

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English has spread across the world more than any other language, and nowadays it is spoken by more people as a second language than as a first language (Jenkins et al., 2018). It has become a language that plays a major part in global communication, education, technology, business, etc. (Kurniawan, 2024). As globalization intensifies, English language proficiency is increasingly seen as an essential skill. As a result, English language learning has become a priority in many educational systems around the world. Indonesia is not an exception. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, with grammar and vocabulary as one of the main focuses of the teaching. For English language learners, vocabulary plays an important role because, according to Hartatiningsih (2022), ideas cannot be properly communicated without a significant amount of vocabulary.

Traditional methods of education, such as textbook learning and classroom activities, continue to play a key role in language acquisition (Suhirman et al., 2023; Zhang, 2021). But these days, students are also beginning to use a variety of creative approaches to improve their abilities, especially when it comes to learning vocabulary. As technology becomes more accessible to everyone, language learners are exposed to English outside of the classroom more frequently (Hariyanti & Purwandari, 2022), creating new opportunities for learning outside of the traditional setting. This growing reliance on technology naturally draws students toward platforms they use frequently, including social media, as alternative spaces for language learning.

Nowadays, social media has taken up a significant time of many people, especially the youths (Amor, 2024). It is increasingly becoming an important part of people's daily lives. Given how social media affects many

aspects of our everyday life, such as communication and information consumption, it is practically impossible for us to avoid being impacted by it. It has completely changed how individuals communicate, share, and access information. Because social media takes up a significant time of users' daily lives, this constant engagement provides opportunities for informal learning experiences (Kumar & Nanda, 2024; Zhu, 2025).

In light of this, researchers and educators have focused on social media's prospects in educational settings. Social media is now being explored as a tool to supplement traditional education because its interactive and engaging nature shows great potential to support education (Samala et al., 2024). According to Sopian et al. (2021) and Safitri & Tari (2025), social media provides accessible and engaging contents that may motivate students and enhance personalized learning experiences. The rise of educational content on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok has demonstrated that social media can be more than just a source of entertainment, it can serve as a great addition to learning.

Among a lot of social media platforms, TikTok has recently grown in popularity, particularly among the youths (Awanda et al., 2024). TikTok, which was originally intended as an entertainment app has evolved into a dynamic platform where users can share and enjoy short-form videos according to their niches. Because its algorithm curates content based on user preferences, users' experiences are more personalized and enjoyable. As more educators and content creators join the platform, TikTok is increasingly being used to share tips, tutorials, and lessons across a wide range of subjects. This shift has transformed the app into an effective tool for informal learning, particularly among younger audiences (Ghosh & Figueroa, 2023). Compared with more established social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, which have gained a substantial amount of research regarding their educational benefits (Baruti & Subekti, 2023; Jiang & Zhao, 2025; Masduqi & Azizah, 2025), TikTok is a relatively recent social media platform in which its educational potential is still being explored. As

TikTok continues to gain popularity among students, it is important to explore its potential to support English vocabulary learning. With its many features, TikTok makes it possible for educational content to reach large audiences in an engaging and efficient manner.

TikTok allows learning to occur anytime and anywhere, making the process more engaging for students who often find traditional classroom learning uninteresting (Liu, 2023). Students can use TikTok to study many different topics, and one of the things that students mostly study from TikTok is language, especially the English language (Suryatiningsih et al., 2025). By using TikTok, students can look for English language content from teachers, native speakers, influencers, or bilingual creators who share practical language knowledge (Bahri et al., 2022; Oktavena et al., 2025). This exposure not only enhances listening and comprehension skills but also introduces students to new vocabulary, even cultural references in a natural and engaging way (Alghameeti, 2022; Condoy, 2024; Putri et al., 2025). Because of this widespread use, TikTok becomes a frequent source of English exposure for many students (Fata et al., 2023; Guzman & Viray, 2024).

Despite such educational benefits, TikTok remains a controversial platform for learning. Unlike learning platforms specifically designed for educational purposes, TikTok is primarily recognized as an entertaining social media application. Its personalized recommendation algorithm and endless stream of short-form user-generated content create opportunities for authentic language exposure, but they also raise concerns regarding distraction, self-discipline, and the accuracy of educational information (Rowiyah et al., 2025; Vargas-Saritama & Espinoza-Celi, 2026). Nevertheless, previous studies have consistently reported that many students continue to use TikTok for English vocabulary learning and generally perceive it positively as a valuable supplementary learning tool (Abidah, 2024; Rita & Subekti, 2023). The contrast between TikTok's considerable educational potential and its commonly acknowledged limitations makes it important to

look into how students perceive and accept the platform for English vocabulary learning.

From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a theoretical framework that explains how people come to accept and use technological systems (Davis, 1989), understanding students' acceptance of technology is significant as it impacts whether and how digital platforms are adopted for educational purposes. In this context, the use of TikTok for English vocabulary learning can be examined through TAM constructs, such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using, and behavioral intention, which collectively shape students' acceptance of TikTok for learning English vocabulary.

In recent years, several studies have explored students' perceptions from many levels of education of using TikTok as a tool for learning English, often highlighting its engaging format, accessibility, and ability to deliver language in practical, real-world contexts (Bernard, 2021; Choo & Khalid, 2024; Mei & Aziz, 2022). There are also studies that specifically examine TikTok for vocabulary learning, showing that the platform's rich input of authentic language use, repetitive exposure, and original explanations by various English language content creators and native speakers can support students' language learning journey (Alghameeti, 2022; Simanungkalit & Katemba, 2023; Venalinda & Armanda, 2023). However, some studies have found that not all students perceive TikTok as an effective learning tool, as concerns about credibility, content quality, and its high level of distraction can influence how the platform is perceived and utilized (Adelhardt & Eberle, 2024; Evans & Hays, 2025).

Although several studies have examined students' perceptions of using TikTok for vocabulary learning, very few have analyzed these perceptions through the lens of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Considering that TikTok exposes students to frequent, diverse, and authentic English language input, understanding students' perceptions of TikTok through a TAM perspective becomes important in revealing how they evaluate and

adopt the platform for English vocabulary learning. While a recent study by Putra et al. (2026) used TAM to examine senior high school students' perceptions of TikTok for English vocabulary learning, university students represent a distinct demographic with a higher ability in self-directed learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore university students' perceptions of TikTok for English vocabulary learning using the TAM framework to provide a deeper understanding of vocabulary acquisition within contemporary digital learning environments.

This study focuses on university students from Universitas Negeri Jakarta, specifically those enrolled in the English Language Education major, located in Indonesia. University students are selected for this study because they tend to be more autonomous learners compared to students from other educational levels and more active users of digital technologies, including social media platforms such as TikTok. Additionally, focusing on English Language Education students from a single university provides a specific and relevant academic, educational, and cultural context for examining TAM-based perceptions of TikTok for English vocabulary learning within the Indonesian EFL setting.

1.2 Research Question

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do university students perceive the use of TikTok for English vocabulary learning in terms of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use?
2. What are university students' attitudes toward using TikTok and their behavioral intentions regarding its use for English vocabulary learning?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore university students' perceptions of TikTok for English vocabulary learning through the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). Specifically, this study aims to examine university students' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of TikTok for learning English vocabulary, to explore their attitudes toward using TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool, and to identify their behavioral intention to use TikTok for English vocabulary learning in the context of English as a foreign language in Indonesia.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on university students who are non-native English speakers and who have used TikTok as a tool for English vocabulary learning. The participants are students who have engaged with English-language content on TikTok with the intention of learning or improving their vocabulary. The study explores their perceptions of TikTok not only as a social media platform but also as a tool for vocabulary learning and examines how they use the app to support their English vocabulary development. This study evaluates students' perceptions specifically through the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) rather than examining the psychological aspects of perception in a broader sense. This study is limited to self-reported data and does not involve formal testing of language proficiency. It does not aim to generalize findings to all TikTok users but rather to provide insights into the vocabulary learning experiences of a selected group of users who engage with English-language content on TikTok.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to be useful both theoretically and practically.

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) by expanding the understanding of how vocabulary learning occurs in digital and informal settings. It highlights the role of multimedia content in language exposure as one of the sources of authentic language input that supports the acquisition of the English language. In addition, by examining students' perceptions of TikTok through the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework, this study extends the application of TAM to the context of language learning. Lastly, this study encourages future research about the integration of technology in language education.

2. Practical Significance

This study emphasizes the potential of TikTok for English vocabulary learning. It may help students recognize how their engagement with English-language content on TikTok contributes to acquiring new vocabulary, reinforcing previously learned words, and encouraging autonomous learning practices. Students can strengthen their vocabulary knowledge in ways that complement traditional education through exposure to authentic language input that is relevant to their interests. For teachers, this study may help them encourage learning outside of the classroom by guiding students to use TikTok more strategically by recommending educational creators, curating English-language content aligned with learning objectives, or creating activities that connect classroom lessons with what students encounter online.

For curriculum developers and educational institutions, the findings of this study may provide insights into how social media platforms like TikTok can be integrated as supplementary resources within EFL programs. Policy makers and educational stakeholders may also benefit from this study by gaining data to support future decisions regarding the use of social media in higher education language learning contexts within the Indonesian EFL setting. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a reference to establish regulations or standards that promote the effective and responsible use of social media for language learning in higher education.

1.6 Clarification of Key Terms

In order to clarify the key terms used in this study, the following definitions are provided:

1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): TAM is a theoretical framework that explains how people come to accept and use technological systems (Davis, 1989).
2. TikTok: TikTok is one of the most successful social media applications in the world that has rapidly attracted young users to watch, create, and interact with short-form content (Montag et al., 2021).
3. Vocabulary Learning: Vocabulary learning refers to the process of acquiring, understanding, and using new words in a language, followed by two basic conditions: repeated exposure to words and high-quality mental processing of those encounters (Nation, 2017).