Using TikTok as a Tool for English Vocabulary Learning in the EFL Context

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Abstract

One of the most crucial components of studying a language is learning its vocabulary. Without sufficient vocabulary, communication becomes problematic. However, research shows that Saudi Arabian university students have a small English vocabulary size. Many technological tools exist in the literature for increasing students' vocabulary size, including TikTok videos. TikTok has become one of the most popular social media platforms for producing and sharing videos. Because students' perception of tools used in the classroom determine the tools' success, investigating their perception of using TikTok videos for English vocabulary learning is essential. In this study, a quantitative research design was used to investigate students' perception toward using TikTok as an English vocabulary learning tool in the EFL context. A descriptive quantitative methodology was adopted to analyze data from 115 female students at King Abdulaziz University. According to the findings, most students have a positive perception toward the use of TikTok videos as a vocabulary learning tool. These findings suggest that TikTok videos can be used to increase students' English vocabulary size. The current study proposes an alternative pedagogical means for teaching English vocabulary to language teachers who want to help their students expand and develop their vocabulary.

Keywords: EFL, L2, learning, technology, TikTok, perception, English vocabulary

1. Introduction

The basis for learning a second language (L2) is vocabulary (Barani et al., 2010). Without learning vocabulary, communication in an L2 becomes difficult (Rohmatillah, 2014). According to Alqahtani (2015), low L2 vocabulary leads to serious problems for language learners. Saudi students have low English vocabulary size, as the following studies have shown (Alqarni, 2019; Altalhab, 2019; Al-Masrai & Milton, 2012). These studies illustrated that Saudi university students, on average, do not reach the level associated with fluency in English as a foreign language (EFL). One of the main problems students experience in mastering and learning English language is a lack of English vocabulary. Increasing students' L2 vocabulary size is important, and to reach this goal, up-to-date and interesting pedagogical means for teaching English vocabulary should be used.

There are many ways to improve students' vocabulary, one of which is to use TikTok videos. TikTok is a digital application that provides entertainment and educational content through short-form videos (Bernard, 2021). It provides more options for learners to access a language through its multiple features, and it helps in familiarizing learners with different sets of vocabulary through its authentic content (Bernard, 2021). This application has gained popularity in recent years because of its numerous exciting features, such as multimedia and video creation, exchanging, and sharing (Erwani et al., 2022).

Multiple researchers investigated the perception of students toward using TikTok for increasing students' English vocabulary (Fahdin, 2021; Anumanthan & Hashim, 2022, Rahman, 2021; Erwani et al., 2022; Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022; Bernard, 2021; Wardani, 2022). However, none of them studied King Abdulaziz University students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate university students' perception toward using this app for English vocabulary learning in a specific context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Students' Perception

Perception is the process through which individuals understand objects in their environment by ordering and interpreting sensory impressions to assign meaning to their surroundings (Bernstein et al., 1988; Santrock, 1988). McDonald (2012) defined perception as the particular way an individual or group views a phenomenon. It involves processing stimuli and incorporating memories and experiences in the process of understanding. Individuals may interpret responses as positive or negative (McDonald, 2012). Student's perception, which we focus on in this study, is their opinion about something that they are using in language learning. It is used to measure their attitude toward using it and whether they agree or disagree about using it, and toward the method to achieve a specific goal (Hong et al., 2003). According to the statements above, we need to investigate students' perception toward the pedagogical tools used in the classroom as well as whether EFL learners agree or disagree about using a particular method of learning English vocabulary.

2.2 Technology-mediated Learning Theory

The use of digital technologies such as social media, mobile applications, virtual worlds, and learning management systems is becoming increasingly common in formal learning environments. In many of these environments, technology is the means by which interactions between participants, most typically teachers and students, are mediated (Bower, 2019). Technology-mediated theory has been used to explain how technology affects learning and how it can be used to improve learning outcomes (Bower, 2019). According to Bower (2019), this theory promotes the following concepts: first, that technology can be used to facilitate learning through scaffolding. This means that technology can be used to provide structure and support to learners as they engage with new material. For example, learners can use technology to access course materials, to receive feedback from instructors, and to submit assignments. Second, technology can be used to improve learning quality. This means that technology can be used to provide more engaging and interactive learning experiences. For instance, learners can use technology to access multimedia content, to participate in online discussions, and to collaborate with other language learners (Bower, 2019). Third, technology can be used to promote equity in learning. It can level the playing field in terms of access to education. This means that technology can be used to provide access to education for learners who might not otherwise have access (Bower, 2019). This theory applies to the use of social media for learning, including TikTok for English vocabulary learning.

2.3 The Importance of Vocabulary Learning

To learn an L2 effectively, it is important to have a large vocabulary size (Alderson, 2005). A strong vocabulary allows learners to understand and communicate with others in the new language and helps learners learn grammar and sentence structure more easily (Alderson, 2005). Alderson (2005) stated that a strong vocabulary in an L2 has many advantages. First, a large vocabulary size allows learners to communicate more effectively. They can express themselves more clearly and accurately. Second, a large vocabulary size allows learners to understand the language better. They can notice subtleties and nuances that they would otherwise miss. Third, learners can read and write more effectively when they know more words, they can better understand what they are reading, and they can write more accurately and make fewer errors. Fourth, a large vocabulary can improve learners' listening comprehension. They can better grasp the main points of a conversation and follow the conversation more easily. Overall, a strong vocabulary is essential for effective communication, deeper understanding of language, and improved reading and writing skills (Alderson, 2005). A strong vocabulary is also essential for effective communication in an L2 (Alderson, 2005). According to Rohmatillah (2014) and Barani et al. (2010), communication without vocabulary is problematic. Language learners who have an inadequate vocabulary usually have difficulty expressing themselves properly, which can prevent them from conveying their true message and interacting freely (Rohmatillah, 2014; Barani et al., 2010). Hence, finding a way to improve students' vocabulary is crucial.

Although English vocabulary is considered important in learning the English language, as previous researchers have noted (Alderson, 2005; Rohmatillah, 2014; Barani et al., 2010), the English vocabulary size of Saudi students is low (Al-Masrai & Milton, 2012). Al-Masrai and Milton (2012) tried to measure the vocabulary knowledge of 92 Saudi university students at the beginning and end of their language studies. The results showed that the vocabulary size of the students was about 2000 to 3000 words at the beginning of their studies and about 5000 words just before graduation. These figures show that the level of Saudi university students on average is far below the level associated with complete fluency in EFL (Al-Masrai & Milton, 2012). These results are similar to those Alqarni (2019) reported. Alqarni (2019) compared the vocabulary sizes of 71 Saudi university male and female students at the end of their studies with specific vocabulary levels ranging from 2000

to 100,000 in addition to an academic word list. The results showed that the students' vocabulary range was limited to the low frequency levels. Surprisingly, even Saudi tertiary students who have studied English for nine years have low vocabulary levels (Altalhab, 2019). Altalhab (2019) conducted a vocabulary test with 120 male Saudi university students at King Saud University, finding that the average vocabulary size of Saudi EFL university students was about 3000 words. Nevertheless, most of the participants achieved low scores in the low frequency vocabulary items (Altalhab, 2019). Some participants were unable to correctly answer even a single item in these low and medium frequency levels (Altalhab, 2019). Even though these students were able to communicate at a basic level, read simplified texts, and understand listening tasks, they may have difficulty reading authentic texts, composing high-quality texts, and watching English programs and movies (Altalhab, 2019). Given these findings, it is crucial to find pedagogical means to enable Saudi students to learn and improve their English vocabulary.

2.4 TikTok and Vocabulary Development

TikTok is one of the most recent and intriguing technological language learning tools. It is a social media app that allows users to create and share short videos (Bernard, 2021). TikTok has become a popular platform for users to view and share creative content, including videos teaching new L2 vocabulary (Bernard, 2021). Since its inception in 2016, TikTok has become one of the most popular technological social media platforms in the world (Bernard, 2021). At the beginning of 2022, TikTok had 22.37 million users in Saudi Arabia who were 18 years old or older (Kemp, 2022). According to ByteDance, Saudi Arabia currently has the largest potential TikTok audience of any country in the world.

As several studies have shown, TikTok could be a great way to learn the English language and increase students' English vocabulary. For example, Diana, Wendy, Claudia, and Melor (2020) conducted an experimental study on using TikTok to enhance four students' speaking skills. The researchers found that participants' ability to speak was enhanced after using the "Let us #TikTokTell" program, in which participants began to use more adjectives and provide more elaboration on the topics given to them. Similarly, Syazana, Kamini, Izzati, and Melor (2019) conducted a study on using TikTok to enhance ESL students' writing skills, focusing on action verbs. They found that using TikTok as a teaching tool in English language classes resulted in considerable gains in students' L2 writing skills. Galuh (2021) investigated students' perception toward the use of TikTok for learning English vocabulary and found that the app helped learners expand their English vocabularies. Bernard (2021) used a qualitative methodology for his research. The researcher implemented TikTok videos in teaching vocabulary learning to determine how such videos help in expanding ESL students' vocabulary learning and how EFL students perceive the use of such videos in vocabulary learning. The results showed that TikTok familiarized learners with different vocabulary sets through its authentic content, that it promoted a positive learning environment for learners, and that learners perceived it as an entertaining and motivating method of learning. These findings are in line with those of researchers (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022; Erwani et al., 2022; Rahman, 2021; Sofeny et al., 2022; Alghameeti, 2022) who concluded that the use of TikTok is beneficial in language learning.

Whereas all the previously mentioned studies were carried out in different parts of the world, only Alghameeti's (2022) was carried out on Saudi secondary school students. No studies have been conducted in Saudi universities to investigate how students perceive the use of this app for English vocabulary learning or whether they are willing to learn English by using it. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate students' perception of TikTok videos as a popular technological tool for increasing their English vocabulary in the EFL context.

2.5 Research Questions

The following two questions are the main focus of the current study:

(1) What are English language learners' perception toward the use of TikTok videos for English vocabulary learning?

(2) Do English language learners perceive TikTok as an effective tool to increase their English vocabulary size?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

Survey research design, according to Cohen et al. (2017) and Creswell (2014), is a procedure in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population to grasp the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. A quantitative survey research design was used in the

current study because its purpose was to investigate students' perception toward using TikTok as a tool for learning and expanding their English vocabulary.

3.2 Instrument

Data were collected using an online questionnaire adapted from previous research studies. The first questionnaire was used in a study (Binti Mistar & Embi, 2016) that examined students' perception toward the use of WhatsApp as a learning tool in the ESL classroom. The second questionnaire was adapted from a research study that investigated learners' perception toward WhatsApp integration as a learning tool to develop EFL vocabulary (Khan et al., 2021). The word "WhatsApp" from both questionnaires was replaced with "TikTok" in the current study (Appendix 2). The questionnaire was also translated from English to Arabic so participants could understand it. The questionnaire contained 16 questions on a 5-point Likert scale (from 5, "strongly agree," to 1, "strongly disagree"). The scale was chosen for several reasons, the most important of which were that Likert scales are inexpensive and easy to administer, and they allow researchers to collect information in a simple, standardized manner (Rattray & Jones, 2007). Participants are generally familiar with this survey format and do not require much assistance in answering the questions (Rattray & Jones, 2007). Additionally, the Likert scale is normative, meaning that we can measure an individual's final score and compare it to others' scores (Cohen et al., 2017; Rattray & Jones, 2007). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was presented to two specialized faculty members and two colleagues. Their observations and opinions on the questionnaire content were taken into account. Subsequently, the questionnaire was modified according to their observations.

3.3 Participant

The sample consisted of 115 preparatory female students from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, who were 18 to 25 years old. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants. Convenience sampling is also known as accidental sampling, in which participants are chosen for their convenience and availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3.1 Data Collection

The descriptive survey method was used along with the questionnaire survey method. Microsoft Forms was adopted as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was necessary to describe the perception students had toward using TikTok for English vocabulary expansion. During the course of this study, the following procedures were followed. First, the researcher obtained permission from the ethics committee of the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University to conduct the study. Once permission was granted, the researcher sent the online survey link, including the consent form, to students via social media (Appendix 1). The researcher also asked students on the preparatory campus to fill out the survey face to face.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The aim of the analysis was to obtain a descriptive statistic for the data to scrutinize students' perception toward using TikTok as a tool for learning English vocabulary. Moreover, the reliability of the scale was calculated through Cronbach's alpha after the formation of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used because it is suitable for determining the internal consistency of questionnaire items that have multi-item scales (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Table 1 shows the values of Cronbach's alpha for each questionnaire.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test for Learner's Perception Toward Using TikTok

Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Reliability
Learners' perception toward using TikTok for learning English vocabulary	0.899	8	Highly reliable
TikTok videos' contribution to expanding English vocabulary	0.877	8	Highly reliable

4. Results

A descriptive analysis test was conducted using IBM SPSS software to determine how learners perceive TikTok as a vocabulary expansion tool. The test aimed to determine the means and percentages of responses to each questionnaire item. Tables 2 and 3 show the means, percentages, and standard deviation values for each item. Both questionnaires had the following values: Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Not certain = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. The higher the mean values were (i.e., > 3), the stronger the indication that opinions

tended toward strong agreement. The lower the mean values were (i.e., < 3), the stronger the indication that opinions tended toward strong disagreement.

Table 2. Means, Percentages, and Standard Deviation Values for the First Questionnaire

Item	Mean	Percentage of Agreement	STD. Deviation
1) The use of TikTok increases my learning productively.	3.72	64.3%	1.136
2) Using TikTok will effectively improve my language learning.	3.62	61.8%	1.031
3) Learning English language using TikTok is convenient for me.	3.54	59.1%	1.078
4) TikTok will help me with my vocabulary retention.	3.91	77.4%	1.048
5) TikTok will help me with vocabulary usage.	3.67	61.7%	1.090
6) I will use TikTok for learning vocabulary in the future.	3.52	56.6%	1.150
7) I am excited about using TikTok for learning vocabulary.	3.61	61.8%	1.106
8) I would use TikTok to share my new vocabulary with my friends.	3.45	65.5%	1.244

As Table 3 shows, participants tended to agree with most of the statements. More than half of the learners (59.1%) thought that learning vocabulary using TikTok videos was convenient for them. Most of them (77.4%) thought that TikTok videos helped them retain their vocabulary. A total of 61.8% learners were excited to use TikTok for learning vocabulary.

Table 3. Means, Percentages, and Standard Deviation Values for the Second Questionnaire

Item	Means of Agreement	Percentages of Agreement	STD. Deviation
1) Vocabulary learning through TikTok is a fun way of learning language.	4.19	82.6%	1.042
2) TikTok is easy to use for vocabulary learning.	3.91	71.3%	1.113
3) The use of TikTok will increase my vocabulary learning chances.	3.79	69.6%	1.064
4) TikTok offers varied ways of vocabulary learning.	3.97	72.2%	1.008
5) Vocabulary learning through TikTok makes learning attractive.	3.91	73.9%	1.048
6) It takes less time to pass on vocabulary-related information through TikTok.	3.77	62.6%	1.172
7) Difficulties levels are varied in vocabulary learning via TikTok.	3.74	62.5%	1.044
8) Learning English vocabulary through TikTok is a good method.	3.97	73%	1.067

Similar to the means and percentages of the items of the first questionnaire, the means and percentages of the items of the second questionnaire tended toward agreement (> 3) = (> 50%). A large number of learners (82.6%) thought that TikTok is a fun way to learn a language. A total of 73.9% of learners found it attractive to learn vocabulary through TikTok. Further, 73% of learners thought it is a good idea to learn vocabulary using TikTok videos.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous researchers have noted the importance of vocabulary (Alderson, 2005; Rohmatillah, 2014; Barani et al., 2010), and they have found the vocabulary size of Saudi students to be low (Alqarni, 2019; Altalhab, 2019; Al-Masrai & Milton, 2012). Therefore, the main objective of this research is to determine how students perceive the idea of using TikTok as a tool for English vocabulary expansion. The results indicate that the perception of most participants toward this tool is positive. According to the analysis of the questionnaire data, the preparatory participants at King Abdulaziz University find that TikTok is a fun and attractive way to improve their

vocabulary learning. This finding is consistent with that of another researcher who conducted a descriptive quantitative study to determine students' perception of using TikTok for learning English vocabulary. The latter researcher found that almost all students of STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung (72 out of 100) were satisfied with the use of TikTok for learning English vocabulary (Hastomo et al., 2022). The students also agreed that TikTok helped them in learning English vocabulary (Hastomo et al. 2022).

Mainly, the results of the current study indicate that students have a positive perception toward using TikTok for learning. A possible explanation for this is that students tend to like new things that are relevant to their daily lives, for example, using social media applications for learning. This also accords with Alghameeti's (2022) study. The author aimed to investigate the attitudes of Saudi secondary school learners toward using TikTok videos for English vocabulary learning and vocabulary expansion. Students reported that TikTok contributed significantly to improving their English vocabulary because it provided different levels of vocabulary (Alghameeti, 2022). These results corroborate those of a great number of researchers (Rahmawati & Anwar, 2022; Erwani et al., 2022; Rahman, 2021; Sofeny et al., 2022). Students prefer TikTok because they believe it is an effective way for learning English vocabulary. Although the current study has a small sample of participants, its findings suggest that most students agree that the use of TikTok increases their chances of expanding their English vocabulary and helps them with using appropriate vocabulary. These findings will be of interest to ESL teachers who want to increase their students' English vocabulary by using a tool that the students are interested in, such as TikTok videos.

The findings also suggest that students' English vocabulary can be increased by using TikTok because most of the participants have a positive perception toward it. Therefore, the results could provide an alternate pedagogical means for language teachers to teach English vocabulary by using TikTok in the classroom.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, only 115 students could be recruited. This was because the researcher was only able to collect data for one week. Second, because the researcher was unable to contact male students, only female participants were included. Third, because of time constraints, the researcher was unable to assess students' perception using a mixed-methods approach and to triangulate the data. This would have achieved stronger, more generalizable, and validated results.

4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Notwithstanding the above limitations, this study contributes to the existing research by showing that most students accept the use of TikTok videos for English vocabulary learning. They have a positive perception toward the use of these videos. However, the following recommendations would help achieve a greater degree of accuracy in the results. First, future research should include a larger number of populations. Larger sample sizes yield more precise mean values with a lower margin of error (Creswell, 2014). The results are also more generalizable. Second, future research should include male participants. Not including all genders would lead to an imbalance, making the results unrepresentative of the entire population (Dickinson et al., 2012). Third, the study should be replicated using a mixed-methods approach. This approach would take advantage of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches' strengths while minimizing their weaknesses (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The use of a mixed-methods approach is also recommended because it would ensure the validity of the results. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of TikTok videos for vocabulary learning. It is suggested that future researchers use experimental or quasi-experimental research designs to test the effectiveness of using TikTok videos as an alternative vocabulary learning tool.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Ethical Considerations

Section 1

This study aims to determine students' perception toward the effects of TikTok on increasing English vocabulary.

Participation

Please understand that your participation in this survey is voluntary and you may, at any time, decline to participate. You may freely decline to answer certain questions with which you may feel uncomfortable.

The benefits

You will not receive any financial benefit from your participation in this research. However, we hope you will feel satisfied in helping us reach our goal of completing this research, which may lead to further progress in how the university deals with any difficulties or challenges in the research area.

Costs

Your participation in this project will cost you nothing.

Risks

There are no risks in participating in this research.

Confidentiality

We will not share your name, IP address, or any information that personally identifies you. We assure you that any information we receive will be held securely and in confidence.

Communication: If you have questions, you can contact us at any time via email at nalshreef0014@stu.kau.edu.sa or hakhadawardi@kau.edu.sa

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

Section 2

Students' perception toward using TikTok for learning English vocabulary

3. The use of TikTok increased my language learning productively.

4. Using TikTok effectively improved my language learning.

5. Learning English language using TikTok is convenient for me.

6. TikTok helped me with my vocabulary retention.

7. TikTok helped my vocabulary usage.

8. I will use TikTok for learning vocabulary in the future.

9. I am excited to use TikTok for vocabulary learning.

10. I use TikTok to share my new vocabulary with my friends.

Section 3

Student's beliefs on the contribution of TikTok videos to English vocabulary expansion

11. Vocabulary learning through TikTok is a fun way of language learning.

12. TikTok is easy to use for vocabulary learning.

13. The use of TikTok increases vocabulary learning chances.

14. TikTok offers varied ways of vocabulary learning.

15. Vocabulary learning through TikTok makes learning attractive.

16. It takes less time to pass on vocabulary-related information through TikTok.

17. Difficulties level are varied in vocabulary learning via TikTok.

18. Learning English vocabulary through TikTok is a good idea.