

Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of TikTok utilization in EFL learning

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Abstract - Despite its increasing popularity among young adults, TikTok has been very slow in finding its way into the English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching profession. Yet before introducing the application into the EFL classrooms, it is no doubt imperative to discern what is preferable among EFL learners. Thus, the aim of the present study was to examine the extent to which EFL learners perceive TikTok as facilitating their learning. To this end, the participants (N = 31) were asked to fill out a short, online questionnaire to gather information about (i) whether they utilized TikTok as an affordance for their EFL learning and (ii) whether they perceive its integration into the EFL classrooms as facilitative of their learning. The findings revealed that although they did not explicitly mention that they used TikTok as an affordance for their EFL learning, they held a belief that TikTok is effective in promoting their English proficiency. According to the students, there were three factors of note which contribute to the effectiveness of TikTok, namely abundant authentic input availability, easy-to-grasp information and availability of free tuition related to English language learning. Pedagogically, it implies that TikTok is worth integrating into the EFL classrooms.

Keywords: TikTok, EFL learning, Indonesian students, social media

1. Introduction

It might not be unreasonable to say that almost all young adults in Indonesia with internet access have TikTok application installed on their smartphones, as evidenced by the large number of active users of the application in this country; in fact, Indonesia has become the second largest TikTok active users worldwide, after the United States (Dzulfaroh, 2023). TikTok, better known as *Douyin* in China (Kaye et al., 2021; Hu & Du, 2022), is one of the fastest-growing social networking platforms which allows its users to create and view short video content. Like other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, it is also possible for its users to like, comment, share a video via other social media platforms, and go live. Unlike other social networking applications, which restrict their users to view only the videos posted by those whom they follow, TikTok, however, provides access to endless videos available determined based on certain (undisclosed) algorithms. TikTok users consider using the application as a valued leisure activity and as a medium through which they can build and strengthen their social connection with other people (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021; Sia et al., 2023).

As a matter of fact, incorporating social media applications into the EFL classrooms is a new phenomenon (see Reinhardt, 2019; Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022; Ali, 2023). Research into the use of social media in facilitating foreign language learning has predominantly focused on informal language learning (Alm, 2015; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Lee & Drajadi, 2019; Wang & Chen, 2020). The penetration of technology into virtually all aspects of human life has made its incorporation into language teaching arena indispensable (Kessler, 2018). As in the words of Chun et al. (2016), “it is not possible to ‘opt out’ of using technology: It is so pervasive and so interwoven with human activity that to teach language without some form of technology would create a very limited and artificial learning environment—if it were even possible at all” (p. 65). The social media platforms which has been used to enrich foreign language teaching include Facebook (Barrot, 2016; Leier, 2017; Çetinkaya & Sütçü, 2018; Dung & Quynh, 2018; Barrot, 2020; Korkealehto & Leier, 2021), WhatsApp (Çetinkaya & Sütçü, 2018) and Instagram (Andujar & Çakmak, 2020). Given the increasing popularity gained by TikTok among young adults, it is quite surprising to note that its utilization in foreign language teaching has attracted less attention (see Dung & Quynh, 2018; Solmaz, 2018; Arrosagaray et al., 2019; Gruba & Chau Nguyen, 2019; Lambton-Howard et al., 2021; Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022; Xue & Churchill, 2022). The lack of interest in the utilization of the application as a pedagogical tool in facilitating foreign language teaching has been the byproduct of its novelty (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2022).

Before bringing TikTok into the EFL classrooms it is quite necessary to probe into how learners make use of the application (i.e., do they use it for the sake of learning English?) and their perspectives related to its pedagogical value (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021). One might argue that pedagogical decisions should not be made on the basis of what the students think is effective for their learning. It is a truism, indeed, that EFL learners are not experts when it comes to their own EFL learning; what they perceive as effective might not sit well with, or might even diametrically be opposed to, what SLA research has found to be effective. Nevertheless, ignorance of the learners’ perceptions with regard to aspects of their EFL learning might bring about adverse effects on their learning. For example, integrating social media applications into the EFL classes which the learners perceive as having no obvious pedagogical merit might lead to their developing some kind of mental or cognitive block, preventing them from actively engaging in the learning process, which eventually has the effect of rendering the pedagogical activity futile. Therefore, it becomes readily apparent that conducting a priori structured analysis of the EFL learners’ use and perspectives of the pedagogical potential of social media applications in EFL classrooms represents an important scholarly endeavor in EFL teaching. The investigation into how learners use and perceive TikTok as an affordance for their own learning can therefore be deemed to be mandatory for effective TikTok-assisted instructed EFL learning, as it is geared toward the exploration of the most effective way of integrating TikTok into the EFL classrooms. As in the words of Plonsky and Ziegler (2016), research into the use of technology in EFL classrooms should focus on “how the affordances of technology might best be exploited to provide learners

with optimal language learning opportunities” (p. 17). The present study was guided by the following two research questions:

- RQs: 1. Do Indonesian EFL learners use TikTok as an affordance to learn English?
 2. What are their perspectives of the use of TikTok in EFL learning?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A total of 31 freshman students (83.87% females, 16.13% males) enrolled in a three-year non-degree program in business administration at a public vocational college in Bali agreed to voluntarily participate in the present study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years ($M_{age} = 19$ years, $SD_{age} = 0.89$ years). None of the participants reported to have taken any standardized English proficiency test (TOEFL, IELTS or TOEIC), so their English proficiency level could not be objectively ascertained. Therefore, self-assessment was conducted to provide insights into the students’ English proficiency level, wherein they were asked to self-rate the level of their English proficiency along the spectrum of beginner, intermediate, advanced, and native-like: slightly over a quarter, i.e., 8 (25.81%), of the participants perceived themselves as intermediate level learners, while the rest, i.e., 23 (74.19%), identified themselves as beginner level learners. None of them considered themselves as advanced, let alone native-like, users of English. At the time the study was conducted, the students received two 100-minute instruction in English for business correspondence (a 2-credit course) per week, and TikTok was not part of the instruction. They were not paid for their participation in the study. However, as a token of appreciation, they were awarded extra 10 points added to the final grade they obtained on the English for business correspondence course. The following table shows the profile of the participants.

Table 1 Profile of participants (N = 31)

		frequency	%
Sex	Male	5	16.13
	Female	26	83.87
Age	18	9	29.03
	19	15	48.39
	20	6	19.35
	21	0	0
	22	1	3.23
Perceived proficiency level	Beginner	23	74.19
	Intermediate	8	25.81
	Advanced	0	0
	Native-like	0	0

2.2 Instrument and Procedure

The instrument used to collect the data in the present study is a short online questionnaire built with the help of Google Forms, a free online survey administration application. The questionnaire consists of four main questions, two closed- and two open-ended ones. The two closed-ended questions ask the participants whether or not they have a TikTok account and whether they think it can potentially be used to promote their English communication skills; these two questions take the form of a Yes/ No question. The open-ended questions ask what they are doing while opening the application and what their perspectives on the usability of the application as English language learning medium are. In additions, three background questions were also included in the questionnaire to gather the participants’ demographic information, namely sex, age, and perceived English proficiency level. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that only those students who answered “Yes” to the question, “*Do you have a TikTok account?*” could proceed to answer the open-ended questions. Those who indicated that they did not have any TikTok account were directed to submit the questionnaire, that is, without having to read the open-ended questions. To facilitate comprehension and to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding of

the questions, the questions were delivered in the native language of the participants, namely bahasa Indonesia. Appendix A provides the English version of the questionnaire.

The online questionnaire was administered during a regular (scheduled) English class by the regular English teacher (the first author) whereby the link to the questionnaire was sent out via the class group WhatsApp. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the participants were told about the aim of the research, that is, to examine their perspectives on the effectiveness of TikTok in promoting their English communication skills. The participants were also told that their participation in the research was voluntary, meaning that they were free not to participate in the research without receiving any academic consequence. All students expressed their agreement to participate in the study, as shown by the fact that all of them properly filled out the questionnaire. They were encouraged to ask questions with regard to the comprehensibility of the questionnaire items; none of them asked any question, indicating that all the questions included in the questionnaire were easy to understand. The questionnaire administration was not timed, but on average the participants took 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

2.3 Data Analysis

Given the purpose of the study, that is, to identify the students' perspectives on the potential of TikTok as a medium to promote their English communication skills (see the Introduction section above), the data for the present study were analyzed quantitatively using one simple descriptive statistic, namely frequency counts. The participants' purposes of using TikTok and their perspectives on the usability of the application to improve their English communication skills were categorized into themes (six themes for purpose of using TikTok and three themes for perspectives on the usability of TikTok) based on which frequency counts were subsequently computed. The themes emerged during the data analysis, rather than were deductively determined a priori, that is, before the data analysis started.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 RQ1: Do Indonesian EFL learners use TikTok as an affordance to learn English?

Of the 31 Indonesian college students participating in the present study, 26 (83.87%) reported to have installed TikTok on their smartphone and, with the exception of one student, reported to use it on a regular basis, while the rest, 5 (16.13%) of them, were not interested to install it on their smartphone. These 25 students mentioned that they opened the application on a daily basis, at least once a day. Meanwhile, one student who had TikTok on his smartphone stated that he hardly opened it. This statistic immediately gives an indication that a vast majority of college students in Indonesia are TikTok active users. The question which arises now is whether they (i.e., those students who installed TikTok on their smartphone and used it on a regular basis, $n = 25$) used the application as an affordance for their English language learning. We wanted to know if they used TikTok for the purpose of improving their English language proficiency, for example opening TikTok to search information about how to say certain expressions in English. To this end, we included in the questionnaire the question “*What are you doing while opening TikTok?*” Their responses to this question immediately indicated that none of those students expressly stated that they opened the application with the intent to promote their English language proficiency. To put it in different terms, none of them independently made use of the videos available on TikTok for their English language learning purposes. Rather, they used it for purposes not related to foreign language learning; such purposes could broadly be classified into five distinct categories, namely self-entertainment, time killing, making video, searching information, and shopping. Table 2 below shows the frequency and percentage of occurrences of these purposes in the database.

Table 2 Students' purposes for using TikTok

Purpose	frequency	%
Self-entertaining	10	33.33
Time killing	9	30
Making video	2	6.67
Searching information	6	20
Shopping	2	6.67
Not relevant	1	3.33
Total	30	100

As can clearly be seen from the above table, 30 different purposes for which the students opened TikTok could be identified. The reason why there were more purposes than the number of students who installed the application on their smartphone ($n = 26$) was because four students provided two purposes each.

Table 1 above reveals that the majority of the students opened TikTok to entertain themselves and kill time, 33.33% and 30% of the total students, respectively. For example, they opened the application “to watch videos for the purpose of entertaining myself” (Student #1), “to look for K-pop videos” (Student #2), “to find good songs” (Student #11) and the like. Some students ($n = 9$) opened it with no particular thing to look for, watching whatever videos which happened to be available on their page, or in their own words, “just scroll.” When they searched information on TikTok they did not look for information pertaining to foreign language learning, for example how to pronounce certain words, how words are used in a sentence or utterance. Instead, they were more interested to find “a lot of things that I hardly know” (Student #18), “to watch latest news or trends” (Student #30), “to find interesting tips for life” (Student #31), and “to look for videos on cats” (Student #20). One student provided a response which was not relevant to the question “*What are you doing while opening TikTok?*” that is, “I hardly open TikTok” (Student #13). Finally, a few students mentioned that they opened TikTok with the specific intent to create a video or to make a purchase, accounting for 7.69% each. In a nutshell, the answer to the research question “*Do Indonesian EFL learners use TikTok as an affordance to learn English?*” is negative. That is to say, on the face of it Indonesian EFL learners did not use TikTok as an affordance to learn English. It strongly suggests the students in the present study did not seem to be aware that TikTok could potentially be deployed as an affordance for foreign language learning. In other words, none of the students seemed to embrace the technology in ways that could potentially benefit their foreign language learning, yet they seem to fail to capitalize upon the affordances offered by the application for their English language learning enterprise. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that they certainly could not see the pedagogical value of the application, as far as their English language learning is concerned. With that being said, the extent to which these students could actually perceive the contributions of TikTok to the development of their English language proficiency is worthy of note, an issue which the following section addresses.

3.1.2 RQ2: What are the students' perspectives of the use of TikTok in EFL learning?

It has been noted above that there were 26 or 83.87% (out of 31) students who installed TikTok on their smartphone. Of these 26 students, 21 (80.77%) believed that such application could improve their English language proficiency level, while 5 (19.23%) did not share the same belief. This can be taken to mean that most of the students in the present study could clearly perceive the pedagogical merit of using TikTok when it comes to English language learning, although they did not explicitly state it, as has been discussed in the previous section. These 21 students provided three types of justification of their favorable attitudes toward TikTok, namely (i) that the information presented on TikTok generally is easy to grasp, (ii) that TikTok contains

an abundance of linguistic input usable for English language learning, and (iii) that free tuition in English can also be found on TikTok. The pie chart below displays the proportions of students providing the three types justification.

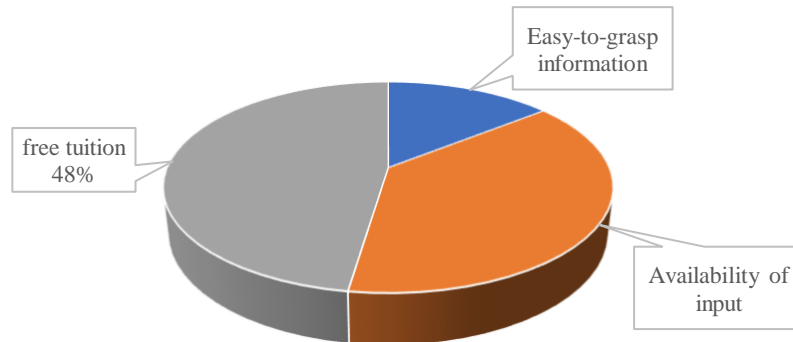


Figure 1 Students' justification

Figure 1 above vividly shows that nearly half of the students (n = 10, 48%) perceived that TikTok could improve their English language proficiency due to the availability of free tuition in English on the application. The proportion of students who thought that TikTok was effective in promoting their English due to the availability of linguistic input was almost three times greater than that who held a belief that the determining factor lied in the easy-to-grasp information, n = 8, 38% versus n = 3, 14%, respectively. The following table shows the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of TikTok.

Table 3 Students' perspectives on the effectiveness of TikTok (Authors' English translation)

Student ID	Perspective	Theme
1	<i>Because in my opinion, today's youth will easily absorb something they get on social media, especially TikTok. Therefore, TikTok media is very suitable to be used as an intermediary for English teaching materials.</i>	Easy to grasp information
5	<i>Because with short content learning about the English language will be made concise and easy to understand and remember</i>	Easy to grasp information
18	<i>Because TikTok has a very wide network and there are many people who speak good English on TikTok, in terms of accents etc., and there are also explanations that are very easy to understand so they are easy to remember and learn, and there are some sentences or vocabulary that I rarely know. Very interesting for me.</i>	Easy to grasp information
2	<i>Because the application provides fyp from various countries, the language used is generally English. The English used is not formal but informal English, so it adds a lot of new vocabulary (phrases).</i>	Availability of input
8	<i>Because we can watch videos that have English subtitles, stories in English and there are videos that contain English captions and TikTok has an Indonesian translation feature if we have trouble reading English captions.</i>	Availability of input
14	<i>Because I see foreign content creators so I can understand and interpret what is delivered word for word.</i>	Availability of input
17	<i>Because there are several words on TikTok that contain English, there the curiosity about the meaning of the English language appears and I really want to find out what the word means.</i>	Availability of input
19	<i>Because TikTok application is not only used in Indonesia, but is used in all countries.</i>	Availability of input
22	<i>Because I often watch foreign content that uses English, I find a lot of new vocabulary and that adds to my knowledge of English. I think TikTok app helps me in improvising my English.</i>	Availability of input
27	<i>Because TikTok is a mass medium that can be reached by all groups, both from outside and within the country. So, we can interact with foreigners by learning basic English.</i>	Availability of input

Student ID	Perspective	Theme
28	<i>In my opinion, because the scope of videos on TikTok is very wide. Lots of English videos passing on my fyp. I usually learn from there, for example speaking and listening.</i>	Availability of input
3	<i>Sometimes my fyp contains learning content related to English.</i>	Free tuition
4	<i>Because [TikTok contains] a lot of education and tips about English. Because TikTok displays easy tips for speaking English, and many TikTok celebrities make their daily vlogs predominantly using English.</i>	Free tuition
6	<i>Because on TikTok app several creators teach English, for example pronunciation, structure, and so on.</i>	Free tuition
10	<i>Because there are lots of English tutors who make videos and submit them to TikTok.</i>	Free tuition
11	<i>Because many foreign people use TikTok and there are many English teachers who can teach us to speak good and correct English.</i>	Free tuition
16	<i>Many content creators create educational content about English, the correct way to pronounce English, how to learn English quickly and correctly and also many content creators use English in creating content.</i>	Free tuition
23	<i>Because on TikTok there are English, and even other foreign language, tutors. English tutors on TikTok have a variety of ways to teach the language. There is lesson on vocabulary, grammar etc.</i>	Free tuition
24	<i>Because on TikTok there are several English lessons for beginners who just want to learn English, maybe not many, but there are some texts or words which use English so those of us who don't know their meaning are interested and want to translate them.</i>	Free tuition
25	<i>Because on TikTok there are lots of content creators who provide education about the English language, so it can be used as material to improve English language skills.</i>	Free tuition
30	<i>Because there are several content creators who can teach us English from beginner to advanced levels.</i>	Free tuition

Note: fyp, abbreviation for 'for your page', is a TikTok feature serving as a landing page for users based on what the TikTok's algorithm thinks they might be interested in

Finally, five students (19.23% of the total participants) perceived that TikTok could not potentially improve their English communication skills. One student (Student #31) stated that she opened TikTok with the intent to entertain herself and find life tips, rather than study English: *"Because I watch entertaining content for myself and look for tips on daily life, for example, tips on becoming a better person."* Likewise, another student (Student #21) mentioned that TikTok is not effective in enhancing her English communication skills because TikTok is not primarily used for pedagogical purposes, but rather for entertaining purposes and, more importantly, her fyp (for your page, which is a user's landing page) did not contain videos related to English language learning: *"Because most of TikTok users use the application to create content [non-pedagogical content] and I rarely see on my fyp videos about English language; instead, I saw a lot of dancing videos on TikTok. That's why it's difficult for me to improve my English skills [using TikTok]."* Two students (Student # 20 and 13) did not endorse TikTok due to their seemingly disinterest in the application, as indicated by the fact that they hardly open it. Finally, one student (Student #15) did not provide any justification for her repudiation of the effectiveness of TikTok in promoting her English communication skills.

In summary, Indonesian EFL students' perspectives on TikTok utilization in English language classrooms could be described thus: the majority of them perceived the application as capable of furthering their English language skills, although they did not seem to have materialized such personal theory in their actual use of the application, as shown by their responses to the question *What are you doing while opening TikTok?* As is often the case, there were also few students who contemplated TikTok quite the contrary, those who could not apprehend the advantages of using TikTok for the benefit of their English language learning enterprise. However, this latter group of students was vastly outnumbered by the former group.

3.2 Discussion

The ultimate aim of the present study is to investigate the perceptions of college level EFL students about the potentials of TikTok in promoting their English language skills. We found that the students participating in the present study opened TikTok for the following purposes: self-entertainment, time killing, video posting, information searching, and shopping. Surprisingly, none of the students reported that they opened the application for pedagogical purposes, more particularly for English language learning purposes; it is to be borne in mind that the information they searched on TikTok had nothing to do with improving their English communication skills. This finding is consistent with the finding of the study conducted by Pratiwi et al. (2021). The students in the Pratiwi et al. (2021) study reported that they used TikTok for the following two purposes: information searching (e.g., to look for information pertaining to life hacks and recommended skincare) and entertainment (i.e., they opened TikTok to entertain themselves). Although two of the students mentioned that they also looked for information about education on TikTok, none of them clearly stated that such information was related to English language learning. Unfortunately, Pratiwi et al. (2021) did not elaborate on what information about education their research participants looked for on TikTok. With that being said, it is quite safe to assume that the educational information looked for by the two students in the Pratiwi et al. (2021) study did not pertain to improving English communication skills. Otherwise, the students would explicitly use phrases such as English language, English learning, etc.

The majority of the students in the present study could clearly perceive the usability of TikTok as an effective learning tool to promote their English language skills. There were three major reasons why they were confident that the application could help them improve such skills, namely (i) it contains information which can easily be understood, (ii) it provides an abundance of authentic L2 input and (iii) it is also used by educators, in this case L2 educators, to share practical knowledge freely. However, five students did not see that TikTok was effective in promoting their English proficiency. Mixed findings were also evident in the study conducted by Hu and Du (2022). The following are some of the positive views stated by the students in the Hu and Du (2022): “TikTok use can definitely improve my English,” “If TikTok is used in my English classes, my English will improve,” “I believe my English has improved after using the learning resources on TikTok,” “The interactive feature of TikTok can improve my language skills,” “I think TikTok is a perfect supplement to my English learning, which can improve my English,” “I can learn and improve my English more easily with the help of TikTok in classes” (p. 1315). On the other hand, a few negative views were also evident in the Hu and Du (2022) study: “(TikTok use) is useless for my overall English studies in university ...,” “TikTok is mostly for fun, and many educational videos on it have an entertaining nature, too ...,” “I do not know if TikTok will work because we have never had a class (like using a mobile application to assist classroom learning) before” (p. 1315). The positive effects of TikTok use in foreign language learning was also apparent in the views of students who participated in other studies. Lee (2023), for example, also found how language learners’ use of TikTok technological features were interlocked with the dimensions of multimodality, mobility, instantaneous participation, and interactivity, which enabled them to perceive language learning affordances inherent in those features.

The students in the present study believed that the utilization of TikTok in formal EFL learning could help them improve their English language skills. Such belief was also shared by the secondary-school students participating in the Yang (2020) study: they believed that TikTok utilization in the EFL classrooms would lead to the improvement of their English in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary, along with cultural difference. This suggests that TikTok utilization in formal EFL learning is considered effective by not only adult learners (i.e., college-level learners), but also younger learners. Like the students in the present study, the students in the Yang (2020) study also pointed to the provision of authentic L2 input in TikTok videos.

Almost half of the participants in the present study thought that TikTok was effective in promoting their English language skills because they could watch videos showing useful tips and tricks in relation to English language learning. In other words, TikTok was viewed by the students

as a potential language learning environment (Barrot, 2022). Indeed, this is true not only of the learning of English, but also of the learning of other languages as well. Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2022) carried out a study to examine the type of video content TikTok users upload in language learning-related hashtags, where the target languages were Chinese, Italian and Russian. The researchers analyzed 165 TikTok videos and found that 127 of those videos predominantly revolved around such linguistic features as alphabet, punctuation, vocabulary, collocations, expressions, pronunciation, speech, and grammar, while the other videos dealt with information necessary for achieving interactional competence in the target languages, namely cultural practices and beliefs (28 videos), and language learning experiences (10 videos). On the basis of this finding, Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2022, p. 126) argued that “TikTok proved to be an active medium and platform for conveying language learning-related content in relation to multiple domains: (1) linguistic features (alphabet, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar), (2) cultural practices and beliefs (customs, traditions), and (3) learner experiences (difficulties, humorous interpretation).” This amounts to saying that TikTok could provide affordances for learning any foreign language.

The present study revealed that in general students’ attitude toward TikTok utilization for formal EFL learning was positive, which indicates that they warmly welcome the integration of the application into the EFL classes, a finding which corroborates that of the study conducted by Alghameeti (2022) with 50 Saudi secondary students. Like the students in the present study, the students in the Alghameeti (2022) study also perceived that TikTok was convenient for, and effective in improving, their English vocabulary. The Saudi students also stated that TikTok help them retain the learned vocabulary, and expressed their intention to keep using TikTok for their English language learning. It is to be noted that the students in the present study had not experienced any learning activities into which TikTok was integrated. Such warm welcome from these students might be caused by the ease of use of TikTok which sparks their curiosity of the technology and the joy derived from its use. In a study which aimed to apply the hedonic motivation system adoption model to TikTok, Deng and Yu (2023) discovered that focused immersion in an activity involving the use of TikTok was significantly influenced by curiosity and the joy related to the application, both of which were in turn significantly influenced by perceived ease of its use. Similarly, Alghameeti (2022) provides empirical evidence which pointed to the ease of use of TikTok as perceived by Saudi secondary students and such ease of use led them to view that TikTok was fun for their vocabulary learning.

Apart from its being easy and fun to use, TikTok also possesses features which encourage them to use the application in their English language learning, “such as shared audio, which allow users to use the audio to listen and mimic voices. It also possesses the duet feature, whereby a user can stitch their video with someone else in order to create new content that looks similar to two individuals conversing” (Tan et al., 2022, p. 3).

The fact that the students in the present study held a favorable attitude toward TikTok utilization in the EFL classrooms might lead to their enhanced engagement in their learning activities (see Akbari et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2022), which in turn might bring about positive learning outcomes (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Reinders & Nakamura, 2022). Herlisya and Wiratno (2022) found that the use of TikTok in speaking classes could improve their students’ in class learning activities. That is, their students were becoming more active after the utilization of the application. Moreover, their students’ speaking skills improved as a result of such utilization. This might suggest that it is imperative to maintain students’ favorable attitude toward aspects of EFL learning, such as the learning platform through which the classes are delivered, as it might trigger learning to take place.

The students’ favorable attitude toward TikTok utilization for EFL learning evident in the present study might spill over into their increased motivation and such increased motivation might eventually influence their proficiency in English (Wu, 2022). The experimental study conducted by Gao et al. (2023) showed that incorporating TikTok into MICE learning activities bring about positive impact on students’ learning motivation and English oral proficiency. That is, those students who received the experimental treatment (i.e., instruction with TikTok) displayed higher

learning motivation and higher English oral proficiency than those in the control condition (i.e., instruction without TikTok). In line with the views of the students in the present study, the MICE learners in the Gao et al. (2023) study mentioned that TikTok allowed them to improve their English speaking and listening skills and let them know how to use words and expressions appropriately according to contexts. Moreover, they argued that TikTok helped elevate their confidence in using English.

Before we end this section, we need to revisit the answers to the two research questions posed in the present study. Responding to the first question, none of the students in the present study categorically stated that they opened TikTok for the betterment of their English language skills. Indeed, none of their responses (even implicitly) pointed to their use of the technology in an attempt to promote their English language skills. Surprisingly, when confronted with the question regarding the potentials of TikTok in promoting their English language skills, they could instantly articulate their positive thoughts about the pedagogical advantages offered by the technology. At first glance, as one might argue, their responses to the second question does not seem to be genuine; if they genuinely thought that the application was indeed effective in advancing their English language skills, why would they not utilize it for their own English language learning purposes? One possible explanation for this seeming dissension is that the students did not know how to put the technology in the service of their English language learning. Moreover, the fact that TikTok was mainly created for purposes other than educational (where it was principally designed for entertaining and social networking purposes), further contributes to the challenges faced by the students in making use of the application as a learning platform. The predominance of entertaining video contents over educational ones available on TikTok offers yet another significant disruption to the effort made the students in utilizing the technology to improve their English language skills.

4. Conclusion

The present exploratory study was primarily aimed to probe into the uncharted potential of one of the social media platforms which has recently surged in popularity especially among young adults (i.e., TikTok). The study was exclusively designed to examine the extent to which EFL students perceived TikTok as an effective pedagogical tool in facilitating their EFL learning. It produced important empirical evidence which pointed to the notion that the application serves as a fertile language learning ground, although they reported that they did not open it specifically for English language learning purposes. There are three features of note, according to the students, which render it effective as a digital learning platform, namely the information delivered is easy to grasp, it contains an abundance of usable L2 input and quite many video authors are also English language educators or specialists whose videos contain useful information related to English language learning, both linguistic (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and non-linguistic (e.g., speaking etiquette, cultural differences).

Admittedly, the present study is not without any limitation, and hence its findings need to be further (in)validated through future studies. The sample size of the study was undoubtedly rather small to arrive at a valid conclusion (see Loewen & Hui, 2021). Moreover, the data were collected merely through questionnaire administration, which did not allow us to dig deeper into the matter at hand. Taking these two limitations into consideration, therefore, we suggest that future studies need not only to use larger sample size, but also to gather the data employing different data collection methods, so as to enable the researchers to conduct triangulation, which eventually leads to more valid conclusion.

Putting aside the limitations of the present study, the pedagogical implication of the findings of the present study is transparent, that TikTok should be a vital component of EFL classes, especially at the college level. The fact that the students in the present study did not independently utilize the application for the benefit of their English language learning, despite their favorable attitude toward it, indicates that they were not knowledgeable about how to effectively exploit the potentials of the technology. However, care needs to be taken so as to make the integration of TikTok into the EFL classes effective and efficient. Following Erlam et al.

(2021, p. 136), “For students, the use of digital media for language learning can be motivating, especially if the digitally supported activities meet their needs and interests, and if they correspond to the way that they use digital communication in their daily lives.”

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