

The Relationship Between TikTok Usage Intensity and Students' English Vocabulary Mastery

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ABSTRACT

TikTok is a widely used platform among university students, providing extensive English-language content that may facilitate informal vocabulary exposure. Grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, this study examined the relationship between TikTok usage intensity and English vocabulary mastery among students in the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 52 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring TikTok usage intensity and a multiple-choice vocabulary test. The results showed that TikTok usage intensity had a mean score of 29.58 (SD = 3.80), while English vocabulary mastery had a mean score of 2.96 (SD = 1.64) out of 6. Spearman rank correlation analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between TikTok usage intensity and vocabulary mastery ($r_s = -.049$, $p = .732$). A supplementary Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated no significant differences in vocabulary mastery among low-, moderate-, and high-usage groups ($H = .796$, $p = .672$), consistent with the results of a one-way ANOVA ($F = .286$, $p = .753$). These findings suggest that the frequency or intensity of TikTok use alone does not predict students' English vocabulary mastery. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because both instruments demonstrated low internal consistency reliability, and the vocabulary test was limited to a narrow six-point scale, potentially restricting score variability. Thus, the results constrain rather than definitively refute the theoretical expectation that exposure to comprehensible input may support vocabulary development. Future research should distinguish attentive and purposeful engagement from mere frequency of access, employ more reliable and comprehensive instruments, and involve larger, more evenly distributed samples.

Keywords: *TikTok Usage Intensity, English Vocabulary Mastery, Correlational Study, EFL Learners*

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INTRODUCTION

TikTok has become one of the most widely used social media platforms among young people and university students, providing users with continuous access to short-form audiovisual content. Its combination of video, audio, on-screen text, captions, and subtitles creates a multimodal environment in which language can be encountered outside formal classroom settings. Recent reports have estimated that TikTok has more than 1.59 billion monthly active users worldwide and more than 125 million users in Indonesia (ABA, 2025). Indonesian users also reportedly spend substantial amounts of time on the platform, with estimates reaching approximately 95 minutes per day (Aprilaba.com, 2025). Such extensive use suggests that TikTok represents an important part of students' everyday digital exposure and may provide opportunities for encountering English in informal contexts.

From a language-learning perspective, this exposure is relevant to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which proposes that acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence, commonly represented as $i + 1$ (Krashen, 1985). The hypothesis emphasizes the importance of meaningful exposure rather than learning that occurs exclusively through explicit instruction. Bouknify & Mrani (2025) further discuss the relevance of comprehensible input to contemporary and

skills-oriented language learning. In the context of social media, students may encounter English incidentally while watching videos created primarily for entertainment rather than education. Therefore, frequent exposure to English-language TikTok content may potentially create opportunities for learners to process language naturally during their everyday digital activities.

Vocabulary is particularly relevant to this form of informal exposure because vocabulary development depends substantially on repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary learning involves knowledge of words across several dimensions, including their form, meaning, and use. Similarly, Teng (2019) demonstrates the importance of contextual encounters and exposure frequency in incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention. TikTok may provide such encounters because users can repeatedly encounter words, expressions, and phrases across different videos and contexts. However, repeated exposure alone does not necessarily guarantee acquisition, because the extent to which learners notice, process, and attend to unfamiliar words may determine whether exposure results in lasting vocabulary knowledge.

The multimodal nature of TikTok may further strengthen its potential as a source of vocabulary input. Videos can simultaneously provide spoken language, written captions, visual information, gestures, and contextual clues, allowing learners to encounter lexical items through several channels. Webb & Nation (2017) emphasize that vocabulary learning is supported by repeated and meaningful encounters with words, while research on captioned audiovisual input has shown that on-screen language can facilitate incidental vocabulary learning. A meta-analysis by Montero Perez et al. (2013), for example, found positive effects of captioned video on both second-language listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. These findings provide a theoretical basis for considering TikTok as a possible informal environment for English vocabulary exposure, although the learning opportunities available on TikTok may differ substantially according to the content viewed and the learner's level of attention.

The importance of vocabulary mastery extends beyond knowing isolated word meanings because lexical knowledge contributes to broader language comprehension and communication. Hidayah et al. (2023) identify vocabulary as an important component of English language learning, while Allal-Sumoto et al. (2023) demonstrate that productive vocabulary knowledge can contribute to second-language comprehension. In addition, vocabulary size is closely related to learners' ability to understand spoken and written English. Research summarized by Schmitt et al. indicates that approximately 2,000–3,000 word families may provide substantial coverage for spoken English, although the amount required varies according to the communicative context and desired level of comprehension. Consequently, examining students' vocabulary mastery is important when investigating whether frequent exposure to English through digital platforms is associated with measurable language knowledge.

Nevertheless, exposure to English through social media does not automatically mean that students acquire vocabulary effectively. Albaqami (2015) illustrates that EFL learners may encounter various linguistic and non-linguistic barriers that affect their English performance. In social-media environments, students may also scroll rapidly between videos, encounter content in languages other than English, or focus primarily on entertainment rather than linguistic information. Consequently, the amount of time spent on TikTok may not accurately represent the amount of meaningful English input received. This distinction is important because TikTok usage intensity can reflect frequency or duration of platform use without necessarily indicating how attentively students process English-language content.

Previous research nevertheless provides evidence that social media can be relevant to vocabulary learning. Rokhmawati & Mastuti (2018), for instance, investigated Instagram use for English vocabulary development and reported positive learning outcomes. More recently, Rita & Subekti (2023) examined Indonesian English-department students' attitudes toward TikTok for vocabulary learning and found generally positive perceptions, although students were more uncertain about its actual effectiveness because TikTok is primarily designed as a

social-media platform rather than a formal learning medium. Similarly, recent research has begun examining incidental English learning through multiple social-media platforms. [Harmaini \(2026\)](#), for example, investigated the relationship between incidental English learning through Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok and English proficiency among Indonesian learners. These studies suggest that social-media exposure deserves further investigation while also indicating that exposure frequency and actual language outcomes should not automatically be assumed to be equivalent.

Despite the growing literature, there remains a need for research specifically examining whether TikTok usage intensity as an everyday behavioral measure is statistically associated with English vocabulary mastery among university-level EFL students. Recent TikTok research has increasingly focused on vocabulary learning, perceptions, instructional interventions, and incidental exposure, but these approaches do not necessarily establish whether students who use TikTok more intensively actually demonstrate higher vocabulary mastery. For example, recent conceptual work has highlighted TikTok's potential as an informal environment for incidental vocabulary learning, while empirical studies have examined particular TikTok activities or instructional uses rather than general usage intensity. This distinction is particularly relevant for students in the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University, who are both active users of digital media and prospective English teachers expected to develop adequate English vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, the present study investigates whether TikTok usage intensity, encompassing frequency of use, duration of use, and type of engagement, is related to students' English vocabulary mastery and whether vocabulary mastery differs significantly among students with low, moderate, and high levels of TikTok usage intensity. Accordingly, the study tests two hypotheses: H0, there is no significant relationship between TikTok usage intensity and students' English vocabulary mastery; and H1, there is a significant relationship between TikTok usage intensity and students' English vocabulary mastery.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between TikTok usage intensity and students' English vocabulary mastery. A correlational design was selected because the study sought to determine whether a statistically significant association existed between the two variables, including its strength and direction, rather than to establish a causal relationship ([Creswell, 2012](#)). Data were collected using a cross-sectional approach, in which both instruments were administered at a single point in time.

The study was conducted in the English Language Education Program, Department of Language, Art, and Humanities, Hamzanwadi University, located in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, during the odd semester of the 2026/2027 academic year, from July to August 2026. The population consisted of all active students enrolled in the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University. A sample of 52 students was selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were that participants were currently enrolled in the program, actively used TikTok at least several times per week, and were willing to participate voluntarily in both research instruments.

TikTok Usage Intensity (X) was measured using a 10-item, five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire covered three indicators: frequency of use, duration of use, and type of engagement, including passive viewing and active participation. Four items (B3, B6, B8, and B10) were reverse-scored. The total score ranged from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater TikTok usage intensity. English Vocabulary Mastery (Y) was measured using a six-item multiple-choice vocabulary test. Each item was scored dichotomously as correct (1) or incorrect (0), resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 6.

Content validity was established through expert review by English lecturers, who evaluated the relevance of each item to its intended indicator and the clarity of its wording. Construct validity was subsequently examined using Pearson's item-total correlation. An item

was considered valid if the calculated correlation coefficient (r -count) was greater than or equal to the critical value (r -table) at the 0.05 significance level. The reliability of the TikTok Usage Intensity questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with 0.60 set as the minimum acceptable threshold. Meanwhile, the vocabulary test was assessed for scoring reliability through independent scoring by two raters.

The data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the distribution of scores for both variables. Second, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test was conducted to determine whether Pearson's or Spearman's correlation analysis was more appropriate. Third, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was performed as a prerequisite for one-way ANOVA. Fourth, correlation analysis was conducted to address the first research question concerning the relationship between TikTok usage intensity and English vocabulary mastery. Finally, group comparisons were conducted across low, moderate, and high TikTok usage categories using either the Kruskal-Wallis test or one-way ANOVA, depending on the results of the assumption tests, to address the second research question. All hypothesis tests were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics were calculated for TikTok Usage Intensity (X) and English Vocabulary Mastery (Y) based on responses from 52 students. TikTok Usage Intensity scores ranged from 18 to 38, with a mean of 29.58 (SD = 3.80), compared with a theoretical range of 10 to 50. English Vocabulary Mastery scores ranged from 0 to 6, with a mean of 2.96 (SD = 1.64), equivalent to 49.36% of the maximum possible score. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of TikTok Usage Intensity (X) and English Vocabulary Mastery (Y)

Statistical Measure	X (TUI)	Y (EVM)
N	52	52
Minimum Score	18	0
Maximum Score	38	6
Mean (M)	29.58	2.96
Median	29.5	3.0
Mode	26	3
Standard Deviation (SD)	3.80	1.64

Respondents were categorized into three levels of TikTok Usage Intensity based on the mean and standard deviation of the total X scores. Respondents with scores below 25.78 were classified as having low usage intensity, those with scores between 25.78 and 33.37 were classified as having moderate usage intensity, and those with scores above 33.37 were classified as having high usage intensity. However, for presentation in Table 2, these cut-off points corresponded to scores of ≤ 25 , 26–33, and ≥ 34 , respectively. Most respondents (40 students, 76.9%) were in the moderate-usage category, while six students (11.5%) were classified as having low usage intensity and another six students (11.5%) as having high usage intensity. The distribution of respondents across the three categories is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Categorization of TikTok Usage Intensity

Category	Score Range	N	%
Low	≤ 25	6	11.5
Moderate	26 to 33	40	76.9
High	≥ 34	6	11.5
Total		52	100.0

Descriptively, English Vocabulary Mastery also differed slightly across the three TikTok usage categories. The low-usage group obtained the highest mean vocabulary score ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.33$), followed by the moderate-usage group ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.74$), whereas the high-usage group obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.38$). Thus, the descriptive pattern showed a weak inverse trend between TikTok Usage Intensity and vocabulary mastery. This pattern was not consistent with the positive relationship that might be expected if greater exposure to potentially comprehensible English input through TikTok were directly associated with higher vocabulary mastery. The group means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. English Vocabulary Mastery by TikTok Usage Intensity Category

Category	N	Mean Y _{Total}	SD
Low	6	3.17	1.33
Moderate	40	3.00	1.74
High	6	2.50	1.38

Before conducting the main inferential analyses, the validity and reliability of both instruments were examined. The results indicated substantial measurement limitations. Half of the items in the TikTok Usage Intensity questionnaire did not meet the predetermined validity criterion. In addition, the questionnaire demonstrated very low internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of -0.118 . The English Vocabulary Mastery test also showed relatively low reliability, with a coefficient of $.516$. These results indicate that the instruments did not demonstrate satisfactory reliability for measuring the intended constructs and therefore need to be considered when interpreting the subsequent statistical findings.

The assumptions for the inferential analyses were then examined. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that TikTok Usage Intensity (X_{Total}) was normally distributed ($W = .973$, $p = .269$), whereas English Vocabulary Mastery (Y_{Total}) was not normally distributed ($W = .940$, $p = .011$). Because the dependent variable violated the normality assumption, Spearman's Rank Correlation was selected as the primary correlation analysis. Pearson's correlation was also calculated as a supplementary analysis for comparison. In addition, Levene's test indicated that the variances of English Vocabulary Mastery across the three TikTok usage categories were homogeneous (Levene statistic = 1.417 , $df_1 = 2$, $df_2 = 49$, $p = .252$). Thus, the homogeneity assumption for one-way ANOVA was satisfied.

The Spearman Rank Correlation analysis showed a very weak negative relationship between TikTok Usage Intensity and English Vocabulary Mastery ($r_s = -.049$, $p = .732$). The relationship was not statistically significant because the p -value was greater than $.05$. Pearson's correlation produced a similar result, with a weak negative correlation of $r = -.078$ ($p = .582$). Therefore, both correlation procedures indicated that TikTok Usage Intensity was not significantly associated with English Vocabulary Mastery in this sample. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) was retained, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was not supported. The correlation results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Between TikTok Usage Intensity and English Vocabulary Mastery

Method	r	p	Interpretation
Spearman	-.049	.732	Very weak negative, not significant
Pearson	-.078	.582	Very weak negative, not significant

A supplementary comparison was conducted to determine whether English Vocabulary Mastery differed significantly across the low-, moderate-, and high-usage groups. The Kruskal-Wallis test produced a test statistic of $H = .796$ with $p = .672$, indicating no statistically significant difference among the three groups. Because Levene's test indicated homogeneous variances, a one-way ANOVA was also conducted as a supplementary

parametric analysis. The ANOVA result was similarly non-significant, $F = .286$, $p = .753$. Thus, both analyses consistently indicated that vocabulary mastery did not differ significantly according to the respondents' level of TikTok Usage Intensity. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of English Vocabulary Mastery Across TikTok Usage Intensity Categories

Test	Statistic	p	Interpretation
Kruskal-Wallis H	.796	.672	No significant difference
One-way ANOVA F	.286	.753	No significant difference

Discussion

The present study examined whether TikTok Usage Intensity was associated with English Vocabulary Mastery among students in the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University. The results showed no statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Spearman's correlation was close to zero ($r_s = -.049$, $p = .732$), and the supplementary Pearson correlation produced a similar result ($r = -.078$, $p = .582$). The comparison across low-, moderate-, and high-usage groups also showed no significant difference in vocabulary mastery. Although the descriptive means showed slightly higher vocabulary scores among students with lower TikTok usage and the lowest mean among students with higher usage, this pattern was weak and statistically unsupported. Therefore, the findings do not provide empirical support for a direct association between TikTok Usage Intensity and English Vocabulary Mastery in the present sample.

One important consideration in interpreting these findings is the quality of the measurement instruments. The TikTok Usage Intensity questionnaire demonstrated very low internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of $-.0118$, while half of its items failed to meet the predetermined validity criterion. A composite score based on items that do not consistently represent the same construct may provide an unstable estimate of actual TikTok usage intensity. Consequently, the absence of a significant correlation should not be interpreted as definitive evidence that TikTok use has no relationship with vocabulary learning. Rather, the result may partly reflect limitations in how TikTok Usage Intensity was operationalized and measured in this study.

The English Vocabulary Mastery measure also presented a measurement limitation. The test consisted of only six multiple-choice items and produced a reliability coefficient of $.516$. Furthermore, each item was scored dichotomously as either correct or incorrect. As described by Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional and graded, meaning that learners may possess different degrees or aspects of knowledge about a word rather than simply knowing or not knowing it. A six-item test with dichotomous scoring therefore provides a relatively narrow representation of vocabulary knowledge. Students with partial knowledge of a word may receive the same score as students with no knowledge of that word. This restricted measurement may have reduced the variability of the outcome and made it more difficult to detect an association with TikTok Usage Intensity.

The distribution of TikTok Usage Intensity in the sample may have further limited the ability to identify a relationship. Most respondents, 40 of the 52 participants (76.9%), were classified in the moderate-usage category, whereas only six respondents (11.5%) were in each of the low- and high-usage categories. This concentration around the moderate level indicates relatively limited variation in the independent variable. A restricted range can make it more difficult for a statistical analysis to detect an association, particularly when the sample size is relatively small. Therefore, the non-significant correlation may partly reflect the limited spread of TikTok Usage Intensity among the respondents rather than demonstrating that differences in TikTok use are completely unrelated to differences in vocabulary mastery.

The findings can also be interpreted in relation to Krashen's Input Hypothesis. The hypothesis emphasizes that language acquisition depends not simply on exposure to a language but on exposure to comprehensible input that can be understood by the learner. In this study, TikTok Usage Intensity included indicators of frequency, duration, and type of

engagement, including passive viewing and active participation. However, several items intended to capture engagement did not satisfy the validity criterion. Consequently, the final measure may have represented the amount or frequency of TikTok use more strongly than the extent to which students actually attended to, understood, and processed English-language input. Frequent TikTok use, therefore, should not automatically be interpreted as frequent exposure to meaningful or comprehensible English input.

This distinction is important because TikTok is a heterogeneous media environment. Students may use the platform for entertainment, Indonesian-language content, music, comedy, lifestyle content, gaming, or other purposes that do not necessarily involve sustained English input. Even when students encounter English-language videos, exposure alone does not guarantee that unfamiliar vocabulary will be noticed, understood, retained, and subsequently recalled. Thus, the absence of a significant relationship in this study is compatible with the possibility that TikTok provides opportunities for English exposure without ensuring that such exposure results in measurable vocabulary acquisition.

The cross-sectional design also limits the interpretation of the findings. The study measured TikTok Usage Intensity and English Vocabulary Mastery at a single point in time, whereas vocabulary development is generally cumulative and may result from repeated exposure over a longer period. [Teng \(2019\)](#) and [Webb & Nation \(2017\)](#) emphasize the importance of repeated encounters and exposure in vocabulary learning. Consequently, current TikTok usage may not accurately represent the amount or quality of English-language exposure that students have accumulated over months or years. The cross-sectional design also cannot establish the temporal direction of the relationship. It is possible, for example, that students with stronger existing English vocabulary are more comfortable understanding and engaging with English-language TikTok content, rather than TikTok use leading to higher vocabulary mastery.

The present findings differ from some previous studies that have reported positive language-related outcomes from social media use, but the differences in research design should be considered. [Authar et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Rokhmawati & Mastuti \(2018\)](#), for example, reported positive changes in language-related outcomes following social-media-based activities. Such findings are not directly comparable with the present study because intervention or pre-test/post-test designs examine changes over a period of learning, whereas the current study examined the statistical association between naturally occurring TikTok usage intensity and vocabulary mastery at one point in time. Similarly, [Safitri et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Syaputra et al. \(2026\)](#) reported relationships between social-media-related variables and other student outcomes, demonstrating that social-media use can be associated with educational or behavioral variables under particular measurement and research conditions. These studies therefore do not necessarily contradict the present finding of a non-significant relationship with vocabulary mastery.

Overall, the results indicate that English Vocabulary Mastery, as measured in this study, was not statistically associated with TikTok Usage Intensity, as measured by the present questionnaire. The findings should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that TikTok cannot contribute to vocabulary learning. Rather, the results suggest that frequency and duration of TikTok use alone may be insufficient indicators of vocabulary learning, particularly when the measurement of usage intensity has weak reliability and the vocabulary outcome is based on a very small number of items. The theoretical mechanism proposed by Krashen involves more than exposure: it requires meaningful and comprehensible input and learner processing. Future studies should therefore employ more reliable measures of TikTok engagement, distinguish English-language exposure from general TikTok use, use a larger and more varied vocabulary assessment, and consider longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to examine vocabulary development over time.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between TikTok Usage Intensity and English Vocabulary Mastery among 52 students of the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University using a quantitative correlational design. Spearman's correlation showed no significant relationship between the variables ($r_s = -.049$, $p = .732$). Similarly, vocabulary mastery did not differ significantly across low, moderate, and high TikTok usage groups (Kruskal-Wallis $H = .796$, $p = .672$; ANOVA $F = .286$, $p = .753$), with homogeneous variances (Levene's $p = .252$). However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because the TikTok Usage Intensity questionnaire showed unacceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = $-.118$), while the six-item vocabulary measure also had low reliability ($\alpha = .516$). Thus, the findings are specific to this sample and these instruments rather than evidence against Krashen's Input Hypothesis. For students, TikTok should be viewed as one potential source of English input requiring attentive engagement. Lecturers should use it as a guided supplementary resource. Future research should improve both instruments, use larger and more balanced samples, and adopt longitudinal or pre-test/post-test designs.

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