

A critical review of TikTok's role in motivating Indonesian students to learn foreign languages

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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This critical literature review examines the impact of TikTok usage on motivation and foreign language learning outcomes among students in Indonesia. Through an analysis of 26 relevant articles from reputable sources, the review reveals that TikTok has a positive effect on student engagement and foreign language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking skills. The platform's interactive short videos, diverse educational content, and the involvement of content creators are key factors contributing to its effectiveness as a learning tool. However, challenges such as potential distractions, varying content quality, and limitations in video length must be addressed. To enhance TikTok's educational value, it is recommended that educators and content creators collaborate, providing strategic guidance to optimize learning outcomes. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating TikTok into foreign language learning in a more innovative and flexible manner.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has triggered a significant transformation in the education sector, particularly in the process of foreign language learning in Indonesia. One notable phenomenon is the increasing use of short-form video-based social media platforms, such as TikTok, among students and university learners. With its brief, interactive, and easily accessible video format, TikTok has become an integral part of daily life for the younger generation in Indonesia, including in the context of informal foreign language learning (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025).

Recent studies reveal that TikTok is now widely used as a tool for foreign language learning, particularly in English, Arabic, and Japanese, across various educational levels in Indonesia. The platform offers a variety of educational content presented in engaging and innovative ways, such as tips to expand vocabulary, pronunciation exercises, and foreign language conversation simulations. TikTok's uniqueness lies in its ability to deliver an authentic, flexible, and enjoyable learning experience, which in turn helps boost motivation

and enhance student participation in their learning activities (Erydani et al., 2025; Rasyid et al., 2023).

A study conducted by Apoko & Waluyo (2025) revealed that TikTok has become one of the preferred platforms for Indonesian students in foreign language learning. The platform has made a significant contribution to improving motivation, participation, and language skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and speaking ability. Similar findings were reported by Erydani et al., (2025), who stated that TikTok use can significantly enhance student engagement and motivation in English speaking practice, thanks to the interactive and authentic learning environment it provides. Additionally, Mulyanah et al., (2024) showed that students who used TikTok in their learning process experienced a more significant increase in learning motivation compared to the control group that did not use the platform.

TikTok is not only effective for English learning, but it has also proven successful in other foreign language learning, such as Arabic and Japanese. Fitrah et al., (2023) and Salma et al., (2025) found that elements such as short videos, ease of access, and interactive content on TikTok play a role in enhancing learners' interest, motivation, and understanding of vocabulary and pronunciation in foreign languages. Furthermore, creative content produced by TikTok creators plays a crucial role in creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere that encourages active student engagement (Kasmudi, 2023; Sari et al., 2024).

However, the use of TikTok as a medium for foreign language learning also comes with several challenges that need to be addressed. The main challenges include potential distractions from non-educational content, the sometimes uncertain quality of materials, and the limited video duration that may hinder more in-depth discussions of the material (Laili, 2023; Manurung et al., 2025). Therefore, it is essential for educators and students to possess strong digital literacy skills so they can wisely select and effectively utilize educational content.

Considering this context, the aim of this study is to critically analyze existing literature on the impact of TikTok use on motivation in foreign language learning in Indonesia. By reviewing various empirical research findings and theoretical perspectives derived from 26 relevant articles, this study hopes to contribute significantly to the development of innovative, relevant, and adaptive foreign language learning strategies that can keep pace with the rapid development of digital technology in Indonesia (Bahri et al., 2022; Nurkamila et al., 2022).

2. METHOD

In this study, the approach used is a critical literature review (CLR), chosen with the aim of conducting an in-depth analysis of the impact of TikTok use on motivation in foreign language learning in Indonesia. CLR was selected because of its ability to provide critical evaluation, comprehensive conceptual synthesis, and the identification of gaps in existing research, particularly on topics that are continuously evolving and multidisciplinary. This approach differs from a systematic review, which focuses more on descriptive and procedural mapping. CLR allows the author to not only summarize existing empirical findings but also to critically assess the contributions, quality, and relevance of the available literature, as well as to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Hart, 1998, p. 143).

The literature search was conducted by accessing three main databases: Scopus, GARUDA, and Google Scholar. Scopus was chosen for its reputation in ensuring international academic quality and strict peer-review processes, while GARUDA was selected to ensure adequate representation of local Indonesian literature. Google Scholar was used to broaden the scope of the search by providing access to a wide range of scholarly documents from various sources. The combination of these three databases is expected to provide a literature review that meets not only global academic standards but also aligns with the context and current developments in Indonesia.

The article search process in Scopus was conducted using the following Boolean operators: (“TikTok” OR “social media” OR “video platform” OR “short-form video”) AND (“language learning” OR “language acquisition” OR “language education” OR “linguistic development”) AND (“motivation” OR “engagement” OR “incentive” OR “interest”) AND (“Indonesia”). This operator use was designed to ensure that the search results focus specifically on TikTok as a learning tool, encompass various terms related to foreign language teaching, filter articles discussing factors such as motivation and engagement in learning, and ensure that the research found is relevant to the context of Indonesia. To aid in understanding, Table 1 summarizes the Boolean operators used in this search.

Table 1. Simple Boolean operators

Simple Boolean Operators	Purpose
“TikTok” AND “language learning”	TikTok study & language learning
“TikTok” AND “foreign language”	Focus on foreign languages
“TikTok” AND Indonesia	Indonesian context
“TikTok” AND education	General education
“TikTok” AND student	Focus on students

The article selection process was carried out using a structured approach, starting with the examination of titles and abstracts to ensure initial relevance, followed by a full-text evaluation to assess the alignment of the articles with the established inclusion criteria. Table 2 summaries the number of articles successfully found and selected from each database.

Table 2. Article selection and screening

Database	Before Screening	After Screening
Scopus	5	4
GARUDA	32	12
Google Scholar	78	10
Total	115	26

The criteria used to determine whether an article should be included or excluded in this study are clearly summarized in the Table 3. All stages of the search, selection, and documentation of articles were conducted in an open and organized manner, following best practices for writing a critical literature review. As such, the results of this study can be revisited and hold a high level of credibility. By applying this methodology, it is expected

that the critical literature review will contribute meaningfully, holistically, and relevantly to the study of the impact of TikTok on motivation in foreign language learning in Indonesia.

Table 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic	TikTok, motivation to learn a foreign language, Indonesian context	Platforms other than TikTok, regional languages/Bahasa Indonesia,
Methodology	All research methods except pure literature review	Article in pure literature review form
Result and Conclusions	Relevant to the review focus	Not relevant to the review focus
Year of Publications	2021–2025	Outside the specified year range
Language	English or Indonesian	Languages other than English or Indonesian

3. FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings from 26 reviewed studies concerning the use of TikTok in foreign language learning in Indonesia. Thematic analysis of the data reveals patterns across several key aspects, including motivation, engagement, language competence, and pedagogical challenges. A comprehensive summary of all reviewed articles is provided in Appendix A.

3.1. TikTok increases motivation and engagement in learning

TikTok has consistently been shown to enhance motivation in foreign language learning across various educational levels, from high school students to university students (Agustina & Putra, 2022; Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Mulyanah et al., 2024). The platform encourages active student participation by providing various interactive content, challenges, and duet features that enable speaking practice and collaboration among users (Erydani et al., 2025; Laili, 2023; Zahra et al., 2025). The majority of respondents in several studies revealed that they felt more motivated and interested in learning foreign languages when the material was delivered through TikTok, compared to traditional, conventional learning methods (Agustini, 2023; Rasyid et al., 2023; Tanasy et al., 2025).

3.2. Improvement in language skills (vocabulary, speaking, pronunciation)

TikTok has proven effective in helping learners improve their skills in vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking, whether in English, Arabic, or Japanese (Fitrah et al., 2023; Nurdini, 2025; Salma et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2024). The authentic, creative, and easily accessible short videos on this platform facilitate faster understanding of concepts and broaden learners’ perspectives on the application of foreign languages in everyday life (Bahri et al., 2022; Chotimah et al., 2023; Susanto & Suparmi, 2024). Several quantitative studies have shown a significant improvement in post-test scores, both in terms of motivation and language skills, in groups that used TikTok, compared to control groups that did not (Irianto & Al-Amin, 2021; Mulyanah et al., 2024).

3.3. Factors that drive TikTok's effectiveness

Several key factors contribute to TikTok's popularity as a foreign language learning platform, including the short video format, ease of access, and the wide range of educational content available (Aminullah et al., 2022; Fitriah et al., 2023; Zahra et al., 2025). Educational content creators on TikTok play a vital role in creating an engaging learning atmosphere, motivating learners, and encouraging them to participate actively (Chotimah et al., 2023; Kasmudi, 2023; Siregar et al., 2023). Additionally, TikTok supports self-directed learning, allowing students to study anytime according to their needs (Aminullah et al., 2022; Dewi, 2024).

3.4. Challenges and limitations

One of the main challenges in using TikTok as a learning medium is the potential distractions caused by non-educational and entertainment content, which can reduce students' focus during the learning process (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Laili, 2023; Manurung et al., 2025). Additionally, the quality and validity of educational material available on TikTok are not always guaranteed, making digital literacy skills essential for sorting and selecting content that is truly beneficial for the learning process (Bahri et al., 2022; Laili, 2023; Siregar et al., 2023). Lastly, the relatively short video duration limits the depth of content discussion, while some productive skills, such as writing and speaking in greater depth, still require the use of other teaching methods to achieve optimal results (Nurdini, 2025; Salma et al., 2025).

3.5. Impact on intrinsic and integrative motivation

TikTok specifically enhances intrinsic motivation (the drive to learn driven by personal interest) and integrative motivation (the desire to understand culture or interact with native speakers) among Indonesian university students (Bahri et al., 2022; Nurkamila et al., 2022). Content related to daily life and global trends makes students feel that their learning is more relevant and aligned with their context (Sari et al., 2024; Zahra et al., 2025).

TikTok has the potential to be integrated into a well-structured strategy as an additional tool for foreign language learning in Indonesia. This platform, in particular, can be used to enhance motivation, student engagement, and deepen mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation in foreign languages. To ensure the optimal use of TikTok and avoid distractions or irrelevant content, guidance and the improvement of digital literacy among students are essential. Collaboration between educators and educational content creators on TikTok can expand learning resources and tailor materials to meet the needs and characteristics of Indonesian students. Additionally, as indicated in the summary table above, all 26 articles used in this study are directly involved in the analysis of research results and findings.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings from this critical literature review emphasize that TikTok plays an increasingly important role in enhancing motivation and supporting the foreign language learning process in Indonesia. The following discussion will outline the key findings, connect them

with existing theories and previous research, and also highlight the implications, limitations, and opportunities for further research.

4.1. The role of TikTok in enhancing motivation and engagement

TikTok has proven to be an effective platform for increasing motivation in foreign language learning, particularly among Indonesian students. The interactive, creative short videos that are highly relevant to everyday life create an enjoyable learning environment and encourage active participation from learners. This finding aligns with the Engagement Theory and social constructivism, which emphasize the importance of active participation and social interaction in the foreign language learning process (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Erydani et al., 2025).

The motivation generated through the use of TikTok can be categorized as intrinsic and integrative, where students are driven to learn due to personal interest and the desire to understand foreign cultures. This is supported by the findings of Nurkamila et al., (2022), which show that learning motivation through TikTok is influenced not only by external factors but also by internal drives from students to develop both linguistically and socially.

4.2. Strengthening language skills through TikTok

In addition to enhancing motivation, TikTok has proven effective in strengthening vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and speaking skills in foreign languages, including English, Arabic, and Japanese. The authentic and easily accessible short videos help accelerate the understanding of new concepts and broaden students' perspectives on the use of foreign languages in real-life situations (Fitrah et al., 2023; Salma et al., 2025). Interactive features such as duets, challenges, and comment sections provide opportunities for students to practice directly and receive feedback from a wider community of learners.

However, TikTok's effectiveness is more evident in the development of receptive skills such as listening and vocabulary acquisition, as well as speaking skills. For productive skills like writing or engaging in in-depth discussions, TikTok still requires complementary teaching methods that are more structured and systematic (Nurdini, 2025; Salma et al., 2025).

4.3. Factors driving and supporting TikTok's effectiveness

TikTok's success as a foreign language learning platform is influenced by several key supporting factors. One of these is the accessibility and flexibility it offers, allowing students to learn anytime and anywhere according to their personal needs and learning style preferences (Aminullah et al., 2022; Dewi, 2024). Additionally, the diversity of available educational content is another important factor, with many creators presenting material in creative, enjoyable, and easily understandable ways for the audience (Chotimah et al., 2023; Kasmudi, 2023). Equally important, TikTok also supports self-directed learning, enabling students to set their own pace and focus during the learning process, thus offering greater freedom to tailor the learning rhythm to their needs.

4.4. Challenges and limitations

Although TikTok offers clear benefits in learning, there are several challenges that need to be addressed and overcome. One of these is the distraction caused by non-educational content: the abundance of entertainment content available can reduce students' concentration and focus on the learning process as intended (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Manurung et al., 2025). Additionally, there are issues regarding the validity and quality of the material: not all educational content on TikTok can be guaranteed in terms of quality and accuracy, so both students and educators need to have sufficient digital literacy to discern useful and relevant content (Laili, 2023; Siregar et al., 2023). Lastly, the very short video duration limits the delivery of more in-depth material, which, for learning that requires conceptual analysis or critical discussions, still needs the support of other more structured teaching methods (Salma et al., 2025).

4.5. Limitations and practical implications

This review highlights the considerable potential of TikTok as an innovative and engaging platform for foreign language learning in Indonesia, yet several limitations should be acknowledged to guide both future research and practical implementation. The generalizability of the findings is constrained by the fact that most included studies focus on specific institutions or regions, which means their conclusions may not apply broadly across different educational contexts. Additionally, the predominance of cross-sectional research leaves a gap in our understanding of the long-term effects of TikTok use on motivation and language proficiency. Another limitation lies in the limited exploration of teachers' and institutions' strategic roles in the effective integration of TikTok into formal educational settings; most available studies focus primarily on learner outcomes without addressing the pedagogical or curricular implications in depth.

Despite these constraints, the findings point to several practical recommendations for educators and stakeholders. Teachers should harness TikTok's engaging video features and vast content as supplementary tools to complement traditional classroom learning, while ensuring students receive adequate digital literacy guidance to evaluate and select high-quality, relevant materials. Collaboration between educators and educational content creators is encouraged, so that learning resources can be contextualized and made more accessible for Indonesian students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, developing hybrid learning models that blend the strengths of social media platforms like TikTok with conventional methods could create more effective, motivating, and sustainable pathways for foreign language acquisition in the digital era. Future research is urged to include longitudinal designs and to explore how teacher agency, school policies, and evolving digital environments interact to maximize the impact of social media-based language learning in Indonesia.

5. CONCLUSION

This critical literature review highlights the significant role of TikTok as a platform for foreign language learning in Indonesia. Based on the analysis of 26 relevant articles, it can be concluded that TikTok use has consistently proven effective in enhancing motivation, engagement, and foreign language skills among students at various educational levels. The

interactive short video features, creative content, and ease of access are key factors supporting TikTok's effectiveness in foreign language learning.

Additionally, TikTok not only boosts intrinsic and integrative motivation but also proves effective in strengthening students' vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and speaking skills. The diversity of educational content and the active role of creators on this platform help create an enjoyable learning environment that can be tailored to the needs of the digital generation. Nevertheless, several challenges should be addressed, such as potential distractions from non-educational content, the uncertainty of material quality, and the limitations of video duration, which may hinder in-depth discussions.

To optimize the use of TikTok in foreign language learning, it is essential to provide guidance on digital literacy, the ability to filter relevant content, and foster close collaboration between educators and educational content creators. TikTok can be an innovative, relevant, adaptive, and effective tool to boost motivation and learning outcomes in foreign language education in Indonesia, provided it is supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies and adequate supervision.

Overall, TikTok is worth considering as part of the foreign language learning strategy in today's digital era. The platform also opens opportunities for further research on long-term effectiveness, the role of educators, and the development of hybrid learning models that combine social media with conventional methods.

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Appendix A. Summary of reviewed articles

No	Authors & Year	Foreign Language	Method	Key Findings
1	Apoko & Waluyo (2025)	English	Mixed-methods	TikTok ranks as the second-most favored platform (34.26%) for English learning, enhancing motivation, engagement, and skills (vocabulary, speaking). Challenges include distractions from entertainment content and inconsistent quality.
2	Erydani et al., (2025)	English	Mixed-methods	Significant improvement in speaking engagement (post-test M=87.00 vs. pre-test M=72.25). Students reported higher motivation and exposure to authentic language use through interactive features (e.g., duets).
3	Mulyanah et al., (2024)	English	Quantitative	Experimental group using TikTok showed significantly higher motivation (post-test M=77.00 vs. control M=47.00). Students cited engaging content and accessibility as key motivators.
4	Rasyid et al., (2023)	English	Mixed-methods	60.1%–94.7% of respondents perceived TikTok as effective for improving English competence. Short videos and interactive content (e.g., challenges) drove motivation and self-directed learning.
5	Fitrah et al., (2023)	Arabic	Qualitative	TikTok's short, interactive videos (e.g., duets, voice recordings) facilitated Arabic practice. Creative content boosted motivation and engagement.
6	Sari et al., (2024)	English	Qualitative	Improved pronunciation (intonation, fluency, accuracy) through TikTok's creative content. Learners felt more motivated compared to traditional methods.
7	Chotimah et al., (2023)	English	Qualitative	97% of students expressed high interest in learning pronunciation via TikTok, citing engaging and accessible content.
8	Helda & Ismail (2023)	English	Quantitative	TikTok significantly improved rhetorical skills (amplification: 85%, chiasmus: 78%), serving as an effective tool for speaking practice and confidence-building.
9	Kasmudi (2023)	Arabic	Qualitative	Popular TikTok accounts (@bisabacakitab, etc.) used audiovisual content to teach Arabic grammar, enhancing understanding and intrinsic motivation.
10	Salma et al., (2025)	Japanese	Quantitative	TikTok improved vocabulary (75.75%), pronunciation (74.42%), and motivation (74.09%). Limitations included difficulty in developing productive skills (writing/speaking in depth).
11	Manurung et al., (2025)	Arabic	Qualitative	High engagement (2.9M views) with TikTok content (vocabulary, grammar, song remakes). Creative audiovisual formats increased integrative motivation (cultural relevance).

Appendix A. Contd.

No	Authors & Year	Foreign Language	Method	Key Findings
12	Tanasy et al., (2025)	English	Qualitative	Students responded positively to TikTok for English learning, citing increased enthusiasm and opportunities for direct language practice.
13	Siregar et al., (2023)	Arabic	Qualitative	TikTok and Instagram focused on vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Interactive methods (quizzes, videos) enhanced engagement and intrinsic motivation.
14	Dewi (2025)	English	Quantitative	20% of respondents used TikTok for English learning. Social media (including TikTok) improved motivation (75%), listening (85%), and vocabulary (80%).
15	Zahra et al., (2025)	English	Qualitative	TikTok content increased interest (19,298 viewers) and interaction (comments, requests). Challenges included technical issues (audio quality).
16	Nurdini (2025)	Arabic	Mixed-methods	TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram were used for Arabic speaking practice. Usage intensity correlated with fluency, supporting self-directed learning.
17	Ridayani (2023)	English	Quantitative	TikTok improved English learning outcomes (38.5% influence per S-O-R theory), with engagement and ease of use as key factors.
18	Kolin et al., (2023)	English	Quantitative	Video-based learning (including TikTok) improved comprehension (post-test M=71.53 vs. control M=65.87). Students found videos enjoyable and motivating.
19	Agustini (2023)	English	Quantitative	TikTok and drama voice techniques improved speaking/listening skills. Participation in language challenges increased motivation.
20	Susanto & Suparmi (2024)	English	Qualitative	TikTok enhanced all language skills (listening, speaking, etc.). Students reported positive experiences due to authentic content.
21	Laili (2023)	English	Qualitative	60% felt motivated to learn via TikTok. It aided vocabulary (83%), pronunciation (57%), and speaking (74%), though distractions were noted.
22	Irianto & Al-Amin (2021)	English	Quantitative	TikTok significantly impacted learning (ANOVA sig. 0.022), contributing to 38.5% of improvement. Key drivers: ease of use and engagement.
23	Bahri et al., (2022)	English	Qualitative	Popular content: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation. Grammar explanations (short, creative) were most engaging, fostering motivation.

Appendix A. Contd.

No	Authors & Year	Foreign Language	Method	Key Findings
24	Agustina & Putra (2022)	English	Quantitative	TikTok increased interest in learning (ANOVA sig. 0.022; 38.5% contribution). "Fun learning" and creativity were motivators.
25	Aminullah et al., (2022)	Arabic	Qualitative	TikTok supported self-directed Arabic learning. Creative approaches (music, images) boosted intrinsic and integrative motivation.
26	Nurkamila et al., (2022)	Multiple	Qualitative	72.7% used TikTok for language learning. Speaking (32%), vocabulary (26%), and grammar (22%) were top content. Fostered intrinsic (49%) and integrative (65%) motivation.