

Investigating Opportunities and Challenges of Self-Directed Learning Through TikTok: EFL Students' Perception

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Abstract

TikTok has become a prominent social media platform, which is notable for its engaging features that display short and fascinating videos. This study aims to investigate the opportunities and challenges confronted by students using TikTok for self-directed language learning. This research employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis design to systematically explain and directly answer the research questions through in-depth group interviews with eight participants who were EFL students with experiences in self-directed language learning using TikTok. The findings of this study revealed that there are many opportunities presented by TikTok for self-directed language learning, including time efficiency, practical and creative application, and its capability to improve students' English skills through authentic, credible, and memorable lessons. Despite these opportunities, students face several main challenges when using TikTok for language learning, including difficulty in controlling discipline, distraction from irrelevant content, confusion of English accents across videos, and device constraints. This research has significant implications for educators in using TikTok for students' self-directed language learning. By understanding the opportunities and challenges associated with using TikTok, educators can provide effective guidance and support to their learners. Further research should explore strategies to maximize the opportunities in the students' use of TikTok for self-directed English learning and in their selection of language learning content on TikTok.

Keywords: Challenges; ELT; Mobile learning; Opportunities; TikTok

Introduction

Social media offers distinctive functionalities that enable users to enhance their communication. It allows users to engage in immediate communication and enjoy the fascinating material created by other users. Social media has also evolved into a marketplace. Thus, social media has gradually transformed into a versatile platform that caters to all requirements. Social media has emerged as a recent

innovation in English language teaching, facilitating participatory learning in English classes. Several English learning classrooms have benefited from instruction in a casual yet productive setting facilitated by social media (Li, 2017; Rowiyah et al., 2025). The most common social media used in English language learning are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube, with various focused skills (Anggraini, 2022; Ariantini et al., 2021; Krismanto et al., 2022; Nuraini et al., 2020). With three billion active users, Facebook enhances learning, engagement, and academic results by improving vocabulary through group projects and user-friendly learning environments (Ravago et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Twitter and WhatsApp have previously been used to develop students' writing skills (Espinoza-Celi & Pintado, 2020; Syarif & Zaim, 2021). WhatsApp provides four types of messages for learning groups, allowing students to use voice notes for writing, check grammar, and post their completed texts (Krismanto et al., 2022; Syarif & Zaim, 2021). In addition, Instagram and YouTube have been proven to enhance students' speaking skills through interactive online activities, allowing them to comment, provide details, hold discussions, respond, and ask questions (Binmahboob, 2020; Nuraini et al., 2020; R. & Seftika, 2019).

Nowadays, people are having intimate interactions with social media almost all-day life. According to the data from Statiska (2024), the number of social media users in this world in 2024 reached 5,04 billion from the total world population of 8,09 billion. This number shows that social media has become one of the main pillars of modern society. However, slightly different from the conclusion of commonly used social media above, Tan et al. (2024) in their study entitled "Utilising TikTok Features for Speech Communication," investigated the use of TikTok in speech communication enhancement among English students in speaking classrooms. It is aimed at knowing how TikTok features can improve speech communication and examine learners' perceptions after applying the TikTok features to improve their speaking skills. The study was conducted on one hundred students from English as A Second Language (ESL) classrooms through a pre-experimental pre-test and post-test design. They claim that oral communication has always been stressed in the pursuit of English language proficiency because it presents difficulties in the classroom due to reluctance, a lack of enthusiasm, and substantial class sizes that make it difficult for teachers to give individual attention to every student. In addition,

due to the COVID-19 pandemic restricting students from school attendance, pupils are deprived of opportunities to speak English interactively.

TikTok, one of the most popular social media platforms, with a total number of users reaching 1,54 billion in 2024, has experienced unprecedented growth and fundamentally shifted user preferences in the social media landscape. While other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube previously dominated digital engagement, TikTok's unique short-form video format has captured global attention and led to significant migration of users, particularly younger demographics. This meteoric rise has not gone unnoticed in an educational context, as the platform has been used in the teaching and learning processes, and the impact of using TikTok has been investigated (Annur, 2024; Bernard, 2021; Rowiyah, 2024). TikTok is defined as a social networking platform that is designed to allow its users to share short videos (B et al., 2023). This application is owned and operated by ByteDance. Tan et al. (2024) do not define TikTok by its meaning, yet its function defines it as an English learning platform over time. The features available in the TikTok application are purposed to support the aesthetic creation of videos and engage interactions among users, such as filters, edit clips, duets, TikTok sounds, voiceover, stitch, and TikTok live (Keenan, 2023). According to user experiences of previous researchers, such as Yang (2020), it is found that the users of TikTok are more likely to create and publish material on the site than they are on other platforms by duplicating, replicating, and mimicking the work of others.

Tan et al. (2024) present the influence of incorporating TikTok into speech communication and analyze ESL TikTok's functionalities based on learners' perceptions. The process of implementing TikTok involves creating material for conversational communication. People can review their recordings, find mistakes, and reshoot their videos as many times as necessary until they get results that they are happy with. In so doing, Tan et al. (2024) found that all of the research participants agree that TikTok has a beneficial influence, boosts students' motivation and confidence, and encourages positive attitudes supported by relevant previous studies (Manggo et al., 2022; Yang 2020). However, the study does not seem to completely meet the research objectives since the result focuses more on the effectiveness of evidence gained from tests and students' perception rather than the TikTok features elevating the spoken communication variable.

Tan et al. (2024) categorize the TikTok use in language teaching as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). It is described as utilizing mobile devices to support language acquisition (Octavia et al., 2019; Putra et al., 2020; H. Yang, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, MALL has become a crucial substitute for traditional teaching and learning methods. Furthermore, Tan et al. (2024) describe briefly in part of the literature review that in its application, students can make quick films with TikTok's main features and collaborate on duets with other users' videos. One major advantage is that they can practice speaking and communicating effectively in their spare time. This is accomplished by offering content production services for spoken communication. They can also watch back over their recordings to find mistakes and reshoot as many times as necessary until they get the expected results. It indicates that the concept applied in the learning process is short-form content that emerges from the student's creation. Since the study used pre-test and post-test design, in the part of data collection, Tan et al. (2024) explain the pre-activities and post-activities of the TikTok application concisely.

This article discusses Tan et al.'s (2024) research report on the effectiveness of utilizing TikTok in improving speech communication. The research used speaking rubrics and questionnaires to gather data and correlated the findings with Indonesian contexts. This study has found several areas of research that have not been adequately addressed. Primarily, a dearth of studies specifically examines the application of TikTok, which elucidates the rationale behind its effectiveness. Furthermore, there is a dearth of extensive research examining the obstacles associated with using TikTok, particularly in English classes in Indonesia, which may vary from those in other nations. Prior studies mostly focused on analyzing the outcomes before and after treatment and presented the results as evidence of their efficacy. This study aims to fill the existing research gaps by providing useful insights on effectively using social media in English classes. The goal is to enhance student involvement and ultimately enhance learning results. The present study aims to investigate the students' assessment of the opportunities and challenges associated with the usage of TikTok for self-directed learning in English classrooms within the Indonesian environment.

This study investigates the challenges that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face when utilizing TikTok as a tool for self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is defined as the process in which individuals take responsibility and initiative

for their learning process, including diagnosing the learning needs, designing the learning plan, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating their learning results, with or without others' help (Charokar & Dulloo, 2022). It will also highlight the opportunities that students obtain from utilizing the TikTok application for self-directed learning using the framework developed by Tan et al. (2024). The present study is particularly positioned to address the identified gaps in the Indonesian context for several reasons. First, Indonesia has a unique linguistic landscape where students navigate between Bahasa Indonesia, regional languages, and English, creating distinct challenges and opportunities that differ from monolingual or other multilingual contexts studied elsewhere. Besides, Indonesia's diverse socioeconomic conditions and various levels of digital literacy among students provide a rich context for understanding how TikTok's accessibility and user-friendly interface can democratize language learning opportunities. This study provides recommendations to educators who want to utilize social media platforms especially TikTok to proactively identify and optimize its educational potential while being aware of any potential concerns. The following research questions are formulated to provide guidance for the implementation of the investigation:

1. How do EFL students perceive the opportunities presented by TikTok for enhancing their language skills?
2. What are the challenges faced by EFL students when engaging in self-directed language learning through TikTok?

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative methods, particularly an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore and understand students' experiences, perspectives, and meaning-making regarding self-directed language learning through TikTok. IPA is particularly suited for this research as it seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Willig & Rogers, 2017). The primary objective was to investigate how EFL students experience, interpret, and make sense of the challenges and opportunities presented by the implementation of TikTok for self-directed learning. Here, we engaged closely with participants to bridge any gap between the researchers and the subjects studied. Multiple forms of data were collected to

ensure a comprehensive understanding and credibility through triangulation, consistent with qualitative research practices that include gathering documents, audiovisual materials, observations, interviews, and images (Creswell, 2012). The data were collected through recorded semi-structured group interviews in the form of interview transcripts, observation notes documenting participants' interactions and responses during interviews, and results of document analysis involving review of participants' TikTok usage patterns and self-directed learning materials when voluntarily shared.

The participants of this research were eight EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners who had experienced using TikTok for self-directed learning. The number of participants aligns with IPA's recommendation of 3-10 participants, allowing for detailed idiographic analysis while maintaining manageability (J. A. Smith et al., 2013). We employed a purposive homogeneous sampling method to recruit participants who share the phenomenon of interest, while maintaining sufficient homogeneity to examine convergence and divergence in their experiences. The detailed selection criteria included duration of TikTok usage, where students must engage in self-directed English learning using TikTok for at least 12 months to ensure substantial experience and meaningful insights, EFL learner status ensuring all participants were non-native English speakers learning English as a foreign language, educational level requiring students currently enrolled in university-level English programs or courses, age range of participants aged 18-30 years to ensure homogeneity in digital literacy and social media familiarity, voluntary participation from students who willingly agreed to share their experiences and had no reservations about discussing their learning practices, and experiential diversity including participants with varying focuses such as speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening to capture comprehensive perspectives.

We then conducted semi-structured interviews with a specific group of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. We opted to arrange interviews in groups to gather students' viewpoints and shared experiences, as well as to identify any disparities or commonalities in opinions among the participants. The names of participants are written in pseudonyms to address ethical considerations in scientific research. These group interviews aimed to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information regarding the students' perspectives on self-directed learning using TikTok. A comprehensive interview guide was created, consisting of open-ended

questions that encompass several aspects, including the students' experiences, encountered difficulties, perceived advantages, and general perspectives regarding the utilization of TikTok for self-directed learning.

In order to examine the data, we followed the systematic IPA analytical framework proposed by Smith et al. (2022). This approach involves several stages of analysis, beginning with immersive reading of transcription, followed by detailed line-by-line annotation, capturing descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual insights. These notes were then distilled into emergent themes, which were organized through pattern recognition methods like abstraction and subsumption. Each case or theme was analyzed independently to preserve idiographic focus, and finally, cross-case patterns were identified to highlight commonalities while honoring individual differences. The credibility was established through the triangulation of multiple data sources and methods; the transferability was ensured through the thick description of participants, context, and findings; the dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures; and confirmability was achieved through reflexive journaling and multiple researchers' involvement in the analysis. Ultimately, the research findings were confirmed through thorough research implementation and triangulation methods. The study techniques were methodically divided into three phases: planning, application (data gathering, analysis, conclusion, and suggestions), and reporting the findings.

In analyzing interview data, initial codes were generated through line-by-line coding, focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to TikTok use for self-directed language learning. A total of 39 initial codes were identified across research questions, which were then refined through constant comparative analysis into focused codes. For the first research question, regarding opportunities, 15 focused codes emerged and were consolidated into 7 main categories. For the second research question, 12 focused codes were identified and consolidated into 5 main categories.

Furthermore, to ensure reliability and validity, statements from at least two participants support all codes. The responses were cross-referenced across participants, and the coding process was reviewed by other researchers. The key findings were validated by three participants. This rigorous analytical process ensured that the identified themes represent genuine, shared experiences among participants rather than isolated individual opinions.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings of the study were directed to provide answers to the two research questions covering the EFL students' perceptions of the experience in using TikTok and their admitted challenges in using TikTok.

EFL students' perception of the opportunities presented by TikTok for enhancing their language skills

Based on the interviews conducted with the students, we have uncovered information about the opportunities presented by TikTok to improve English language abilities. The analysis revealed seven primary themes of opportunities that students identified for using TikTok as a tool for self-directed English language learning. Each opportunity was consistently mentioned across multiple participants, demonstrating robust triangulation of findings. One of the opportunities is time efficiency in language learning from the native speaker, since TikTok presents short videos that directly focus on the main points of the material users want to convey. This theme emerged from statements by multiple participants.

"I think, when I do not have much time for learning, I prefer opening TikTok compared with other social media because besides it is more interesting, I can also get directly what I need to know." (Student 2)

"I do agree that TikTok is worthy of its efficiency and fun." (Student 1)

"The short duration of video really helps me when I have a few minutes of rest time." (Student 4)

Some participants discovered that TikTok also offers chances to share more comprehensive perspectives, particularly in the realm of English conversation. The phenomenon is that the English videos on TikTok organically arise with comparable subjects from various video producers worldwide. It enables the students to immerse themselves in the authentic English language without real-life interaction. This theme was particularly strong, with participants noting exposure to different English accents and cultural contexts.

"TikTok has provided me with numerous wonderful experiences due to the wide range of English content that appears on 'fyp'. For example, suppose we access content with a British accent. In that case, we will be immediately offered video content with various accents, particularly for slangs and casual languages rarely taught in schools." (Student 2)

"TikTok allows me to easily obtain English movie trailers from many speakers and acquire the pragmatics from them. For instance, I learned that Americans are more willing to express their feelings through explicit verbal communication than the people in the UK, although both of them are native English speakers." (Student 3)

Concurrently, other students also emphasized the potential of TikTok in language learning, citing its convenient accessibility and practical application. The TikTok application is specifically tailored for young individuals seeking a balance between simplicity and sophistication. In addition, the instructional materials viewed on TikTok will be more memorable because of TikTok's interactive capabilities and algorithmic elements that align with previously consumed content.

"I am of the Z generation, and I believe TikTok is well-suited to my generation because it has user-friendly and interesting features such as trending videos on the homepage called "fyp," suggested videos, a search bar, and, most importantly, the "duet" and "stitch" features, which allow me to collaborate with other users to create videos." (Student 6)

The student added,

"Meanwhile, watching videos of learning English on TikTok is more memorable since after watching specific English content, I get suggestions for related videos on my homepage." (Student 6)

"The application records what I want to study and shows me more of that content." (Student 8)

Moreover, TikTok not only serves as a source of entertainment but also motivates students to enhance their learning through the English video snippets they watch. Five participants discussed how TikTok increased their motivation to learn English, making it the most consistently reported benefit across all participants.

"TikTok helps me learn numerous informal languages from movie trailers. Aside from that, watching snippets of videos from podcasts, public speaking, or movies motivates me since I am anxious to repeat what they say in the video, which increases my confidence in speaking English." (Student 3)

"I do agree with Student 3 regarding this case, motivation comes from enjoyable learning." (Student 4)

"When I practice performing on TikTok and editing my video there, I am seriously motivated." (Student 5)

When queried regarding the specific English skill most amenable to enhancement through self-directed learning via TikTok, all eight participants concurred that TikTok particularly supports speaking skill development, although they noted individual variations in which skills benefited most. TikTok is more conducive to the development of productive skills because of its content and features.

"Based on my experience, I enjoy watching videos about horror stories from English movies since they provide me with a wealth of unusual vocabulary for retelling the event. As a result, I believe TikTok encourages productive skills, particularly speaking." (Student 7)

"In my opinion, the most effective ways to develop English skills with TikTok are unique to each individual. Users are more frequently exposed to English videos, which for me enhances listening, vocabulary, and speaking." (Student 5)

"For me, it's more about the insight of speaking, because the types of English that usually appear on FYP are various. For example, the content suddenly switches to a British accent, then to another one. So, it feels like it is more varied in terms of exposure to English in those aspects." (Student 2)

Most students are also able to find trusted TikTok videos easily by tracking the user account. It means that the material that they serve in the videos is as original as in the English books. They mentioned the availability of trustworthy educational content from verified educators and institutions.

"TikTok video content is trustworthy because we can simply locate users who are institutions or experts and then follow all of their videos." (Student 3)

"There are many actual teachers on TikTok who post educational content." (Student 4)

The final advantageous aspect of utilizing TikTok for self-directed English study is its prevalent live streaming feature, which enables students to engage in real-time learning with specific specialists and pose follow-up questions, much like a public online class.

"What is currently going viral is a live broadcast teaching English on TikTok. I regularly see it used to teach TOEFL. It is quite beneficial, and many people are watching. As such, it functions similarly to a free online course." (Student 2)

"Yeah, that is it. I often see the live streaming as well." (Student 8)

The aforementioned interview findings substantiate the conclusion that TikTok presents several advantages, including time efficiency, extensive and authentic language exposures, practical application and user-friendly features, enhanced learning motivation, skill development, reliable educational context, and real-time learning opportunities. We have included essential information about the opportunities available to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students engaged in self-directed language learning through TikTok to enhance the reader's understanding of the interview results. The summary of the opportunities presented by TikTok is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The opportunities presented by TikTok when engaging in self-directed language learning through TikTok

Code of Opportunities	Participant	Representative Quote
Time Efficiency	Student 2	"When I do not have much time for learning, I prefer opening TikTok

	Student 1	compared with other social media."
	Student 4	"I do agree that TikTok is worthy for its efficiency and fun." "The short duration of video really helps me when I have a few minutes of rest time."
Extensive and authentic language exposures	Student 2	"TikTok has provided me with numerous wonderful experiences due to the wide range of English content that appears on "fyp."
	Student 3	"...I learned that Americans are more willing to express their feelings through explicit verbal communication..."
Practical application and user-friendly features	Student 6	"I believe TikTok is well-suited to my generation because it has user-friendly and interesting features." "...after watching a specific English content, I get suggestions for related videos."
	Student 8	"The application records what I want to study and shows me more of that content."
Enhanced learning motivation	Student 3	"...watching snippets of videos from podcasts, public speaking, or movies motivates me since I am anxious to repeat what they say in the video..."
	Student 4	"I do agree with Student 3 regarding this case, and motivation comes from enjoyable learning."
	Student 5	"When I practice performing on TikTok and editing my video there, I

		am seriously motivated."
Targeted skill development	Student 5	"Users are more frequently exposed to English videos, which for me enhances listening, vocabulary, and speaking."
	Student 7	"TikTok, in my opinion, is an excellent tool for enhancing your speaking skills."
	Student 2	"..., it's more about the insight of speaking, because the types of English that usually appear on FYP are various."
Reliable educational context	Student 3	"The TikTok video content is trustworthy because we can simply locate users who are institutions or experts."
	Student 4	"...many actual teachers on TikTok who post educational content."
Real-time learning opportunities	Student 2	"What is currently going viral is a live broadcast teaching English on TikTok."
	Student 8	"Yeah, that's it. I often see the live streaming as well."

The challenges faced by EFL students when engaging in self-directed language learning through TikTok

Based on the results of the interviews, the analysis identified five primary challenges that the participants found while utilizing TikTok in self-directed learning. One of them is the risk of overusing because they sometimes unconsciously scroll through content unrelated to English language learning. Seven participants agreed that this was the most significant challenge, describing how entertainment content often distracts from educational objectives.

"In my opinion, the use of TikTok for self-directed learning has challenges in leading the students into overuse; it is because the students cannot control themselves to keep studying and using TikTok for entertainment only." (Student 3)

"For me, the challenge is dealing with random videos on the TikTok homepage. Although I do not intend to watch the content, it bothers my focus in looking for videos for English learning only." (Student 2)

"I started with learning videos but ended up watching funny content." (Student 4)

Besides that, a student who has experienced self-directed learning based on the teacher's instruction expresses his intention to open TikTok content other than what was instructed by the teacher, although the teacher had provided a link to access a particular video. Four participants reported the obstacle of maintaining concentration on a specific type of TikTok content or English educational material, as there are additional equally captivating videos available.

"Once, when my teacher instructed me to learn from a TikTok video by providing a link to click, I was interested in checking another video after watching the video as instructed. This activity requires strong self-awareness." (Student 3)

"I found it difficult to stay focused when studying English from TikTok. Although there are many educational videos about English on TikTok, there are also many entertaining videos when we scroll down the TikTok homepage. When I scroll and watch one of the videos, I am interested in scrolling down and seeing more videos. As a result, I often forget what I wanted to search for before." (Student 4)

"I have different ways to avoid any distractions ... Since I have two phones, I created two TikTok accounts; one account is for studying English, and the other is for entertainment. It helps me a lot to keep my focus." (Student 1)

On the contrary, besides the challenges from the student's condition, there is also a challenge from the TikTok content itself. Since TikTok users are various from all over the world, they have different English accents.

"Since the TikTok users are from various countries and are from various age groups, I have little difficulty distinguishing the accents that are different for each user. For instance, Australians and Americans speak differently. The variety of ages also influences the language they use since each generation has a particular slang to say. I am struggling with this case by checking the video description before watching to know whether the speaker speaks in a British or American accent." (Student 1)

"Sometimes I can't understand quickly if someone has a very strong accent." (Student 6)

Besides the substantial challenges, technical challenges exist as well. This is the constraint of the devices possessed by certain students.

"I have a challenge with my phone since it is an Android with low-capacity RAM. When my RAM is running out, my TikTok usually freezes, and I need to clear the space of phone memory to maintain my TikTok working smoothly." (Student 4)

"The internet connection in my boarding house sometimes makes TikTok videos load slowly." (Student 5)

The above-stated findings of the interview justify the conclusion that utilizing TikTok for self-directed English learning presents multiple challenges that the students encounter, including the struggle to control their discipline and risk of overuse, being

distracted from irrelevant content, and the attempt to find videos with a consistent English accent. Additionally, students struggle with specific device constraints. This implies that each person will significantly influence TikTok usage control. To facilitate the reader's comprehension of the interview outcome, we have incorporated crucial information regarding the challenges encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students while participating in self-directed language learning using TikTok. The summary of the challenges presented by TikTok is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Challenges faced by EFL students when engaging in self-directed language learning through TikTok

Code of Challenges	Participant	Representative Quote
Risk of overuse	Student 3	"It is because the students cannot control themselves to keep studying and using TikTok for entertainment only."
	Student 2	"Although I do not intend to watch the content, it bothers my focus on looking for videos for English learning only."
	Student 4	"I started with learning videos but ended up watching funny content."
Distraction of irrelevant content	Student 2	"For me, the challenge is dealing with random videos on the TikTok homepage."
	Student 3	"...I was interested in checking another video after watching the video as instructed..."
	Student 4	"I am interested in scrolling down and seeing more videos. As a result, I often forget what I want to search before."
	Student 1	"I have different ways to avoid any distractions..."
Various English accents	Student 1	"I have little difficulty distinguishing

	Student 6	the accents that are different for each user." "I can't understand quickly if someone has a very strong accent."
Device constraint	Student 4	"When my RAM is running out, my TikTok usually freezes, and I need to clear the space of phone memory."
	Student 5	"The internet connection in my boarding house sometimes makes TikTok videos load slowly."

According to the participants, the primary challenge students encounter in self-directed language learning is managing the capacity to self-restrain from watching videos unrelated to language learning, as TikTok offers many captivating videos for its users. Overcoming the obstacles necessitates the students possessing sufficient maturity and self-awareness. Hence, this learning method is suitable for those with maturity in discipline and time management.

Discussion

The opportunities of self-directed language learning through TikTok

We employed a group interview, in the form of a focused group discussion, as the instrument to address the first research question regarding the opportunities for self-directed language learning through TikTok. The FGD results reveal that EFL students perceive TikTok as offering numerous opportunities for enhancing their language skills. The most prominent opportunity identified is time efficiency, which aligns with the platform's design of short-form content. This finding is in line with previous research by Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2023), who discovered that short-form videos on TikTok or similar social media can provide efficient and engaging language learning experiences. Tan et al. (2024) add that the reason students utilize TikTok is its short and engaging videos. However, while Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) found that TikTok fosters students to gain new English words, the current research suggests that students find TikTok very beneficial for improving speaking skills as well as real-world exposure to various accents and informal language use. This perspective extension on TikTok's potential is in accordance with findings by Hu and

Du (2022) on TikTok's capacity to expose learners to authentic and contextual language use.

The present study also reveals TikTok's strength in providing extensive and authentic language exposure to linguistics and culture, which students find particularly valuable. It strengthens what has been stated by Smith (2017) in his study that social media platforms can introduce their users to rich sociocultural contexts for language learning. TikTok utilization in self-directed learning provides pupils with the opportunity to regulate their learning schedules. Supriyono et al's. (2024) findings indicate that the online environment facilitates students in showcasing the utility of technology, motivating them to enhance their self-regulation skills during their learning experiences. Nevertheless, the current results emphasize TikTok's unique features, such as "fyp" or trending videos, duets, and stitch, as well as a live streaming feature that provides personalized content and real-time interaction. These aspects were not mainly discussed in previous studies, and suggest that the TikTok platform may offer noticeable opportunities among other social media platforms in language learning facilities.

Interestingly, the participants in this study generally see TikTok as a credible source of language learning content, in which this context is opposite to the concern about content quality and reliability in previous studies. For instance, Maretha and Anggoro (2022) and Xue and Churchill (2022) noticed the potential for misinformation and inaccurate language models on social media platforms. The present study suggests that students have developed strategies for selecting and identifying trustworthy content creators by following official or institutional accounts and recognized experts. This part demonstrates that it is necessary to conduct more research on how EFL learners navigate and evaluate the reliability of language learning content on social media platforms like TikTok and how this ability can be fostered to maximize the benefits of self-directed learning through social media.

The challenges of self-directed language learning through TikTok

The research findings indicate that EFL students encountered multiple challenges while engaging in self-directed learning via TikTok. Focused group discussions were employed for the interviews to achieve the purpose of this research. One of the challenges is its potential for overuse caused by the enjoyment of operating social media. It is in line with the results of research by Tan et al. (2024) that although TikTok minimizes students' attempts by watching short videos, the absence

of exertion leads to the students' tendency to access this kind of social media continuously. In addition, in relation to the second challenge, students are also often distracted by random content emerging on the TikTok homepage. The TikTok feature displays the next videos automatically. This can be beneficial when the user needs it, but it can be harmful when the students who first want to access educational content are exposed to irrelevant entertainment. As a result, the students also struggle to focus and sustain concentration, which becomes the next challenge.

The condition is similar to what has been observed by Lin et al. (2023) that other videos on TikTok can distract the students' learning concentration. When the students create a video for an assignment on TikTok, they cannot concentrate well. López-Carril et al. (2024) highlight several risks of TikTok use in their study, including the possibility of addiction and mental health disorders. Meanwhile, Godwin-Jones (2019) observes that "time spent on social media does not necessarily equate to time spent on language learning". The findings indicate that TikTok's algorithm and the continuous flow of "for you page" movies provide specific issues in this context. In addition, Ahmed (2016) warns that although social media can offer essential and authentic language input, learners may find it challenging to maintain focus due to the abundance of interesting content. Ultimately, the challenges in sustaining attention noted by participants reflect McCarthy et al.'s (2020) assertion that "the very features that make social media appealing for language learners, such as their immediacy and perpetual novelty, can also result in superficial engagement." To harness the advantages of TikTok for language acquisition, children may require assistance in cultivating self-regulation methods.

The next challenges EFL students face during self-directed learning through TikTok encompass the various English dialects encountered. The problem of various English accents in TikTok content corresponds with previous studies regarding the problems overcome by students in implementing TikTok as a learning speaking medium. This finding is different from the study of Maretha and Anggoro (2022), who discovered that the drawbacks of using TikTok are related to privacy issues, which lead users to suffer cyberbullying, threats, and harassment. However, the study also adds that TikTok is known as a worldwide social app supporting various English accents, as stated by the findings above. The observation that variations in English dialects among TikTok video providers posed difficulties for certain learners is significant. Although exposure to various accents can enhance listening

comprehension skills (Gao & Hanna, 2016), learners may require assistance in effectively managing this variety. Despite this, Smith (2017) posits that specific education in accent variance and skills for managing unfamiliar accents might enhance learners' engagement with realistic hearing material.

The device and network issues are the last challenges for the students' self-directed language learning through TikTok. Since TikTok content is videos, the cellphone's signal speed and Random-Access memory (RAM) capacity significantly affect the smooth access to social media. The affordability and pace of the Internet significantly influence the implementation of online learning (Irdianto et al., 2023). However, it is stated by Tan et al. (2024) the technology TikTok uses in language learning, part of the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) approach, is supported by the current 4G technology, which offers 12,000 times faster data transmission speeds than 2G. This demonstrates how far mobile technology has advanced to the point where it can help with language acquisition.

The findings support the potential of TikTok as a language-learning instrument while also emphasizing the necessity of learner instruction and direction for effective participation. Hartung et al. (2023) contends that the effective use of TikTok social media for language learning necessitates an understanding of the platforms and an awareness of learners' objectives, strategies, and obstacles. Language educators should, therefore, contemplate ways to facilitate students' self-directed learning through TikTok to address the issues revealed in this study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities and challenges faced by language learners regarding self-directed learning through TikTok among EFL students. These include quick learning, access to genuine and diversified linguistic content, increased motivation, and cultivating several language abilities, especially speaking. Nonetheless, several challenges could disturb these opportunities, such as the potential for overuse, the distraction of extra content causing a loss of focus, confusion with various English accents, and particular device limitations. With a video-short format, personalized content algorithms, and creatives like live streaming built-in inherently provide a collaborative learning environment. Instead, the study underscores the need to develop strategies that help maximize TikTok's opportunities to acquire a new language while reducing its challenges. For instance, one

practical strategy that emerged from the participants' experiences involves creating separate TikTok accounts: one dedicated exclusively to English learning content and another for entertainment purposes. This approach helps maintain focus on educational objectives while still enjoying the platform's recreational benefits. While TikTok may be a valuable tool for self-study in language acquisition, it requires learners to have some level of digital literacy, self-regulation, and the skills necessary to evaluate content critically. This is where, paradoxically, perceptions of production on platforms such as TikTok should be integrated more into a nuanced approach to language learning.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting its findings. The study examined a small sample of eight EFL students in Indonesia, which could limit the findings' generalizability to other cultural or educational settings. A broader and more diverse sample might provide better insights. Second, this study relied on students' self-reporting their perceptions and may be subject to biases or errors. Possibly, this analysis of non-experimental data, based on observable outcomes or quantifiable language learning metrics, will provide other useful insights. This would emphasize a need for more work examining this in-depth to offer possible solutions by navigating around these limitations of the study and research on TikTok's EFL language acquisition role. It remains open to future research on content validation and quality assurance strategies for learning-related video content, particularly posted on the TikTok platform. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies are also necessary to understand how the challenges and opportunities of using TikTok for language learning might vary between cultures.

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