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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF VIRAL TIKTOK ENGLISH SONGS AS EFL VOCABULARY LEARNING PLATFORM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of viral TikTok English songs as a tool for vocabulary learning. In today's digital era, social media platforms such as TikTok have become a part of students' daily lives and offer new possibilities for integrating entertainment into education. Viral English songs on TikTok are often catchy and memorable, making them potential media for improving students' vocabulary acquisition in an enjoyable way. This research used a quantitative descriptive survey involving 52 English Education students at Universitas Negeri Semarang, selected through a pre-survey screening to ensure they were active TikTok users familiar with viral English songs. A 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire measured three aspects which are students' engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and perceptions of TikTok as a learning tool. The data were analyzed through reverse coding of negative items, reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, and descriptive statistics. The results show that students were highly engaged with TikTok English songs and reported meaningful vocabulary gains supported by repeated and contextual audiovisual exposure. Students also showed positive attitudes toward TikTok, finding it enjoyable and useful for learning, which aligns with theories of comprehensible input, multimedia learning, and the Technology Acceptance Model. Overall, the study suggests that viral TikTok English songs can function as an effective supplementary tool for increasing engagement and supporting vocabulary learning in EFL settings.

Keywords: TikTok, viral English songs, vocabulary learning, students' perceptions, EFL

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) continues to evolve as more and more students are surrounded by technology. One of the most urgent challenges is finding innovative and engaging ways to teach vocabulary, which is still a crucial aspect of language proficiency. Traditional methods of vocabulary learning, although useful for retention, are often repetitive and fail to maintain student interest. This concern is supported by Fengyu's (2023) findings, which explain that although conventional approaches can improve vocabulary retention, they are often less effective in improving actual vocabulary usage. Due to these limitations, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of using viral English songs on TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool, combining entertainment with education to create a more engaging learning experience.

TikTok, a popular social media platform known for its short and visually engaging videos, already has a significant influence on young people around the world. It supported by Pratiwi, et al., (2021) that shows if English education students at Suryakancana University improved their pronunciation skills by using TikTok, which highlights the potential of this platform in supporting language learning. This implies that TikTok videos can positively contribute to vocabulary and overall linguistic development for students. English songs, especially the viral one, are often featured in TikTok content because they are catchy, memorable, and widely popular. As pointed out by Yükselir and Kömür in Rahmawati and Anwar, cited by Budiartha and Akmar (2024), TikTok's short video format is effective for sharing information in a fun and visually appealing way. Since many users include viral songs in their short content, this provides an opportunity for students to be exposed to English vocabulary naturally. By analyzing this trend, this study aims to understand whether viral English songs on TikTok can enhance vocabulary learning and make the process more enjoyable for EFL students.

Previous studies have also shown that music can significantly improve memory and language performance. It supported by Nguyen and Grahn (2017) found that music that matches the cognitive abilities of learners can improve retention in language tasks. Viral TikTok songs, which are often characterized by repetitive and memorable lyrics, offer potential as effective vocabulary learning platforms. Similarly, Nie, et al., (2022) found that repeatedly listening to English songs can help improve students' vocabulary mastery. Thus, these findings suggest that music-based learning can create a more enjoyable and efficient experience, allowing students to remember new vocabulary more easily.

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Viral songs on TikTok have become a global phenomenon, reaching a level of popularity that extends beyond the platform limits. Many viral songs are used as background music for various types of creative content, such as dance challenges, lip-syncing, educational videos, and short sketches. These songs often address themes that are relevant to teenagers, such as love, friendship, and everyday experiences. As a result, viral TikTok songs not only entertain young users but also expose them to meaningful language. This is supported by research from Maharani and Nurharini (2024), which found a significant relationship between TikTok usage, project-based learning models, and music learning outcomes, with a correlation of 0.408 and a coefficient of determination of 16.6%. Furthermore, the use of viral songs in creative videos can allow students to connect new vocabulary with contextual meaning, which is helping them understand words more deeply through related visuals and situations.

Generation Z, the most active internet population, which especially loves viral content. Growing up with platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, they usually prefer media that is easy to understand, interesting, and short. Viral trends which is including dance challenges and popular songs, attract their attention and shape their preferences in entertainment, lifestyle, and even learning. Their interest in trending content can be used in an educational context. By integrating vocabulary learning with viral TikTok songs, teachers can create experiences that feel relevant and motivating for Generation Z students. Findings from Vizcaya-Moreno and Pérez-Cañaveras (2020) support this by showing that most people in this generation consider themselves active technology users and are highly engaged with digital media.

Understanding student perceptions is crucial when assessing the effectiveness of learning platforms. If students consider viral TikTok songs useful for vocabulary development, this indicates a high potential for engagement that can be integrated into classroom practice. It supported by Fitriani and Masykuroh (2023) findings that 86.2% of students agreed that TikTok facilitates vocabulary learning, while 70.5% felt that it increases the enjoyment of learning. Additionally, Bahri et al. (2022), as cited by Fitriani and Masykuroh (2023), explained that TikTok provides fun and engaging English learning materials. These findings show that TikTok can serve as a highly engaging learning platform, allowing students to access real-world vocabulary through interesting content.

Considering this context, this study aims to fill a research gap. Although many studies have explored TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool, only a few have focused specifically on how viral English songs affect students' vocabulary acquisition in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This highlights the importance of this study, not only to understand the effectiveness of TikTok-based vocabulary

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learning but also to contribute to the development of more engaging and innovative vocabulary teaching methods.

Previous studies have found that using songs has an effective impact in vocabulary teaching. For example, Ilinawati and Dharma (2018) found the impact of English songs on vocabulary development among first-semester students at STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa Sintang. Using classroom action research with qualitative data, such as field notes, tests, and observations, they found a significant increase in vocabulary, with an average score of 80.25, which is categorized as good. Students also showed higher levels of engagement during lessons, indicating that songs serve as an effective medium for vocabulary learning. Similarly, Gushendra (2017) conducted an experimental study and showed that the experimental class that used English songs achieved a significantly higher average score of 82.25 compared to the control class's score of 63.25. These results imply that English songs can effectively improve vocabulary mastery.

Additional evidence comes from studies that integrate TikTok songs into vocabulary learning. Pratama & Susanti (2024) investigated how English song lyrics on TikTok affect vocabulary mastery among 11th grade students. Using a pre-test and post-test design, they found a significant improvement, with the average score rising from 68.38 to 81.67. The significance of the results indicates that TikTok has a positive impact on vocabulary learning. Similarly, Alghameeti (2022) explored Saudi high school students' attitudes toward using TikTok for vocabulary learning and found that participants responded positively to the use of TikTok videos as a learning tool. Besides, Rama, et al., (2023) found similar results, showing that TikTok-based learning led to positive attitudes toward vocabulary development among high school students in Bandar Lampung.

To fully understanding how learning platforms affect students, it is important to analyze perceptions, how individuals interpret information through their senses. As explained by Qiong (2017), perception involves the mental process through which people understand what they see, hear, or experience. Because perception shapes student engagement and motivation, understanding how they view TikTok as a learning tool helps researchers and educators design more effective instructional strategies. By aligning learning materials with the way students naturally perceive digital content, the learning experience becomes more meaningful and impactful.

Several previous studies have shown that both traditional English songs and TikTok-based songs effectively enhance vocabulary learning. Research by Ilinawati & Dharma (2018), Gushendra (2017), Pratama & Susanti (2024), and Rama et al. (2023)

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have consistently shown improvements in vocabulary mastery and student engagement. Although these studies have similar conclusions, they differ in focus, participant groups, and methodology. Some examined traditional English songs, while others focused on TikTok music; some involved university students, while others targeted middle or high school students; some used surveys, while others used test-based evidence. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Alghameeti and Rama et al., also emphasize students' attitudes and perceptions of TikTok as a learning tool.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that although many studies have explored the effectiveness of English songs and TikTok for vocabulary learning, there is still limited research that specifically explores students' perceptions of viral English TikTok songs as a vocabulary learning tool. To address this gap, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how students view the role of TikTok in vocabulary learning and how these perceptions relate to their engagement and vocabulary mastery.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative descriptive survey method to investigate students' perceptions of using viral TikTok English songs as a vocabulary learning tool in EFL contexts. This approach was chosen by the researcher because it collects measurable and structured data related to students' experiences, engagement, and views toward the learning tool being examined. According to Creswell (2014), Quantitative research involves gathering and analyzing numbers to test hypotheses or answer questions using statistics. Thus, it is ideal for identifying trends and relationships.

Participant

The participants of this study were 52 students from the English Education Department at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES). A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that only students who met the inclusion criteria were selected. The criteria included: (1) being an active TikTok user, (2) frequently listening to viral English songs on TikTok, and (3) being willing to participate.

The data collection was carried out in two steps: a pre-survey and the main survey. The pre-survey served as a screening process to confirm students' TikTok activity and their exposure to viral English songs. Only students who met the criteria were allowed to continue to the main questionnaire. This multi-step selection method ensured that the participants had enough experience with TikTok content related to the study. It is supported by Ahmad and Wilkins (2024) that purposive sampling and clear screening criteria are important in qualitative research to ensure that participants' experiences align with the study focus and that findings meaningfully address the research

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questions.

Instruments and Materials

The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 15 items measured using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms and shared with participants via WhatsApp to make the process simple and accessible. Two forms were used: the pre-survey and the main questionnaire. The pre-survey included close-ended questions designed to identify participants' TikTok usage and their familiarity with viral English songs. The main questionnaire asked about three main aspects: (1) students' engagement with TikTok English songs, (2) vocabulary learning and acquisition from repeated exposure, and (3) perceptions of TikTok as a learning tool. All responses were automatically saved in Google Forms to ensure accuracy, consistency, and easier data organization.

Table 1. Specification of the Questionnaire

No	Aspect	Item Numbers	Total Items
1	Students' Engagement	1-5	5
2	Vocabulary Acquisition	6-10	5
3	Perception of TikTok as a Learning Tool	11-15	5

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Variables

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement
Students' Engagement	Students' involvement and attention toward viral TikTok English songs	Interest, attention, frequency, involvement	Likert scale (1–5)
Vocabulary Acquisition	Students' ability to learn new vocabulary from TikTok songs	Understanding, recall, recognition from repetition	Likert scale (1–5)
Perception Toward TikTok	Students' attitudes about the usefulness and relevance of TikTok as a learning tool	Usefulness, ease, motivation	Likert scale (1–5)

Data Preparation

After all responses were collected through Google Forms, the data were downloaded in spreadsheet format. The researcher first checked the entries to ensure they were complete and valid. Numerical scores were then assigned to each Likert-scale response. Since the questionnaire included three negatively worded items, reverse

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coding was applied using the formula (6 – original score). This step made sure that all items measured the constructs in the same direction.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 25. A reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha was performed to examine the internal consistency of each variable. It is aligned with Setyaedhi (2024) that Cronbach's ALpha is a standard formula for reliability testing in questionnaires and tests which provides evidence that the instrument produces consistent results across items.

After confirming reliability, descriptive statistics, which is including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated. These statistics were used to summarize students' engagement, vocabulary learning experiences, and perceptions toward TikTok songs. As Loeb et al., (2017) stated that it is important applying descriptive statistics for identifying patterns and summarizing phenomena in education research. Then, the results were interpreted by connecting them to relevant theories such as comprehensible input, multimedia learning, and the Technology Acceptance Model. This ensured that the findings were not only numerical but also meaningful within the broader EFL learning context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings

Reliability Analysis

To ensure the consistency of the questionnaire's items, the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to calculate for each theme which are Engagement, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Perception.

Table 3. Reliability Coefficient of the Three Theme

Theme	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Students' Engagement	5	0.644
Vocabulary Acquisition	5	0.782
Perception Toward TikTok	5	0.709

The results indicate that all three themes demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency, which is suggesting that the instrument was reliable for

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measuring students' engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and perceptions. It is supported by Taber (2017) that Cronbach's Alpha values in the range of 0.60-0.70 are considered acceptable, which demonstrate sufficient internal consistency.

Students' Engagement

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for five engagement items. The results show that students consistently have high engagement with viral TikTok English songs.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Engagement Items

Code	Item Description	Mean	SD	Category
E1	I enjoy watching TikTok videos that use viral English songs.	4.46	.753	High
E2	I often follow trends or challenges related to English songs on TikTok.	3.77	.983	Moderate
E3	I usually look up the lyrics after hearing them on TikTok.	4.35	.764	High
E4	I spend time re-listening to viral English songs because I like their lyrics.	4.19	.793	High
E5R	I rarely pay attention to the lyrics. (reversed)	4.04	1.009	High

The highest engagement was found in E1 (M = 4.46), which is indicating that students enjoy watching TikTok videos which featuring English songs. Items E3 and E4 also showed that there is a strong behavior engagement, with students frequently searching for lyrics and replaying the songs. The lowest mean was found in E2 (M = 3.77) which mean that following TikTok trends is less universal but still moderately common. Overall, students show high emotional and behavioral engagement with TikTok English songs.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for the vocabulary acquisition items. It found that students have high levels of vocabulary learning attributable to viral TikTok English songs.

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Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary Acquisition

Code	Item Description	Mean	SD	Category
V1	I have learned new English words from viral TikTok songs.	4.42	.605	High
V2	I can remember vocabulary better when I hear it repeatedly in a TikTok song.	4.27	.717	High
V3	TikTok songs help me understand how words are used in real life.	4.04	.766	High
V4	I can use words from TikTok lyrics in my own sentences.	3.90	.748	High
V5R	The words I hear are hard to remember. (reversed)	3.35	1.153	Moderate

The table shows that students strongly agree that TikTok songs help them learn new vocabulary V1 (M = 4.42). Meanwhile repetition from viral sounds also help retention V2 (M = 4.27). In the other hand, contextual understanding (V3) and productive usage (V4) were moderately to highly supported. V5R has the lowest score (3.35) which is indicating that some students still experience difficulty when remembering certain words. Overall, vocabulary acquisition through TikTok is high and meaningful.

Students' Perceptions Toward TikTok as a Learning Platform

Table 6 recorded students perceptions of using TikTok English songs as a vocabulary learning resource. The results show primarily positive perceptions.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Perception Items

Code	Item Description	Mean	SD	Category
P1	Using viral TikTok songs makes learning enjoyable.	4.37	.627	High
P2	TikTok is a useful platform for learning English vocabulary.	4.08	.788	High
P3	I prefer learning vocabulary through TikTok over textbooks.	3.58	1.109	Moderate
P4	I believe teachers could use TikTok to make vocabulary learning more fun.	4.10	.799	High

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P5R	TikTok mostly entertainment (R)		3.21	1.016	Moderate

It found that generally students perceive TikTok as enjoyable P1 (M = 4.37) and useful for vocabulary learning (P2, P4). Students prefer using TikTok over textbooks P (M = 3.58) which is suggesting that TikTok is viewed as a supplement rather than a replacement for vocabulary platforms. P5R (M = 3.21) shows mixes views on TikTok's make the balance between entertainment and learning. Overall, students hold consistently positive perception toward TikTok as a vocabulary learning tool.

Discussion

Students' Engagement

The high levels of engagement found in this study confirm that TikTok English songs serve as an emotionally and behaviorally stimulating learning medium. The strongest indicator of engagement was students' enjoyment in watching TikTok videos containing English songs (E1: M = 4.46). According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004), engagement includes emotional engagement (enjoyment, interest) and behavioral engagement (effort, participation). TikTok's use of fast-paced visuals, trending audio, and interactive features (liking, sharing, challenges) directly enhances both aspects.

The strong behavioral indicators, such as looking up song lyrics (E3: M = 4.35) and re-listening to songs (E4: M = 4.19), which reflect students' learning autonomy, where students take independent initiatives to improve their language input. It is supported by Benson (2011) that explains about autonomy that is the capacity to manage one's learning process which includes making choices about resources and strategies. This explains why students independently replay viral English songs and explore their lyrics without explicit instruction. Moreover, the results support Multimedia Learning Theory (Mayer, 2005), which argues that learners absorb information better when verbal and auditory channels are combined. TikTok videos incorporate both imagery and audio, creating dual-channel learning that increases attention and engagement. This theory explains why learners remain engaged and willingly re-expose themselves to English input through music and video. These findings also align with earlier research by Pratama & Susanti (2024) and Rama et al., (2023), who found that TikTok promotes high emotional involvement among Indonesian EFL learners. Together, these studies indicate that social media-based multimodal input contributes significantly to maintaining student motivation and engagement. Overall, the engagement results confirm that TikTok English songs foster

highly interactive and motivating learning experiences, driven by emotional enjoyment and voluntary behavior aligned with modern engagement theory.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition scores were consistently high, particularly for learning new words (V1: M = 4.42) and remembering vocabulary through repeated exposure (V2: M = 4.27). These findings align strongly with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which states that learners acquire language when exposed to abundant, comprehensible input (i+1). Viral TikTok English songs provide repetitive, authentic input that is accessible to learners at various proficiency levels. Additionally, TikTok supports incidental vocabulary learning, which occurs unintentionally while engaging with a task (Huckin & Coady, 1999). The fact that students learn vocabulary while using TikTok for enjoyment reinforces the idea that incidental learning is effective when input is frequent, meaningful, and engaging.

The moderate-to-high score for understanding contextual vocabulary (V3: M = 4.04) supports research by Kıvrak & Gökmen (2019), who found that audiovisual content enhances learners' contextual understanding. TikTok videos often embed English lyrics within visual storylines, comments, and captions, helping learners infer meaning from context. Furthermore, the ability of some students to use newly learned vocabulary in their own sentences (V4: M = 3.90) aligns with Nation's (2001) concept of productive vocabulary knowledge. This suggests that TikTok does not merely support word recognition but also facilitates deeper vocabulary processing. The lower mean for the reverse item (V5R: M = 3.35) indicates natural variation in memory retention, consistent with Laufer's (2005) findings that incidental learning varies across individuals. Nevertheless, overall vocabulary acquisition remains strong across the dataset. In summary, vocabulary gains observed in this study confirm well-established theories of input, repetition, audiovisual enhancement, and incidental learning which is highlighting TikTok's potential as a vocabulary-rich environment.

Students' Perceptions Toward TikTok as a Learning Platform

The perception findings reflect positive attitudes toward using TikTok English songs as a vocabulary learning tool. High means in enjoyment (P1: 4.37), usefulness (P2: 4.08), and teacher integration (P4: 4.10) correspond directly with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989).

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), students are more willing to use a learning tool if they feel that it is useful, enjoyable, and easy to use. These three factors influence how positively they respond to a technology. In this study,

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TikTok fits all of these conditions. Students find TikTok easy to access, enjoyable to use, and naturally engaging because of its short videos and music-based content. The platform also provides quick and repeated exposure to English vocabulary, which helps learners feel that TikTok is genuinely useful for learning new words. Because of this combination, students develop a positive attitude toward using TikTok English songs as a tool to support their vocabulary learning.

The moderate preference for TikTok over textbooks (P3: 3.58) suggests that while students appreciate TikTok, they still value traditional materials which is supporting findings by Alghameeti (2022) and Fengyu (2023) that social media is best viewed as a supplementary rather than primary tool. The mixed responses to the entertainment-only belief (P5R: 3.21) reflect TikTok's dual nature as both an entertainment and learning platform. This is consistent with Han (2022) who found that learners often shift between academic and recreational uses while still gaining linguistic benefits. Overall, perception results confirm that TikTok has strong potential as a supportive tool for EFL learning, validated by well-established technology acceptance and media learning theories.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that viral TikTok English songs play a meaningful role in enhancing students' engagement and vocabulary learning within the EFL context. Students showed strong emotional and behavioral engagement toward TikTok content, which aligns with Fredricks et al. (2004), who argue that engagement increases when learning activities are enjoyable and personally relevant. Their willingness to rewatch videos, listen repeatedly, and look up lyrics demonstrates active involvement that helps lower learning barriers, reflecting Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. The multimodal nature of TikTok, which combines audio, visual, and short-form repetition, further supports vocabulary exposure in ways consistent with Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory and with Murphey (1990) and Kıvrak & Gökmen (2019), who highlight the effectiveness of songs and audiovisual input for memory retention. As a result, students not only encountered new vocabulary incidentally but also understood word meanings in context and were sometimes able to use these words productively, supporting Nation's (2001) view that repeated and meaningful exposure contributes to both receptive and productive vocabulary development.

In addition to vocabulary gains, students showed generally positive perceptions toward the use of TikTok as a learning tool. Their belief that TikTok is enjoyable,

useful, and appropriate for learning reflects the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which states that perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment shape users' willingness to adopt technology. These positive attitudes are also consistent with findings from recent studies such as Susanto & Suparmi (2024), Pratama & Susanti (2024), Alghameeti (2022), and Fengyu (2023), which similarly report that learners view TikTok as a supportive platform for language learning. By focusing specifically on viral English songs, this study strengthens evidence that informal digital media can complement formal instruction and provide authentic input aligned with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985). Overall, the results suggest that TikTok English songs offer an effective supplementary resource that increases engagement, provides repeated comprehensible input, enriches vocabulary exposure, and bridges classroom learning with students' everyday digital practices.

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