *dewy finish*, were related to the beauty products, application methods, and effects showcased in beauty videos. Students were also able to glean meaning from context clues since the vocabulary was presented in natural, recognizable situations. In this sense, incidental vocabulary learning occurred not because students intentionally memorized words, but because the words were embedded in content that was meaningful, useful, and visually understandable for them.

This discovery also paints a new perspective compared to previous research findings on TikTok and English language acquisition. Previous discussions of TikTok videos have focused on intentional use of English learning on the platform, such as speaking conversations, "learn-on-TikTok" videos, or English songs. However, this study highlights beauty influencer videos which are not created with language education in mind. The strength of this study is that it allows for insights into how non-educational content can expose students to English vocabulary in contextualized and natural settings that pair with students' interests. The significance of this finding lies in the fact that non-educational content can still create language-learning opportunities when it provides repeated exposure, contextual clues, and personally relevant topics. The strength of this study is that it allows for insights into how non-educational content can expose students to English vocabulary in contextualized and natural settings that align with students' interests.

These findings are also consistent with the research by Rita and Subekti (2023), which shows that using TikTok can expand vocabulary because users are frequently exposed to English in their daily social media activities. While the main reason users turn to TikTok is to enjoy entertainment content, repeated exposure to English in the videos they watch can help them learn new vocabulary without even realizing it. (Lai & Wang, 2025), also found that informal English language learning in digital environments can help enrich learners' vocabulary. When people engage with content that aligns with their interests, exposure to a language typically occurs naturally and unconsciously. The same pattern was observed in this study, where students' interest in beauty content led them to encounter English

vocabulary more frequently on TikTok. Thus, even though their primary focus was on enjoying the content, they still expanded their vocabulary while using the platform. Thus, interest should be understood as more than motivation to watch content; it becomes a condition that supports repeated exposure, attention, and vocabulary familiarity. Even though the students' primary focus was on enjoying the content, they still expanded their vocabulary while using the platform.

Noticing and Understanding Vocabulary through TikTok's Multimodal Features

Second, students also reported that they noticed and learned vocabulary with the assistance of other components featured in TikTok beauty videos. Captions/subtitles, repeated words, written/spoken text on-screen, audio, gesture/mimics, explanation of facial expressions, brand/product names, and makeup application all allowed students to better interpret vocabulary. Students learned from more than just what the influencer was saying aurally. Students were also pairing what was being said with what they saw written on screen and what visual action was being portrayed on camera. For example, students were able to understand the word blend when watching the influencer apply makeup and run the brush back and forth on the face. Students were also able to interpret coverage when they could see what the makeup looked like on the influencer's skin. This indicates that understanding did not depend on a single source of input. Instead, meaning was constructed through the interaction of spoken language, written text, visual demonstration, and product context.

This data indicates that TikTok beauty videos allow for extensive context to learn vocabulary from. TikTok as a platform, allows for a mixture of short videos, visual context, written context, and repetition through the For You Page algorithm. As mentioned before, these characteristics allowed students to notice new words and use contextual clues to determine the definition of the word. The process of noticing is important because incidental learning does not mean that learners are completely passive. Although students did not deliberately search for vocabulary lessons, they still paid attention to words that appeared repeatedly, were supported by captions, or were connected to visible product demonstrations. Some limitations arose from this data as well. Words that were spoken too quickly, had unclear pronunciation, were slang, were covered by music, or were on videos that did not have subtitles displayed were difficult for students to notice. TikTok can allow for comprehensible input when learning vocabulary, but it is still contingent on the clarity of the content and the inclusion of useful features such as captions/subtitles. This means that TikTok does not automatically lead to vocabulary learning; its usefulness depends on how clearly language is presented and how effectively learners can connect language with context.

The findings of this study indicate that vocabulary comprehension is influenced by how information is presented, not merely by exposure to the language itself. Zhang and Zhang (2024), discovered that the combination of audio, text, and visual elements on short-form video platforms can support vocabulary learning. In line with this, (Li & Hafner (2022), explained that multimodal digital environments help learners understand new vocabulary through available contextual cues. In this study, subtitles, product visualizations, and

vocabulary repetition in beauty influencer content helped students interpret word meanings more easily so that they could understand new vocabulary even without formal explanations. Therefore, TikTok's multimodal features functioned as scaffolding that reduced the difficulty of understanding unfamiliar words. Visual demonstrations showed what the words referred to, subtitles helped students recognize the written form, and repetition made the vocabulary more familiar over time.

Vocabulary Use after Incidental Vocabulary Exposure

The results indicated that students' experiences did not stop at simply noticing or recognizing words. After encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, students reported replaying the video, rewatching captions, looking up meanings, consulting dictionaries/translation tools, reading comments, saving the video, or trying to remember. This demonstrates that incidental encounters can spark small intentional follow-up actions. While vocabulary was initially acquired unintentionally, learners became more engaged once they found the words interesting, useful, or comprehensible. This finding is important because it shows that incidental vocabulary learning in digital spaces can move from passive exposure to active processing. Students may first encounter a word unintentionally, but their curiosity and need for understanding can lead them to verify the meaning and strengthen their memory of the word.

Students also reported using learned vocabulary from TikTok beauty videos outside of TikTok. Words like brightening, hyperpigmentation, blend, glowy, coverage, and pigmented were used between students and their friends in captions on other social media platforms, when looking up beauty products, while shopping, and even while doing schoolwork. This illustrates that vocabulary from TikTok beauty was not just limited to knowing words heard while watching the videos. In some instances, students were able to incorporate the words into their language use. Through repeated exposure, interest, visual clarity, and usefulness, students were able to remember the vocabulary and recall it during other experiences. The ability to reuse these words suggests that the vocabulary became meaningful beyond the original TikTok context. This happened because the words were connected to students' daily interests and practical activities, making them easier to remember and apply.

Students' ability to recall and reuse acquired vocabulary suggests that repeated exposure can support vocabulary retention. Hanansi et al. (2025) found that repeated encounters with vocabulary in digital content contribute to learners' ability to recall and use that vocabulary in different situations. These findings are also consistent with the research by Usman et al. (2024), which found that TikTok can serve as a tool for learners to expand their vocabulary through continuous exposure to English. When the same words appear repeatedly in various videos, learners have more opportunities to understand and remember them. Setiawan and Fediyanto (2026), also found that short video content can support vocabulary acquisition by providing repeated exposure to the words being learned. This exposure enables learners not only to memorize vocabulary but also to use it in various communication contexts. This is evident in this study, where some students were able to reuse the vocabulary they encountered on TikTok in other activities, such as conversations, social media, and daily activities. Therefore, the significance of repeated exposure in this

study lies not only in increasing word familiarity but also in helping students connect vocabulary with personal use and real communication.

Informal Vocabulary Learning Supported by TikTok Beauty Content

Students thought watching TikTok beauty videos helped with language learning because it allowed them the opportunity to encounter vocabulary in informal, fun, and contextual settings. Students would reference formal learning of vocabulary in classes as rigid or taught from textbooks, while TikTok taught them words more visually and naturally, so that they could connect to real life. Though this doesn't mean that TikTok has to take the place of formal learning, it can be thought of as an extra place where students are hearing authentic vocabulary and seeing how others communicate digitally. This finding does not suggest that TikTok should replace formal vocabulary instruction. Instead, it shows that informal digital content can complement classroom learning by providing additional exposure that students may not always receive in formal settings. Although this does not mean that TikTok has to take the place of formal learning, it can be considered an additional space where students encounter authentic vocabulary and observe how English is used in digital communication.

Implications of this study show that informal digital learning can have a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition if students hear comprehensible input enough times. Beauty influencer videos may allow students to gain more domain-specific vocabulary, notice pronunciation more, and learn vocabulary with visual and contextual support. Teachers and students should also keep in mind that TikTok videos are not made for language learning, so think of it as extra exposure outside of class rather than a replacement for teaching vocabulary. From a pedagogical perspective, this finding is significant because it encourages teachers to recognize students' informal digital practices as part of their wider language-learning environment. Teachers may guide students to become more critical and reflective users of digital content, for example by encouraging them to note unfamiliar words, check meanings, and compare informal usage with classroom vocabulary.

The results of this study indicate that TikTok can serve as an informal learning tool that allows students to engage with English outside the classroom setting. Alamsyah (2024) social media allows students to learn a language in a more flexible and unrestricted way, enabling them to learn according to their own interests and habits. These findings are consistent with those of Almohesh and Altamimi (2024), who demonstrated that the use of social media can increase learners' opportunities to be exposed to English vocabulary in authentic contexts. Additionally, (Thahira et al., 2023) explain that independent digital activities can create opportunities for learners to gain language experience through exposure that arises during the everyday use of technology. In this study, students acquired new vocabulary through beauty content on TikTok that they accessed based on personal interests. Thus, the contribution of this study is to show that incidental vocabulary learning can occur within everyday digital entertainment when learners are exposed to repeated, meaningful, and multimodal input. Beauty influencer content, although not designed for formal instruction, can become a supplementary source of vocabulary exposure because it connects language with interest, context, and visual meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that beauty influencer content on TikTok can function as a meaningful source of incidental vocabulary exposure for EFL learners. Although students did not watch beauty videos with the direct intention of learning English, their repeated engagement with beauty-related content allowed them to encounter, notice, and understand English vocabulary in context. The findings suggest that incidental vocabulary learning occurred because the words were connected to students' interests, supported by multimodal features, and presented in familiar visual situations. In this sense, TikTok beauty content provides more than entertainment; it creates an informal digital space where learners can experience vocabulary through authentic and interest-driven exposure.

The main contribution of this study lies in its focus on non-educational TikTok content, particularly beauty influencer videos, as a potential source of vocabulary development. While many previous studies have discussed TikTok as a tool for intentional English learning, this study shows that vocabulary learning may also emerge from everyday digital practices that are not designed for classroom instruction. This finding broadens the discussion of incidental vocabulary learning by showing how learners can gain vocabulary exposure through informal, multimodal, and personally relevant content outside formal learning environments.

Pedagogically, the findings imply that teachers may consider students' digital habits as part of their wider language-learning experience. Beauty TikTok content should not replace formal vocabulary instruction, but it can be used as supplementary exposure that helps students see how English words are used in real-life digital contexts. Teachers may guide learners to become more reflective users of social media by encouraging them to notice unfamiliar words, check meanings, observe context, and relate new vocabulary to classroom learning. In this way, informal digital content can support vocabulary learning when students engage with it critically and purposefully.

This study has several limitations. The participants were limited to English Education students from one university, and the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners. Future research may involve participants from different universities, majors, or proficiency levels. Further studies could also compare different types of non-educational TikTok content and examine how learners retain and use vocabulary after repeated incidental exposure to social media content.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank the supervisor for the helpful comments, constructive criticism, and support throughout the research and writing process of this article. The author would also like to thank the English Education Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang for academic support while completing this study.

The author would also like to thank all of the participants who kindly agreed to share their experience in completing the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured

interviews. Their time, honesty, and thoughtful responses were greatly valued as presented in this research.

Lastly, the author wants to thank family, friends, and everyone who gave support, help, and encouragement during this study. Your support was highly appreciated.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, N. E., Mohamad, F., Kamal, M. A. A., & Isa, I. A. M. (2023). The Acceptance of TikTok as a Tool in English Language Learning among University Students. *Arab World English Journal*, 14(3), 445–461. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no3.29>
- Alamsyah. (2024). *Social media as informal digital learning of English: students perception a thesis presented to Department of English Language Education as partial fulfillment of the Requirements to obtain the Sarjana Pendidikan degree in English Language Education by: Muhamad Dhimas Alamsyah 20322101 Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Psychology and sociocultural sciences islamic university of Indonesia, Yogyakarta 2024.*
- Almohesh, A. R. I., & Altamimi, J. A. H. (2024). Wow, I cannot stop: a concentration on vocabulary learning via Instagram and its effects on informal digital learning of English, technostress, and on-line engagement. *BMC Psychology*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01503-w>
- Alshenqeeti, H. (2018). Technology in the Language Classroom: How Social Media is Changing the Way EFL is Taught. *Arab World English Journal*, 4(4), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call4.5>
- Amanda Syari, F., Lupiarto Reza Susangkut, H., Harahap, N., Aulia, P., Maharani, K., & Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, U. (2024). *Terbit online pada: https://ejournal.almakazibkl.org/index.php/ince Pelaksanaan kegiatan digital content creator "English learning via social media platforms Instagram dan Tiktok" untuk pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang inovatif dan fleksibel.* Retrieved <https://ejournal.almakazibkl.org/index.php/ince>
- Andriani, D., & Sriwahyuningsih, V. (2019). An Analysis of Students' Mastery of Vocabulary. In *ELT-Lectura* (Vol. 6, Number 2).
- Aslim, M. (2024). *IDEAS Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature An Analysis of Code Mixing Used by Beauty Influencers in TikTok.* 12(1), 89–97. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas>
- Aubryla, H., Ratnawati, V., Nusantara, U., & Kediri, P. (n.d.). *Strategi Mengelola Penggunaan Tiktok Agar Tidak Mempengaruhi Konsentrasi Belajar Siswa.*
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. In *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* (Vol. 11, Number 4, pp. 589–597). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education* (8th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (International student edition)*. In SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hakim, A. N., & Yulia, L. (2024). Pediaqu: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial dan Humaniora dampak teknologi digital terhadap pendidikan saat ini. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial dan Humaniora*, 3(1). <https://publisherqu.com/index.php/pediaqu>
- Herman. (2024). *Pengaruh Komunikasi Digital Terhadap Pola Komunikasi Pada Nilai-Nilai Budaya Masyarakat Modern Herman*.
- Juciananda Febriamita, Eliza Abelia, Nayla Zahratul Maula, & Ita Ita. (2024). Pemerolehan Leksikon Ragam Bahasa Gaul pada Aplikasi X. *Jurnal Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Budaya*, 3(4), 62–69. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jpbb.v3i4.4560>
- Kusdemawati, J. (2024). Konsep Body Image Remaja Putri Penikmat Beauty Content pada Aplikasi TikTok. *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 4, 8591–8601.
- Lai, C., & Wang, Q. (2025). Online informal learning of English and receptive vocabulary knowledge: Purpose matters. *ReCALL*, 37(1), 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834402400017X>
- Li, Y., & Hafner, C. A. (2022). Mobile-Assisted vocabulary learning: Investigating receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of Chinese EFL learners. *ReCALL*, 34(1), 66–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344021000161>
- Macis, M., & Schmitt, N. (2017). *Not just “small potatoes”: Knowledge of the idiomatic meanings of collocations*.
- Olli. (2024). *Students’ perceptions on the use of TikTok in learning English Speaking*.
- Putri Jasmine, A., Sisilia Fallo, E., Noviyanti, S., Guru Sekolah Dasar, P., & Jambi, U. (2025). *Hakikat pemerolehan bahasa dan faktor pendukung pemerolehan bahasa*. 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.37081/jipdas.v5i4.4335>
- Rahardaya, A. K., & Irwansyah, I. (2021). Studi Literatur Penggunaan Media Sosial Tiktok Sebagai Sarana Literasi Digital Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19. *Jurnal Teknologi Dan Sistem Informasi Bisnis*, 3(2), 308–319. <https://doi.org/10.47233/jteksis.v3i2.248>
- Rana Hanansi, N., Fitriyah, N., Maghfirah, K., & Uswatun Hasanah, H. (2025). Publisher: CV. Doki Course and Training Viral Voices in Language Learning: The Role of TikTok English Songs in Enhancing EFL Learners’ Vocabulary Retention. *Journal of English Education*, 3(2), 116–123. <https://doi.org/10.61994/jee>
- Rita, R., & Subekti, A. S. (2023). TikTok and Vocabulary Learning: A Survey Study of Indonesian Students from English Departments. *Pedagogy : Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11(2), 202. <https://doi.org/10.32332/joelt.v11i2.7866>

- Rosyada, A., & Apoko, T. W. (2023). Investigating English vocabulary difficulties and its learning strategies of lower secondary school students *1. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 11(3), 489. <https://doi.org/10.33394/joltt.v%vi%i.8404>
- Salsabilla, S., & Perdhani, W. C. (2025). *IDEAS Journal on Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature EFL Students' Perceptions Toward the Use of TikTok Trending English Songs in Vocabulary Learning*. 13(2), 8738–8752. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas>
- Setiawan, M. A., & Fediyanto, N. (2026). Short Video Media and Vocabulary Development in Young EFL Learners. *Indonesian Journal of Education Methods Development*, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijemd.v21i4.1043>
- Thahira, L., Nurhandayani, R., Septia, S., Pratiwi, K., & Nupus, A. M. (2023). *The use of digital technology in informal English language learning: How the practices support learning outcomes?* 4(1), 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.22236/ellter.v4i1.11420.g3638>
- Usman, M., Yoestara, M., Rizal, M., Nurjannah, C., & Mohamed, N. A. (2024). A Study on Enhancing EFL Students' Vocabulary Proficiency via TikTok. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11(3), 1315–1331. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v11i3.38472>
- Webb, S., Uchihara, T., & Yanagisawa, A. (2023). How effective is second language incidental vocabulary learning? A meta-analysis. *Language Teaching*, 56(2), 161–180. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444822000507>
- Wowoseko, H. C. A., Kalukar, J., Mulawarman, U., Kuaro, J., Kelua, G., Samarinda Ulu, K., Samarinda, K., & Timur, K. (2025). Aba Wowoseko, dkk. In *Jurnal Pendas Mahakam* (Vol. 10).
- Zhang, P., & Zhang, S. (2024). Multimedia enhanced vocabulary learning: The role of input condition and learner-related factors. *System*, 122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103275>