

University Students' Perceptions of using TikTok in education: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract— The number of young adults using various applications is increasing. Life in the 21st century requires people to constantly familiarize themselves with newly invented technologies that facilitate many aspects of life, including education. To this aim, some students choose to use the TikTok application. Students' perceptions of using TikTok in education have yet to be explored. The present questionnaires with 111 university students aim to explore two research questions: (1) What are the university students' experiences of using TikTok? and (2) What are the university students' perceptions of using TikTok in education? The results are presented in two parts according to the research objectives. The first part relates to students' experiences of using TikTok which focuses on the usage of TikTok and the difficulties they encountered. Five themes emerged from the question related to difficulties: privacy issues, technical difficulties, concerns about video content, lack of skills, and hindrance to learning. The second part of the findings focuses on learners' perceptions on the use of TikTok in education and the benefits of TikTok in learning. The latter revealed three main themes: entertainment, improving English skills and providing learning resources. These insights into students' perceptions of TikTok use in education can guide teachers and learners, as well as policymakers, in optimizing the use of TikTok in education.

Keywords — perceptions, experience, benefits, difficulties, TikTok, education

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID -19 pandemic has caused universities around the world to scale back their on-campus activities and triggered a surge in online teaching and learning. The development of today's sophisticated technology has led to a breakthrough in learning (Zaitun et. al., 2021). Instructors use online learning platforms such as Google Meet, Google Classroom and Zoom to teach in virtual classrooms via synchronous and asynchronous sessions that allow students to learn at their own pace (Ko & Rossen, 2017; Finkelstein, 2016). To make teaching on these platforms more effective, many instructors use technological tools with various functions (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). Some examples of such tools are email for one-

on-one communication, chats and instant messaging for group discussions, and blogs for uploading materials or posting learners' thoughts and written work. Another teaching tool that has gained prominence in recent years is social networking (Huang et. al., 2019). As the name suggests, social networking sites originally connect people with family and friends on the Internet for entertainment purposes, but they can also become a powerful educational tool because of the functions of sharing texts, images, music, links, and videos (Davis, 2009).

Zaitun et. al., (2021) states that TikTok is one of the most widely used applications. The TikTok application is a social media through which videos can be uploaded with various video editing functions so that they can be created at will. Users can create short videos from fifteen seconds to three minutes long and upload them as content to their accounts. To make the videos more attractive, users can use some features, such as adding a soundtrack and changing the speed (Anderson, 2020). To add a soundtrack to the videos, users can choose one of the many sounds in the app or upload their own sounds. In addition, they can change the speed of the videos or the sounds, which creates an interesting effect and attracts viewers. Within a short period of time, the app gained the interest of many users and viewers around the world, which led individuals and institutions to realize its potential as an educational tool and spread knowledge through this app (Chen et. al., 2021). Even educators have attempted to incorporate this app as an instructional medium in their classes to facilitate tertiary-level learning (Escamilla-Fajardo et. al., 2021). This is because incorporating social media into the teaching and learning process can improve student contribution and engagement, foster a sense of community, support a learner-centred approach, increase student participation and interaction, promote creativity, and improve academic outcomes (Aida Nabilah Azman et al., 2021).

While these related previous studies focused on the institution-initiated use of TikTok for teaching and learning (e.g., Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021; Zaitun et al., 2021), the study of learners' self-directed practice with the technology is also crucial. This is because TikTok is one of the most popular apps in the world (at least among people under a certain age) (Nur Ilianis Adnan et al., 2021). Besides, learning using TikTok is in line with the aspiration of the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Learning (2015-2025), which promotes independent learning and lifelong learning among its tertiary students (Razali, Xuan, & Samad, 2018). Accordingly, the purpose of this preliminary study was to describe (1) learners' perceptions of using TikTok in education, (2) the benefits of TikTok to themselves, and (3) the difficulties they encountered in using TikTok. The next section explains the methodology of the study, then presents and discusses the research findings. The paper ends with the conclusion and implications of using TikTok in education.

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES

According to Alguacil et al., (2021), education is also evolving; social media is revolutionizing the educational context, and online or hybrid education is becoming more popular. In education, TikTok enhances classroom interactivity, accessibility, and collaboration, as well as a window for online learning. In fact, the popular video-sharing website has gone down a storm with Gen-Z, outpacing its trendsetting predecessors, notably Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook (Reindl, 2020). TikTok's decision to invest further in education is one of the big developments. The video content is a powerful learning platform, as YouTube and many other platforms have shown, and it interacts with the app's recent demographic while providing more opportunities for others to use it (Lunden, 2020). With the new educational app, it is better for teachers and students to use this kind of platform so that they really understand its various functions as it provides them with numerous benefits. Besides, #onlineclass was highly promoted by TikTok as a featured hashtag, making it the largest hashtag, followed by #onlineschool as the second largest hashtag (Literat, 2021). This shows that TikTok is a good application for students to learn new things in their life, especially as an online learning method. Not only can they use TikTok for other things, but it is also good for them to acquire knowledge. It is a good opportunity for teachers and students to use this new technology and discover the advantages of TikTok for them. Most short videos are moving applications that allow users to create, edit, share, and watch short videos (Jung & Zhou, 2019). Moreover, TikTok's video features encourage certain innovative teachers to develop TikTok-based assignments in closed groups. Students can also work collaboratively or individually to produce video content using their conceptual model, promoting peer-to-peer education (Robillos, 2020).

In a study conducted by Nur Ilianis Adnan et al., (2021), it was found that of 105 students, 70 preferred using TikTok as a learning tool to transfer information from audio to a graphical representation. They indicated that the music and fun elements in TikTok made it more interesting to use compared to the traditional mind map method. One of them also emphasized that by using TikTok, he can challenge himself to use new methods and explore more. In terms of content, students admitted that they remember better when using TikTok because they must spend more time creating the

video on TikTok and therefore have to watch the information for a longer time than the traditional mind map method, which takes less than 10 minutes to transfer the information. Even though there were a few students who expressed their opposite opinion on the use of TikTok saying that TikTok requires much more time and effort, overall, the results of this study indicated positive feedback, as most respondents preferred this new method over the traditional mind map due to its novelty and interesting features.

Apart from its educational value, unfortunately, it is becoming a source of concern for parents. That is why a few countries have placed a temporary ban on Tik-Tok, including India, considering its fatalities. According to Wang (2020), TikTok was briefly blocked in Indonesia in 2018 and Pakistan in 2020 for providing 'morally wrong' or 'offensive' videos. From this, the use of TikTok can also lead to danger if people do not use it properly. Obviously, uncontrolled use can have an impact on an individual's education. To counteract, youth groups that surf TikTok for educational and other excessive input are however present. With proven studies, it is evident that TikTok helps students learn "differently" and is an important forum for teaching academic material and promoting social/emotional well-being (Solomon, 2021). TikTok offers a novel educational approach that combines technology, kinaesthetic movement, and social collaboration or collective learning. In summary, the use of the TikTok application is highly influential because of its usefulness and benefits, such as facilitating and creating fun learning environments, watching entertaining videos, running a business, and learning quickly about current events in the world, as claimed by Anggi E Pratiwi et al. (2021).

From the above literature and previous studies, the impact of social media has both positive and negative components. As the educational system has changed over time, students have begun to drastically use social media, including TikTok, as a means of obtaining information. However, despite its popularity as one of the most downloaded apps among Malaysian youth, there are a few studies that explore the use of the TikTok app for teaching and learning in the Malaysian context (Melur Yunus et al., 2019). This preliminary study, therefore, aims to investigate the use of TikTok by university students and their perceptions of its benefits in education. Given the lack of studies, conducting this preliminary study is important because the students' insights will then expectantly help the researchers in preparing a teaching design that incorporates TikTok for a future study.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (1) What are university students' experiences of using TikTok?
- (2) What are university students' perceptions of using TikTok in education?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used in this study. The first part of the questionnaire contains questions related to students' experience of using TikTok while the questions in the second part are related to their perceptions of its usefulness in education. The participants consisted of 111 students from diploma and degree programs of mixed courses (engineering, health science and hotel management) from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang who

were selected through convenience sampling. The questionnaire was distributed to the students via a Google form, considering that classes at the university were held online. The quantitative data obtained were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data from the open-ended questions were organized into major themes for drawing conclusions.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in two parts, in line with the research objectives. The first part relates to the students' experiences of using TikTok, in which three questions were used to collect data. The close-ended questions (i.e., question one and two) gave students the option to choose between 'yes' and 'no', while the third question was an open-ended question in which they were asked to write down the answers. The questions were as follows:

1. Are you a TikTok application user?
2. Have you tried creating your own TikTok videos?
3. What difficulties did you encounter when using TikTok?

Table 1: Students' experiences with the use of TikTok

No.	Questions	YES (%)	NO (%)
1.	Are you a TikTok application user?	83.8	16.2
2.	Have you tried creating your own TikTok videos?	42.3	57.7

Table 1 reports on the students' experiences of using TikTok, in particular their actual use of the application and the video creation feature. As the table shows, most students (83.8%) used TikTok and only 16.2% answered "no". From the results, it appears that young people are the main user group of Tik Tok, as noted by Hou (2018), who explained that the short video application was developed for the younger generation aged 18-28.

In terms of their experience with the application's video creation feature, while most students (57.7%) indicated that they had not tried to create their own TikTok videos, almost 42.3% of them had. Some previous studies discovered the opposite results, in which students were found to be highly motivated to create their own TikTok videos to create their own identity, express themselves and receive praise and social recognition (Bahiyah Omar & Dequan, 2020; Bossen & Kottasz; 2020; Yang, 2020). In contrast, some students may find recording and publishing videos of themselves embarrassing, as found in a study by Andiappan et al. (2022). Moreover, as cautioned by Xiuwen and Razali, (2021), creating self-recorded video in TikTok requires the students to master the skills in using the application. Thus, it is possible that the students lacked the skills to create TikTok videos, as revealed in their open-ended responses.

In regards to the third open-ended question which questioned their difficulties in using TikTok, coding of their responses generated five key themes: privacy issues, technical

difficulties, concerns about video content, lack of skills, and hindrance to learning. The first theme is related to some privacy issues such as hacking and visibility of TikTok accounts that students feared when using TikTok. The second theme, which relates to technical issues, includes high mobile data and memory consumption and poor internet access limiting their TikTok use as this also affects video quality.

In addition, the analysis of the qualitative data revealed their concerns about the content of TikTok videos, which is the third theme. As students described in their responses, they were exposed to videos that could have "bad", "non-beneficial", "false", "violent" and "personal" content. Moreover, some of the students expressed concern about getting "random content" recommended on their For You page and having to skip "a lot of questionable contents". The students' responses also revealed that the English language makes it difficult to understand the video content, mainly because of unfamiliar vocabulary and speaking too fast.

The fourth theme pertains to students' lack of skills in using TikTok, which made it "hard" for them to edit, create and publish their own TikTok content. This finding is in line with that of Nur Ilianis Adnan et. al. (2021), whose study showed that students claimed that using TikTok required much more time and effort. The fifth theme is about students' thoughts of TikTok as a hindrance to their learning. To illustrate, some of them described using TikTok as "addictive" and a "waste of time" because they tend to spend so much time scrolling and watching the videos "late into the night".

From the results on challenges and difficulties, it is undeniable that TikTok could not run away from any controversial issues. In its infancy, TikTok ran into a series of controversy and in 2019, it was banned in India for a short amount of time due to "morality issues". On several occasions, it has been accused of not doing enough to protect the users who are by and large young teenagers and young adults (Dillon, 2020). Xiuwen and Razali (2021) also expressed their concern on the use of TikTok for teaching and learning, as TikTok content could be distracting, students could be exposed to cyberbullying, and their private information could be leaked.

This second part of the results section presents the students' perceptions on the use of TikTok in education. Three questions were also used to collect data, with question one and two being close-ended, in which students could answer 'yes' or 'no'. Question three was open-ended and allowed students to write down their answers. The questions were as follows:

1. Do you use TikTok for learning?
2. Do you think TikTok has an advantage in education?
3. What are the benefits of TikTok for learning?

Table 2: Students' perceptions on the use of TikTok in education

No.	Questions	YES (%)	NO (%)
1.	Do you use TikTok for learning?	73.9	26.1
2.	Do you think TikTok has an advantage in education?	86.5	13.5

As Table 2 shows, most students (73.9%) used TikTok for learning. Most students (86.5%) also believed in the benefits of TikTok in education. Based on the responses to question three, perceptions on the benefits of TikTok can be categorized into three main themes: entertainment, improving English skills and providing learning resources.

The first theme that emerged in terms of perceived benefits is entertainment. As described by the students, using TikTok for learning was "interesting", "entertaining" and "fun". According to some students, using it "helped with boredom" and "stress relieve". This result confirms the earlier study by Lawrence (2020), which found a positive correlation between entertainment and motivation to use TikTok. In addition, Yang (2020) discovered that real-life distresses encourage consumers to use TikTok as an immediate pleasure outlet to entertain themselves, especially during a pandemic. Hence, it can be concluded that entertainment such as funny or humorous videos affects the popularity of TikTok. Accordingly, the study by Bossen and Kottasz (2020) found that fulfilling entertainment was the main motivation for students' to use TikTok, regardless of whether it was passive or active consumption.

The second theme pertains to students' perceptions that using TikTok has improved their English skills such as pronunciation and vocabulary. Regarding the third theme, most students believed that TikTok provided them with a variety of learning resources that were not limited to education, but also offered hacks for everyday life. Moreover, by using TikTok, they were able to gain new knowledge on various topics of interest and update themselves on the latest news from around the world. The samples of student responses about the benefits of TikTok for learning include the following:

"Learn many things and get to know many news issue"

"Can learn something new"

"Able to know something interesting or life hacks easily"

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"I can study more about my course"

"We learn about new things like history of the place, about health, cooking recipe, what's going on in other countries and many more"

From the learners' responses, it can be concluded that some users are attracted to TikTok's uniqueness which is related to entertainment and informativeness. The information provided on TikTok ranges from unboxing videos, tutorials, sharing opinions, warnings, and giving suggestions about services or products, life hacks or DIY (do it yourself). Accordingly, it was found that there is a positive association between the content information and the popularity of TikTok (Aliyah Widyasari Putri Daryus et. al., 2022). This is because TikTok combines the popular features of the app, one of which is the "For You" feed which displays videos based on the likes of TikTok users. Ngangom (2020) also found that Tik Tok is more than simply a social media site; it has a uniqueness that is different from other platforms, thus Tik Tok video results, even when shared across many networks, may still capture viewers' attention.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to explore the perceptions of learners on the TikTok app. The results are presented in two parts according to the research objectives. The first part relates to students' experiences of using TikTok which focuses on the usage of TikTok and the difficulties encountered. Five themes emerged from the question related to the difficulties; privacy issues, technical difficulties, concerns about video content, lack of skills, and hindrance to learning. The second part of the findings focuses on learners' perceptions of the use of TikTok in education and the benefits of TikTok in learning. The latter revealed three main themes: entertainment, improving English skills and providing learning resources. The findings of this preliminary study are crucial as they shed light on the use of TikTok among Malaysian university students and their opinions on its educational benefits. Since most students are familiar with TikTok, have used it for learning, and are positive about its educational benefits, further studies should be conducted to explore the integration of TikTok in teaching and learning. This should also take into account difficulties expressed by students in using TikTok when planning the teaching strategy.

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