

THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF TIKTOK'S FOR YOUR PAGE (FYP) ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPOSURE AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE USE AMONG FORMER PESANTREN STUDENTS

Pynkan Kartika Putri¹, Fadhilah Ramadhani², Dwi Wara Wahyuningrum³,
Zeny Luthvia⁴, Ervin Yudianto⁵, Faiz Rizki Muhammad^{*6}

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Darussalam Gontor

Author corresponding email*: faizrizkimuhammad@unida.gontor.ac.id

Abstract

In today's digital era, social media has become an important source of informal English exposure for Generation Z, including individuals with educational backgrounds in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Among various platforms, TikTok's For You Page (FYP) frequently exposes users to authentic English language content through personalized recommendations. This study aims to explore how former pesantren students perceive the influence of TikTok's FYP on their English language exposure and informal language use. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires involving former pesantren students who regularly engaged with English-language content on TikTok. Participants perceived that TikTok provided authentic exposure to vocabulary, slang, pronunciation, and everyday expressions while complementing rather than replacing formal English instructions. These findings suggest that TikTok may serve as a valuable complementary resource for informal English exposure when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical guidance and digital literacy support.

Keywords: digital platform; English language; generation z; pesantren; TikTok

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital media has transformed the way generation Z engages with information, communication, and learning. Unlike traditional classroom settings, social media platforms provide continuous access to authentic language through short-form videos, interactive content, and user-generated communication. Among these platforms, TikTok has gained remarkable popularity because it combines entertainment with easily accessible educational content, allowing users to encounter English vocabulary, expressions, pronunciation, and conversational language in meaningful contexts. Previous studies have also highlighted that TikTok is increasingly used not only for entertainment but also for educational purposes, including language learning and religious content creation, demonstrating its growing role in supporting informal learning among young people (Nababan & Harahap, 2023). Likewise, Ariantini et al. (2021) suggests that social media has become an important complementary resource for English learning, offering learners opportunities to engage with authentic language beyond formal educational environments.

Among TikTok's distinctive features, the For You Page (FYP) plays a central role in shaping users' content consumption by recommending video based on individual preferences and interactions (Zeng et al., 2021; Vera & Ghosh, 2025). Through this personalized content delivery, users are repeatedly exposed to English videos containing contemporary vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, slang, abbreviations, and conversational discourse. Such repeated exposure has been associated with incidental language learning, in which learners encounter linguistic forms naturally while engaging with meaningful content rather than through explicit instructions. Previous study has also discussed how TikTok facilitates the circulation of emerging linguistic expressions and digital communication practices among Generation Z, reflecting the dynamic relationship between language use and online interaction (Nashrudina et al., 2025). Instead of presenting English solely as an academic subject, TikTok offers learners opportunities to observe how the language is used in everyday communication,

allowing them to become familiar with authentic expressions that are rarely introduced in conventional learning materials.

The experiences of learners with pesantren backgrounds provide an important context for understanding informal English exposure through digital media. Indonesian pesantren are widely recognized as multilingual educational environments where Arabic, Indonesian, English coexist within structured for understanding and institutional practices (Muhammad & Ashadi, 2019; Muhammad & Purbani, 2024; Tahir, 2015; Uctuvia & Jaza, 2024). In contrast, digital platforms such as TikTok expose learners more spontaneous and informal forms of English that differ from the language typically encountered educational environment to broader digital spaces may shape how they experience English language content in everyday life. Their experiences therefore provide valuable insights into how informal digital exposure complements previous formal language learning while remaining influenced by their educational and sociocultural backgrounds.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the educational potential of TikTok and its contribution to English language learning, most of them have primarily examined the platform in general educational settings or among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners without considering the distinctive experiences of learners with pesantren backgrounds. Existing research within the pesantren context has largely focused on multilingual practices, language policies, students' motivation to learn English, or the integration of digital media into education (Tahir, 2015; Muhammad & Purbani, 2024; Uctuvia & Jaza, 2024). Meanwhile, studies discussing TikTok have generally emphasized its role in facilitating vocabulary learning, digital communication, or emerging language practices among Generation Z (Ariantini et al., 2021; Nashrudina et al., 2025). Consequently, limited attention has been given to how former pesantren students themselves perceive their exposure to English through TikTok's For You Page (FYP), particularly regarding how they experience informal English use after leaving a highly regulated educational environment. Exploring these perceptions may provide a richer understanding of how digital platforms complement, rather than replace formal language learning experiences.

Building upon this gap, the present study explores how former pesantren students perceive the role of TikTok's For You Page (FYP) in their English language exposure and informal language use. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach through semi-structure interviews and open-ended questionnaires, this study focuses on participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding their engagement with English-language content on TikTok. Rather than examining measurable improvements in English proficiency, the study seeks to understand how participants describe the opportunities and challenges they encounter while interacting with authentic English content through the platform. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital language learning by providing insights into the experiences of former pesantren students, a population that has received relatively limited attention in previous studies concerning social media and English language exposure.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how former pesantren students perceive their exposure to English language content through TikTok's For You Page (FYP). The qualitative approach was considered appropriate for understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding their engagement with English content on TikTok rather than measuring changes in their English proficiency. The study adopted thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning across the collected data.

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The participants were five female former pesantren students aged 19-21 years who had studied at the same Islamic boarding school for approximately four to six years and had left the pesantren around one to two years before the study was conducted. All participants were regular TikTok users and reported frequent exposure to English content on their For You Page (FYP). Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly their experience of studying in a pesantren context and their active engagement with TikTok and English content. Of the five participants, three participated in semi-structured interviews and also completed the open-ended questionnaire, while two participants completed only the questionnaire. The participants were selected because their experiences as former pesantren students and active TikTok users provided relevant perspectives for exploring informal English exposure through the platform.

Data were collected in July 2025 through semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire. The three semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Google Meet and lasted approximately 40 minutes each. The interviews were conducted in both English and Indonesian to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives comfortably. Each interview consisted of three core questions addressing participants' TikTok use, experiences of encountering English content, the role of the FYP, exposure to vocabulary and slang, pronunciation, informal English use, challenges, and perceptions of English learning. The same core questions were used with all interview participants, while follow-up probing questions were asked when necessary to clarify or explore participants' responses in greater depth. With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded for subsequent transcriptions and analysis.

An open-ended questionnaire was also administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions written in English and was distributed to participants online. For participants who took part in the interviews, the questionnaire was distributed after the interview sessions, while the two participants who were not interviewed received the questionnaire after providing their consent to participate. Participants were given approximately three days to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire questions are different from the interview questions and were designed to obtain broader perspective on participants' experiences and perceptions, while the interviews provided opportunities to explore individual responses in greater depth. All questionnaire responses and interview data were included in the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts and questionnaire responses. Second, initial coded were generated manually using Microsoft Excel. The initial codes were developed inductively based on frequently occurring word or phrases, recurring ideas, and responses considered relevant to the research questions. Third, codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader categories. Fourth, these categories were examined and organized into preliminary themes. Fifth, the themes were reviewed and refined by revisiting the coded data and the original responses to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' experiences and addressed the research objectives. Finally, the themes were clearly defined and named before being used to organize and interpret the findings. The researcher conducted a re-check of the coding and themes after the initial analysis, and the coding and thematic interpretation were also reviewed by the researcher's academic supervisor. The final analysis resulted in four overarching themes presented in the Findings section. No member checking was conducted.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, data source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The use of two sources of qualitative data enabled the researcher to identify

recurring patterns and compare participants' perspectives across the datasets. The convergence of relevant findings from the two sources supported the credibility of the interpretations. Ethical considerations were also addressed throughout the research process. Before participating, all participants received information about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study. To protect participants' privacy, their identities were anonymized using participant codes (e.g., P1, P2). The collected research data were stored securely on the researcher's personal laptop and were used solely for research purposes. The study did not obtain formal ethical approval from a university ethics committee or institutional review board.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the obtained data and the thematic analysis show four main themes: a) Social Media Access Patterns in Pesantren, b) TikTok FYP as a Source of English Exposure, c) Informal English Usage Influenced by TikTok, d) Educational Aspirations for TikTok-Based Methods,

Social Media Access Patterns in Pesantren

The findings indicate that participants' access to TikTok was closely associated with restrictions they experienced while living in the pesantren environment. Participants recalled that smartphone and social media use was limited during their time in the boarding school, meaning that their opportunities to access TikTok were generally restricted to school or occasions when they were outside the pesantren or visited by their parents. As former pesantren students, participants reflected on these experiences when describing how their patterns of social media use developed over time.

"I just use TikTok when my mother came to the boarding school to visit me or during the holiday." [P1]

"I only used when holiday and also when my parents came for visiting me." [P2]

These accounts suggest that participants' engagement with TikTok was not a regular part of their daily routine while they were living in the pesantren. Instead, access to the platform depended largely on the institutional regulations and circumstances surrounding their time outside the boarding school. This pattern can be understood through Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory, which views individual practices as shaped by the interaction between human agency and the structures within which individuals operate. In this context, pesantren regulations formed part of the institutional structure that constrained participants' access to digital media, while periods outside the pesantren provided greater opportunities for them to engage with platforms such as TikTok.

After gaining greater access to smartphones and social media outside the pesantren environment, participants reported spending considerably more time on TikTok, particularly during periods of unstructured free time. Some participants described using the application for more than five hours a day, primarily for entertainment and relaxation.

"Since I have nothing to do at home, I can use TikTok for above 5 hours." [P1]

This account suggests that participants' TikTok engagement increased when they had greater autonomy over their time and digital media access. This finding is consistent with Fedak

et al. (2024), who found that students tend to increase their TikTok use during periods of unstructured free time, positioning the platform as a space that may serve both entertainment and informal learning purposes. In the present study, participants similarly described TikTok as a platform they used primarily for entertainment but through which they also encountered English-language content incidentally.

Participants also distinguished the English they encountered through TikTok from the English they had experienced in formal educational settings. They generally described English on TikTok as more flexible, conversational, and characterized by slang and informal expressions.

“They taught English in a formal way compared to English TikTok which taught about informal language more.” [P1]

“English TikTok is more flexible because it sounds more casual.” [P2]

These responses indicate that participants perceived a distinction between the formal English associated with classroom instruction and the more informal language they encountered on TikTok. Rather than suggesting that TikTok objectively provides more authentic English than formal instruction, the findings demonstrate that participants experienced the platform as a source of conversational expressions and informal language that they perceived as less commonly encountered in their formal learning environment. Similar observations were reported by Nuri (2023), who argued that digital media increasingly blur the boundaries between formal and informal language, requiring learners to develop the ability to shift between language registers according to communicative contexts. Likewise, Ugoala (2024) emphasized that TikTok has become an environment in which Generation Z encounters emerging linguistic forms and contemporary discourse practices.

Despite recognizing the communicative value of informal English, participants noted that teachers generally discouraged the use of slang or non-standard expressions in academic tasks.

“Teachers are fine, but when it comes to slang, it's different.” [P1]

“If we use TikTok expressions and they become grammatical errors, teachers disagree with that.” [P2]

These responses reflect a distinction between the language practices participants encountered through social media and the formal language norms expected in educational settings. Within their educational experiences, grammatical accuracy and standard English remained important, while informal expressions encountered through TikTok were considered appropriate only in particular contexts. This finding can be interpreted through Institutional Theory, which explains how educational institutions maintain established norms through formal regulations and instructional practices.

Participants also reported that some peers in the pesantren were surprised when they used expressions associated with TikTok because these expressions sounded overly casual or unfamiliar.

“Some people in the pesantren were surprised because my phrases sounded casual and trendy.” [P4]

This experience suggests that participants' exposure to informal digital language did not automatically translate into universally accepted language use across different social contexts. Instead, participants appeared to recognize that expressions encountered on TikTok might be perceived differently depending on the communicative setting and audience. This observation

is consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence, which emphasizes that effective communication involves not only grammatical knowledge but also an understanding of the sociolinguistic appropriateness of language use.

TikTok FYP as a Source of English Exposure

Participants described TikTok's For You Page (FYP) as an accessible source of English-language exposure that complemented their formal English learning experiences. Rather than using TikTok primarily for explicit grammar instruction, participants reported encountering English vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, and everyday conversations while watching videos that appeared on their FYP and matched their personal interests.

"I'm interested in watching English content because I want to be more fluent." [P3]

This response suggests that participants' engagement with English-language content on TikTok was not always driven by formal learning objectives. Instead, their exposure often occurred alongside their regular use of the platform for entertainment and personal interests. This pattern can be understood in relation to incidental language learning, in which learners encounter and potentially acquire language through exposure to meaningful content rather than through explicit instruction. Huckin and Coady (1999) argue that authentic and contextualized exposure can support vocabulary development, while Tomasello's (2006) Usage-Based Theory suggests that repeated encounters with language in meaningful contexts may contribute to learners' development of linguistic patterns.

Participants also reported positive emotional responses to the English they encountered on TikTok. They described feeling more confident, capable, and motivated when they encountered new vocabulary and expressions that they could understand or use. Participants frequently compared their experiences with TikTok content to traditional English learning, describing the platform as more engaging because it presented English through examples of everyday communication.

"English TikTok content creators provide direct examples of common phrases and trending vocabulary in daily conversations." [P2]

"Learning English through TikTok is more enjoyable than textbooks." [P3]

These responses indicate that participants valued the contextualized presentation of English on TikTok. Unlike textbooks, which participants associated with more formal and structured language learning, TikTok videos were perceived as presenting vocabulary and expressions within conversational situations. Participants therefore viewed the platform as providing opportunities to observe how certain expressions were used in contexts that appeared closer to everyday communication. Such exposure may support learners' understanding of how vocabulary and expressions function in context, consistent with Tomasello's (2006) Usage-Based Theory, which emphasizes the role of repeated experience with language in meaningful communicative settings.

Participants further described the short and entertaining format of TikTok as a factor that encouraged their continued engagement with English-language content.

"I naturally learn new vocabulary, slang, and pronunciation because the videos are short and much more fun than memorizing from a textbook." [P4]

The participants' accounts suggest that enjoyment and accessibility were important aspects of their engagement with English content on TikTok. The short duration of videos allowed participants to encounter English in manageable segments, while the entertaining format encouraged them to continue watching and encountering similar content. These experiences can be interpreted in relation to Krashen's (1989) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which proposes that emotional factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety may influence learners' engagement with language input. In the present study, participants' reports of enjoyment and reduced boredom suggest that they perceived TikTok as a less intimidating and more engaging environment for encountering English than some traditional learning activities.

At the same time, the findings should be understood in terms of participants' perceptions rather than as evidence of objectively measured language improvement. While participants believed that TikTok helped them encounter new vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation, the present study did not directly assess changes in their English proficiency. Instead, the findings indicate that participants perceived repeated exposure to English-language content on the FYP as a useful complement to their existing learning experiences.

Overall, participants viewed TikTok's FYP as a supplementary source of English exposure that provided access to vocabulary, pronunciation, conversational expressions, and examples of everyday language use. The platform was perceived as particularly engaging because English appeared within short, entertaining, and interest-based content rather than through explicit language instruction alone. These findings suggest that TikTok may serve as an informal environment in which learners encounter English alongside their everyday digital activities. However, rather than replacing formal English instruction, participants' accounts indicate that TikTok was perceived as complementing classroom learning by offering additional opportunities to encounter forms of English that they associated with everyday communication.

Informal English Usage Influenced by TikTok

The findings indicate that participants perceived TikTok as an important source of exposure to informal English. Through repeated encounters with content appearing on their For You Page (FYP), participants reported becoming familiar with slang, abbreviations, idiomatic expressions, and conversational sentence patterns that they perceived as less commonly introduced in formal classroom instruction. Rather than intentionally studying these expressions, participants described encountering them incidentally while engaging with English-language content on the platform.

"I found words like slay, no cap, and lit." [P2]

"I found slang such as nonchalant, clumsy, and something fishy." [P3]

"I also learned abbreviations like TBH, GOAT, IMO, FOMO, IDK, and LOL." [P4]

These responses suggest that participants encountered a range of contemporary vocabulary, slang, and abbreviations through their engagement with TikTok. The expressions they

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mentioned reflect forms of English associated with informal digital communication and everyday interaction. Participants' experiences can be interpreted in relation to Krashen's (1989) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of exposure to meaningful language input in the language learning process. In this context, TikTok provided participants with opportunities to encounter linguistic forms that they might not have encountered as frequently through formal classroom materials. However, the findings represent participants' perceptions of their exposure and learning experiences rather than direct evidence of measurable language acquisition.

Beyond vocabulary and expressions, some participants also described using language encountered on TikTok as a reference when constructing their own English sentences. They reported paying attention to how expressions were used and attempting to reproduce similar patterns in their own communication.

"I try to understand the meaning first, then make my own sentences and guess in what context I should use them." [P1]

"I copy them so my English doesn't sound as formal as what is in textbooks." [P2]

These responses indicate that participants did not simply encounter unfamiliar expressions but also engaged with them by interpreting their meanings and considering how they might be used in different contexts. This process can be understood through Tomasello's (2006) Usage-Based Theory, which views language development as emerging from repeated experiences with language in meaningful contexts. From this perspective, participants' attempts to observe, interpret, and reproduce linguistic patterns encountered on TikTok may reflect an active engagement with language input. Nevertheless, the participants' accounts suggest that this process was primarily associated with informal communication, particularly when they wanted their English to sound less formal or more conversational.

Despite the perceived benefits of exposure to informal English, participants also reported difficulties in understanding some of the language they encountered on TikTok. The most frequently mentioned challenges included unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech, slang, and culture-specific references.

"Sometimes I find words I didn't know before." [P1]

"It's difficult when native speakers talk about unfamiliar topics." [P2]

"Sometimes creators speak too fast or use slang I've never heard before." [P4]

These responses demonstrate that exposure to naturally occurring digital content does not necessarily guarantee immediate comprehension. Participants experienced greater difficulty when videos contained unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech, or expressions that depended on knowledge of particular cultural contexts. These experiences can be interpreted in relation to Krashen's (1989) concept of comprehensible input, as participants appeared to find language more difficult to process when the input contained linguistic or cultural elements beyond their existing knowledge. Similarly, Sundaram et al. (2023) emphasize that the constantly evolving nature of slang can create additional challenges for second language learners.

The challenges reported by participants extended beyond vocabulary recognition to the interpretation of meaning in context. Several participants described misunderstanding

expressions because they initially interpreted them literally or were unfamiliar with their intended cultural or pragmatic meanings.

"I thought lashes me out meant voice out, but later I realized it had a different meaning." [P1]

"I thought under the bridge referred to the actual bridge." [P2]

"I assumed something fishy meant stingy, but it actually means suspicious." [P3]

Another participant recalled:

"I once copied a funny phrase without realizing it sounded sarcastic and slightly rude." [P4]

These examples suggest that participants' understanding of informal English depended not only on recognizing individual words but also on interpreting expressions according to their contextual, cultural, and pragmatic meanings. As Bachman (1990) explains, communicative competence involves more than grammatical knowledge and includes the ability to use and interpret language appropriately in different contexts. Similarly, Holmes (2022) argues that language meaning is closely connected to shared cultural knowledge and communicative norms. The participants' experiences therefore illustrate how exposure to informal English through TikTok may provide access to contemporary expressions while simultaneously requiring learners to develop greater awareness of the contexts in which those expressions are used.

At the same time, participants reported using various strategies to overcome difficulties in understanding TikTok content. These strategies included replaying videos, activating captions, slowing down playback speed, searching for unfamiliar vocabulary, watching similar content, and consulting online translations.

"I search for the meaning and watch similar content." [P1]

"I replay the video and look for the translation." [P2]

"I usually slow down the video, turn on captions, and pay attention to the slang afterwards." [P4]

These practices demonstrate that participants actively engaged with digital features and external resources when encountering unfamiliar language. Rather than relying solely on passive exposure, they described taking deliberate steps to clarify meaning and make difficult input more accessible. This pattern can be interpreted through Belshaw's (2012) Digital Literacy framework, particularly the cognitive, constructive, and critical dimensions of engaging with digital resources. Participants' use of captions, playback controls, online searches, and translations suggests that they drew on the technological affordances available on and around the platform to support their understanding of English content.

Overall, the findings suggest that participants perceived TikTok as expanding their exposure to contemporary informal English, including slang, abbreviations, idiomatic expressions, and conversational patterns. At the same time, their experiences demonstrate that such exposure can involve challenges related to comprehension, rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural references, and pragmatic meaning. Participants' strategies for addressing

these challenges further indicate that their engagement with TikTok involved active efforts to interpret and contextualize unfamiliar language. Thus, participants viewed TikTok as both a source of linguistic exposure and a space that required them to develop strategies for navigating informal and context-dependent forms of English. These findings highlight the potential value of combining exposure to digital language with guidance that helps learners distinguish between informal expressions and language appropriate for academic or formal communication.

Participant Aspirations for TikTok-Based Methods

Beyond using TikTok for entertainment and informal exposure to English, participants expressed interest in incorporating some of the platform's characteristics into formal English learning in pesantren. In particular, they valued the short, engaging, and contextualized presentation of language that they encountered through TikTok. Participants suggested that English-language content on digital platforms could provide additional opportunities to encounter language in contexts that appeared closer to everyday communication.

"I hope there will be more English content in the future because content should provide more value for learners." [P1]

"I really hope TikTok creators make more positive content rather than useless content." [P2]

Participants also highlighted the perceived advantages of short-form videos for English learning.

"The more English content on TikTok, the easier it becomes to study because of the short duration." [P3]

"If more creators made short, clear, and engaging English learning videos, studying would feel effortless." [P4]

These responses suggest that participants valued concise, accessible, and engaging digital materials as potential complements to conventional English learning. Their comments also indicate that their interest was not necessarily in replacing formal instruction with TikTok, but in incorporating some of the characteristics they appreciated from the platform, particularly short duration, clarity, engagement, and contextualized language use. This finding is consistent with Alfitri (2025), who reported that learners using TikTok-based English materials showed higher achievement in vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation. Similarly, Assakhi and Fakhurriana (2025) concluded that short-form educational videos may support speaking and listening performance by increasing learner engagement, while Zhang et al. (2022) identified short-video platforms as an increasingly relevant resource for foreign language instruction.

Participants further expressed positive attitudes toward incorporating TikTok or similar digital media into English lessons within pesantren. They perceived digital content as a potential means of connecting formal classroom learning with contemporary language use and everyday communication.

"Pesantren should utilize TikTok in English lessons because the world keeps moving forward." [P1]

“Using TikTok or similar media would make English classes more engaging and closer to how we actually use language in daily life.” [P4]

These responses indicate that participants valued learning experiences that extended beyond textbook-based examples and exposed them to forms of English that they associated with everyday communication. Their perspectives are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the potential of authentic learning materials to support learner motivation, communicative competence, and learner autonomy by presenting language in meaningful social contexts (Alamri, 2025; Hossain, 2024). Within the context of pesantren education, participants therefore perceived TikTok and similar digital resources as potentially complementary to formal instruction, particularly in providing additional exposure to contemporary and conversational English.

However, participants also recognized that incorporating TikTok into pesantren education may require consideration of institutional values and perceptions surrounding social media. One participant noted that the broader social reputation of TikTok could affect its acceptance in some educational environments.

“Some communities still have a negative view of TikTok. Maybe YouTube would be more acceptable.” [P2]

This response illustrates that participants distinguished between the potential educational value of digital content and the social reputation of the platform through which that content is delivered. In other words, participants' support for digital and short-form learning did not necessarily imply unrestricted acceptance of TikTok itself. Instead, their responses suggest that the suitability of a particular platform may depend on how it aligns with the values, expectations, and norms of the educational institution. As argued by Slim et al. (2019), the successful integration of social media into education requires attention to institutional culture and collaboration among relevant educational stakeholders.

Overall, participants expressed an aspiration for English learning that combines the strengths of formal education with the accessibility and engagement associated with digital media. They valued the potential of short-form content to provide concise, contextualized, and contemporary English input while also acknowledging the importance of institutional and cultural considerations. Rather than suggesting that TikTok should replace formal English instruction, participants' accounts point toward a more complementary role for digital media, in which selected features of short-form and authentic content could be incorporated into language learning while remaining consistent with the educational and cultural values of the pesantren context

OVERALL DISCUSSION

Enhanced Incidental Learning and Learner Engagement

Participants' accounts suggest that TikTok's For You Page (FYP) provided former pesantren students with continuing opportunities for incidental exposure to English. Rather than reporting learning through explicit grammar instruction, participants perceived that repeated exposure to English-language content on TikTok increased their familiarity with vocabulary, pronunciation, and conversational expressions. Because the algorithm personalizes content according to learners' interests, English input is presented in meaningful and enjoyable contexts, increasing both the frequency and quality of language exposure.

This finding reinforces Huckin and Coady's (1999) view that vocabulary development occurs naturally through repeated encounters with authentic language in context. Likewise,

Tomasello's (2006) Usage-Based Theory suggests that linguistic knowledge emerges from continuous interaction with meaningful language rather than isolated rule learning. Participants' reported attempts to imitate expressions encountered on TikTok suggest active engagement with communicative English. However, the study did not directly measure changes in their communicative competence.

Equally important, participants consistently described TikTok as more engaging than traditional textbook-based learning. The platform's short, interactive, and visually appealing videos encouraged sustained attention and reduced boredom, creating a learning environment that supported intrinsic motivation. This interpretation is consistent with Krashen's (1989) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which highlights the relationship between positive emotional conditions and engagement with language input. Participants perceived TikTok as a relatively enjoyable and low-pressure source of English exposure. Therefore, TikTok functions not only as a source of comprehensible input but also as a motivational environment that complements formal English instruction in pesantren.

TikTok, Learner Confidence, and Emerging Linguistic Identity

Beyond perceived linguistic exposure, participants reported that their engagement with TikTok was associated with greater confidence and motivation. Their accounts may also indicate an emerging sense of themselves as English users, although linguistic identity was not directly measured. Participants frequently reported feeling more confident, capable, and motivated after learning new expressions through English-language content. Unlike formal classroom settings, where accuracy often becomes the primary concern, TikTok offers a relatively low-pressure environment in which learners can experiment with authentic language and observe how English is used in everyday communication.

These findings further support Krashen's (1989) proposition that positive emotional factors facilitate language acquisition. Increased confidence encourages learners to engage more actively with English input, thereby strengthening both language development and learner autonomy. Within the pesantren context, where English is predominantly associated with formal academic instruction, TikTok expands learners' opportunities to construct a broader linguistic identity by exposing them to contemporary global communication.

Participants' accounts suggest that engagement with TikTok may have encouraged them to view English as a practical means of interaction and may have supported their willingness to use informal English. These interpretations remain perception-based because neither language acquisition nor willingness to communicate was directly measured.

Challenges of Informal Language Exposure

Despite its educational benefits, the findings also reveal several challenges associated with learning English through TikTok. Continuous exposure to slang, abbreviations, and conversational expressions may encourage learners to prioritize informal language over grammatical accuracy. Several participants admitted imitating expressions directly from TikTok without fully understanding their grammatical structure or contextual appropriateness.

This finding is consistent with Tomasello's (2006) Usage-Based Theory, which acknowledges that learners initially construct language from frequently encountered patterns. However, without systematic feedback, repeated imitation may also lead to fossilized errors or overgeneralization. Consequently, authentic exposure alone is insufficient to ensure balanced language development.

Another challenge concerns the complexity of authentic digital input. Participants frequently reported difficulties understanding rapid speech, unfamiliar slang, and culturally embedded expressions. These findings correspond with Krashen's (1989) concept of comprehensible

input, suggesting that language acquisition becomes less effective when input substantially exceeds learners' current proficiency level. Therefore, while TikTok provides abundant authentic English, pedagogical guidance remains necessary to help learners distinguish between appropriate informal communication and formal academic language

Digital Literacy and Pedagogical Implications

The findings also emphasize the importance of digital literacy in maximizing the educational value of social media. Rather than acting as passive consumers, participants actively replayed videos, enabled captions, adjusted playback speed, searched unfamiliar vocabulary, and consulted multiple online resources to improve comprehension. These learning strategies demonstrate learners' ability to regulate their own language development through digital technologies.

Belshaw's (2012) Digital Literacy framework provides an appropriate lens for interpreting these behaviors. Students demonstrated cognitive skills by interpreting unfamiliar input, constructive skills by utilizing technological features, and critical skills by evaluating information from multiple sources. These competencies illustrate that effective language learning through TikTok depends not only on exposure but also on learners' ability to critically engage with digital content.

Taken together, the findings suggest that TikTok should not be viewed as a replacement for formal English instruction but rather as a complementary learning resource. Within pesantren education, carefully selected TikTok-based materials can increase learner engagement, expose students to authentic communicative English, and strengthen learner autonomy while maintaining institutional values and academic standards. Integrating digital media with explicit instruction on grammar, pragmatics, and media literacy may therefore enable students to benefit from authentic language exposure without sacrificing formal language competence.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how former pesantren students perceived the influence of TikTok's For You Page (FYP) on their English language exposure and informal English use. Using a descriptive qualitative design with semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, the authors analysed accounts from 19-21-year-old former santri who regularly encounter English content on TikTok. Thematic analysis surfaced four patterns: (a) restricted yet purposeful social-media access in pesantren, (b) FYP as a steady source of authentic input, (c) participants' reported familiarity with informal lexis, abbreviations, and conversational sentence patterns, together with the grammatical and pragmatic challenges they experienced when using such expressions, and (d) students' aspirations to import TikTok-style, short-form, contextual materials into formal instruction. Overall, the paper argues that TikTok operates as an informal learning ecology that can complement classroom teaching when paired with scaffolds for register-shifting, grammar, pragmatics, and digital/media literacy, especially in religious-educational settings.

The study's scope is bounded by a small, purposive sample of TikTok-using Gen-Z participants (19-21) tied to Indonesian pesantren, reliance on self-report (interviews and online forms), and the absence of classroom observations, corpus triangulation, or performance-based measures of grammatical/pragmatic outcomes. Personalization of FYP feeds and recall or desirability bias may also shape the findings, while the cross-sectional design limits claimed about change over time. Future work could expand transferability and rigor via mixed-methods designs with larger and more diverse pesantren, comparative groups beyond pesantren, longitudinal tracking of register-shifting, corpus analyses of TikTok input and learner output,

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and experimental interventions that evaluate learning gains when TikTok-inspired tasks are systematically integrated into instruction.

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