



Popular English Songs in Tiktok to Teach English Vocabulary: A Mixed-Method Study

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Abstract

Although TikTok has been widely utilized as an educational medium, there remains a lack of empirical research examining its specific impact on vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, this study examined the impact of using popular TikTok songs as a medium for teaching English vocabulary to students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 2 Buleleng. With a mixed-methods approach, the research integrated a quasi-experimental design with qualitative observations to assess the effectiveness of TikTok-based vocabulary learning compared to conventional teaching methods. This study involved two groups: an experimental class, where students learned vocabulary through selected TikTok songs, and a control class, which followed a traditional textbook-based approach. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests to measure vocabulary acquisition, along with classroom observations to evaluate student engagement and participation. The findings revealed a significant improvement in vocabulary mastery among students in the experimental group, with their average score increasing from 63.52 in the pre-test to 83.22 in the post-test. Meanwhile, students in the control group showed only a slight improvement, from 64.00 in the pre-test to 67.76 in the post-test. The implications of the significant improvement in vocabulary mastery among students in the experimental group suggest that integrating popular TikTok songs into English vocabulary instruction can effectively enhance learning outcomes. This approach not only improves students' vocabulary acquisition more substantially than traditional methods but also indicates that engaging, culturally relevant digital media can serve as a powerful tool to boost motivation, participation, and confidence in language learning. This study highlights the potential of social media as an educational tool and encourages educators to explore creative, student-centered approaches to enhance language learning outcomes.

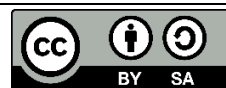
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1. Introduction

Vocabulary is widely recognized as a cornerstone of foreign language learning, playing a critical role in enabling learners to communicate effectively and achieve academic success. According to Cameron (2001), vocabulary constitutes a significant portion of language knowledge, and without a solid vocabulary foundation, language acquisition becomes nearly impossible. This view is supported by Harmon et al., (2009), who highlight vocabulary as a vital element in language development. Thornbury (2002) further clarifies that while grammar provides the structural framework for communication, it is vocabulary that truly conveys meaning and allows learners to express themselves clearly. Vocabulary learning encompasses both receptive skills, such as listening and reading, and productive skills, including speaking and writing. Importantly, vocabulary acquisition is an ongoing, lifelong process that requires both incidental exposure and deliberate, explicit teaching strategies to



deepen learners' understanding and use of words in various contexts. From a theoretical perspective, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) underscores the importance of comprehensible and meaningful input in language acquisition, highlighting how exposure to authentic language in context facilitates natural learning.

Despite the availability of numerous vocabulary teaching methods, many challenges persist in engaging students actively in the learning process, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Research indicates that students often face difficulties in mastering vocabulary, which negatively impacts their participation and motivation during lessons (Permana, 2020; Putri et al., 2021; Pramesti et al., 2025). Teachers, therefore, have a multifaceted role as facilitators, guides, and designers of learning strategies tailored to meet students' individual needs. Effective vocabulary instruction demands the use of diverse teaching methods, as no single approach is universally effective. Among these methods, the use of songs has emerged as a particularly promising tool (Trisnawati et al., 2024). Songs not only provide contextualized language input but also evoke positive emotions, making vocabulary learning more enjoyable and memorable. This approach leverages auditory exposure and contextual clues to help students internalize new words more effectively than traditional rote memorization techniques.

In recent years, the integration of technology and popular culture into language learning has opened innovative pathways for vocabulary instruction. While traditional studies on using songs in the classroom have largely focused on audio or video formats delivered through conventional media, TikTok introduces a unique multimodal and interactive platform that combines short-form videos with audiovisual, textual, and social engagement features. This format allows users to experience vocabulary learning in dynamic, culturally relevant contexts, often leveraging trends, challenges, and peer interaction, which may increase motivation and retention beyond that of classic song-based methods. Research by Sofeny et al. (2022) exemplifies how TikTok-based songs can significantly improve vocabulary mastery, yet such studies have predominantly been situated within general elementary and junior high school settings. Notably, there is a marked absence of investigations that explore TikTok's impact on vocabulary acquisition within madrasahs or Islamic educational contexts, where pedagogical approaches often remain conventional and songs are less frequently incorporated into language instruction. Moreover, existing research seldom clarifies whether the songs used were tailored for educational purposes or selected solely for popularity, raising questions about content appropriateness and contextual fit in religious school environments. These gaps underscore the necessity to examine the efficacy and cultural relevance of popular TikTok songs as a vocabulary teaching tool specifically adapted to the needs and sensitivities of madrasah learners, thereby expanding the understanding of digital media's role in diverse educational landscapes.

This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the impact of popular English songs on TikTok as a medium for teaching vocabulary at one public school in Buleleng. The research focuses on two primary objectives: first, to examine how the use of these songs influences students' vocabulary mastery scores, and second, to assess the level of student engagement during vocabulary learning activities involving TikTok songs. The study is guided by two key research questions: (1) What effect does the use of popular TikTok songs have on the improvement of vocabulary mastery scores among students? and (2) How do students engage with vocabulary learning when using popular songs on TikTok as a teaching medium? By addressing these questions, the research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness and practicality of integrating popular digital media into vocabulary instruction in a madrasah setting.

The significance of this research extends beyond theoretical contributions to vocabulary acquisition and teaching methodologies. Practically, it offers valuable insights for English teachers seeking innovative and engaging ways to enhance vocabulary learning among their students. For students, the use of popular TikTok songs as a learning medium is expected to stimulate interest,



increase motivation, and facilitate better retention of vocabulary. For researchers, the study provides a foundation for further exploration of digital and multimedia tools in language education. Additionally, the findings may inform school administrators and policymakers about the benefits of incorporating modern, culturally relevant media into the curriculum, potentially leading to improved learning facilities and higher quality educational outcomes. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the ongoing effort to make language learning more effective, enjoyable, and accessible for diverse student populations.

2. Method

Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, defined as a research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study to achieve a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This approach was used to answer two research questions regarding the effects of the popular English song on Tiktok and student engagement in vocabulary learning. The rationale for selecting a mixed-methods design study aims to leverage the strengths of both, producing findings that are not only statistically robust but also rich in contextual understanding. This integration is particularly important in the context of language learning, where cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions interact dynamically to influence student outcomes.

In this study, two intact ninth-grade classes from the same madrasah were purposively selected to participate, ensuring they were similar in demographic backgrounds and instructional environment. One class was designated as the experimental group, and the other as the control group. Prior to the intervention, both groups completed a pre-test to assess their baseline vocabulary proficiency, confirming no statistically significant differences in initial language abilities. Teacher experience was also considered; both classes were taught by instructors with comparable qualifications and years of teaching English to control for teacher effect.

The intervention for the experimental group involved integrating popular English-language songs available on TikTok as the medium for vocabulary instruction. The selected songs were chosen based on their popularity among adolescents, clear pronunciation, suitable content for educational purposes, and relevance to the vocabulary themes in the syllabus. Examples of songs included trending TikTok hits that contained repetitive, contextually rich vocabulary useful for language learning.

The intervention consisted of 8 sessions conducted over four weeks, with two sessions per week. Each session lasted approximately 40 minutes. Instructional methods incorporated multiple active learning strategies to maximize vocabulary acquisition and engagement. These included gap-fill exercises based on the song lyrics, sing-along activities encouraging pronunciation practice, and guided lyric translation to deepen comprehension. Additionally, multimedia elements such as TikTok video clips supplemented the lessons, providing visual and auditory stimuli that reinforced vocabulary in authentic contexts. Meanwhile, the control group received conventional vocabulary instruction aligned with the school's curriculum. This approach centered on textbook exercises, direct teaching of vocabulary meanings, and teacher-led explanation without the use of multimedia or popular songs. Both groups were post-tested at the conclusion of the intervention to measure vocabulary mastery gains and evaluate the effectiveness of the TikTok song-based method.

To explore the second research question—how students engage in learning vocabulary using popular songs on TikTok—this study employs qualitative research methods, specifically classroom observation. Classroom observation serves as a primary tool to identify and document various indicators of student engagement during vocabulary lessons using TikTok songs. The observer systematically records behaviors such as students' active participation, including asking questions, responding to prompts, and contributing to discussions.



Instrument

Measurement of variables is conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools. The independent variable's implementation is monitored through classroom observations to ensure fidelity of the intervention, while the dependent variable is quantitatively assessed using pre-tests and post-tests designed to evaluate vocabulary knowledge. These tests are constructed based on the syllabus and lesson plans, ensuring alignment with the curriculum and relevance to the students' learning level. The difference in test scores before and after the intervention provides empirical data on vocabulary improvement. Additionally, qualitative data from observations offer insights into how the use of TikTok songs influences student engagement and learning behaviors, complementing the quantitative assessment of vocabulary mastery.

Data Analysis

In this study, descriptive statistics serve as the foundational tools for summarizing and interpreting the quantitative data collected from students' vocabulary mastery tests. Descriptive statistical methods provide essential measures that describe the central tendency, dispersion, and overall distribution of the test scores, enabling the researcher to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of students' performance before and after the intervention. The independent sample t-test is a fundamental inferential statistical method used in this study to compare the mean vocabulary mastery scores between two independent groups: the experimental group exposed to popular TikTok songs and the control group taught through conventional methods. The primary purpose of this test is to determine whether the observed difference in mean scores between these two groups is statistically significant, indicating that the intervention had a measurable effect on students' vocabulary learning outcomes. This test is particularly appropriate when comparing two distinct groups on a continuous dependent variable, such as test scores, and is widely used in educational research to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions.

3. Findings

Table 1 present the results of descriptive analysis conducted.

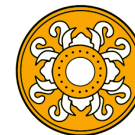
Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Control	10	61	67	64.00	1.975
Post-Test Control	8	64	72	67.76	2.278
Pre-Test Experiment	10	60	70	63.52	3.013
Post-Test Experiment	10	78	88	83.22	3.162

The descriptive analysis of the provided data indicated that the control group had a post-test mean score of 67.76 with a standard deviation of 2.278. On the other hand, the experimental group demonstrated a more significant post-test result, with a mean score reaching 83.22, compared to the pre-test mean score of 63.52 and a standard deviation of 3.162. The next analysis conducted was to identify the normality of the data.

Table 2. Results of Normality Test

		Shapiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	df	Sig.
Result	Pre-Test Control Class	.913	21	.064
	Post-Test Control Class	.918	23	.061



Pre-Test Experiment Class	.965	21	.631
Post-test Experiment Class	.947	23	.253

The normality analysis of the data demonstrated results that supported the assumption of a normal distribution. For the control group in the pre-test, the Shapiro-Wilk statistic was 0.913 with a p-value of 0.064, while the post-test had a Shapiro-Wilk statistic of 0.918 with a p-value of 0.061. Both indicated that the data did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, as the p-values were above 0.05. Furthermore, the experimental group in the pre-test recorded a Shapiro-Wilk statistic of 0.965 with a p-value of 0.631, and for the post-test, the statistic was 0.947 with a p-value of 0.253. These values were also greater than 0.05, indicating good normality. Thus, it could be concluded that all data groups met the assumption of normality, allowing the application of parametric statistical analysis for further evaluation.

Table 3. Results from Independent Sample t Test

df	sig	Mean difference	Effect Size
42	<0.001	15,445	2.776

The result of independent samples t-test for the post-test, which in this case referred to the students' vocabulary mastery, indicated a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group ($\text{sig.} < .05$). The experimental group had a post-test mean score ($M = 83.22$), while the control group had only ($M = 67.76$), resulting in a mean difference of 15.455. The Cohen's d value, significantly greater than 0.8 and approaching 2.8, indicates that the effect of the treatment (using TikTok songs in vocabulary learning) is strong and significant.

During the observation, the researcher identified some important findings. The use of TikTok songs in vocabulary lessons significantly enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes across several dimensions. Students demonstrated active participation throughout the sessions, displaying liveliness and attentiveness as they engaged deeply with the song lyrics, such as Bruno Mars' "Count On Me." They frequently asked questions, shared personal experiences, and took part in meaningful discussions, which fostered a strong classroom community and encouraged even typically quiet students to voice their thoughts. This engagement was further amplified by increased interest and motivation generated through the use of familiar and popular songs like Taylor Swift's "Love Story," which sparked enthusiasm and curiosity, making the learning process enjoyable and empowering students to explore vocabulary in a broader and more meaningful context.

Moreover, emotional and social engagement was evident in group activities centered around songs such as Adele's "All I Ask." These collaborative exercises allowed students to explain vocabulary to their peers and participate in lively lip-sync performances, thereby strengthening social bonds and enhancing the learning atmosphere. Students also exhibited positive non-verbal responses, such as sustained eye contact, smiling, nodding, and expressive facial reactions, indicating immersive engagement with the audiovisual material. Importantly, these experiences translated into improved language skills and confidence, as demonstrated when students confidently used newly acquired vocabulary in real-life conversations—for example, a student used the word "reminisce" from Wiz Khalifa's "See You Again," which not only showcased vocabulary retention but also encouraged peer learning and mutual support.

4. Discussions

In the experimental class, there was a significant improvement in students' ability to master English vocabulary after being taught using popular songs from TikTok. This indicated that the use of TikTok as a teaching medium had a positive impact on the students' learning process. Furthermore, the



evaluation results after teaching in the experimental class showed that vocabulary improvement occurred uniformly among the students. In contrast, the control class, which was taught using traditional methods, experienced some improvement; however, the results were not comparable to those achieved by the experimental class. This suggested that traditional methods were less effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery compared to the use of songs from TikTok. Statistical analysis also indicated a significant difference between the evaluation results after teaching in the experimental and control classes. The increase in vocabulary mastery in the experimental class was much more pronounced than in the control class.

This significant improvement could be attributed to the emotional and personal engagement provided by music and social media platforms like TikTok. Songs that were popular among students offered additional intrinsic motivation to learn new vocabulary because students were more interested in understanding the lyrics of the songs they liked. Additionally, TikTok's interactive features, such as creating lip-sync videos or watching short videos with authentic English content, contributed to a more enjoyable learning process and improved students' retention of the vocabulary being taught.

This study reinforced findings from previous research that highlighted the significant impact of using songs in English language teaching, particularly for vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Oktaviani (2021) demonstrated that using songs for young learners significantly improved their vocabulary achievement. Similarly, in this research conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 2 Buleleng, students taught with popular TikTok songs showed substantial improvement in vocabulary mastery compared to those taught using conventional methods. The ability of these songs to captivate students' interest and engage them in the learning process was a key factor in their improved performance. Moreover, the research by Gita et al. (2021) emphasized the role of songs in enhancing students' engagement in learning, both cognitively and behaviorally. Songs not only helped facilitate interaction with the learning material but also encouraged active participation and social interaction within the classroom.

In this study, TikTok songs played a similar role by creating a more dynamic and motivating learning environment. Students became more involved and motivated to learn new vocabulary, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. However, Putri et al., (2022) identified challenges in using songs for vocabulary teaching, such as difficulties in pronunciation and retention of new words. In line with these findings, this research acknowledged that while TikTok songs helped improve student engagement, challenges related to memory and pronunciation, particularly with more complex vocabulary, were still present. Nevertheless, because TikTok songs were popular and familiar to students, they were more likely to remember the vocabulary they frequently encountered in these songs, mitigating some of these challenges. Amelia et al. (2022) offered a more specific perspective on how TikTok could aid ESL learners in vocabulary acquisition. The practical features of TikTok, such as the save function and the combination of audio-visual elements, allowed students to learn new words in an engaging and authentic context. In this study, TikTok also served as an effective teaching medium, where popular songs were used to introduce new vocabulary. Through this approach, students not only learned vocabulary from the song lyrics but also benefited from the interactive and visual content provided by the platform, which further reinforced their retention of the vocabulary.

Overall, the findings from this study aligned with and expanded upon previous research. The use of songs, particularly through a popular platform like TikTok, was not only effective in improving vocabulary acquisition but also enhanced student engagement and motivation in the learning process. By integrating audio, visual, and social interaction elements, TikTok offered an innovative and engaging approach to language learning, especially for students who were more inclined toward digital media that was relevant to their daily lives. This research suggested that leveraging familiar media, such as popular TikTok songs, could be a highly effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary learning in English language education.

Next, based on the second research question, the findings indicated that the use of popular TikTok songs as a learning medium had a significant impact on students' active participation in learning



activities. This active engagement was demonstrated through students' eagerness to ask questions, participate in discussions, and reflect on new vocabulary introduced through song lyrics. These results aligned with the study by Anita and Susilawati (2018), which emphasized that active student participation was essential for creating an effective learning process. Furthermore, the studies by Oktaviani (2021) and Gita et al. (2021) also highlighted that the use of songs could foster an interactive learning environment, a phenomenon observed in this study where students actively engaged in various classroom activities.

Moreover, this study found that the use of TikTok songs relevant to students' daily lives significantly increased their interest and motivation to learn English vocabulary. The high level of enthusiasm at the beginning of lessons, evidenced by cheerful expressions and enthusiastic comments, reflected the intrinsic motivation driven by media-based learning that resonated with students. The student engagement theories proposed by Astin (1984) supported these findings, stating that emotional and social engagement played a critical role in motivating students to learn. Burhayani (2013) also noted that songs could create a positive learning atmosphere, thereby enhancing students' learning interest, which aligned with the results of this study.

Students' emotional and social engagement was further evidenced by their collaboration in small groups, where they discussed new vocabulary, participated in lip-sync activities, and shared interpretations of lyrics. These activities fostered collaborative skills and deepened students' understanding through shared discussions. The research by Gita et al. (2021) highlighted that social interaction in learning could improve students' comprehension, while Amelia et al. (2022) emphasized that TikTok's interactive features facilitated discussions and collective learning, reinforcing the outcomes of this study. During learning sessions, positive non-verbal responses such as eye contact, focused posture, and facial expressions indicating emotional engagement also contributed to the success of this method. These non-verbal cues indicated high student attention to the material, suggesting that the visual and auditory elements of TikTok successfully captured their attention and provided an immersive learning experience. This finding aligned with Kahu's (2011) theory of emotional engagement and the study by Adnyani and Dewi (2020), which found that music could enhance students' focus and engagement in learning. Furthermore, the use of TikTok songs not only enriched students' vocabulary but also boosted their confidence in using newly learned words in various contexts. Students felt more comfortable attempting to use vocabulary in everyday conversations, both inside and outside the classroom. However, the study also revealed that although this approach was well-received, some students faced challenges in recalling more complex or less commonly used vocabulary. The visual and audio support provided by TikTok videos assisted students in overcoming these challenges by creating memory associations through the rhythm and melody of songs. This aligned with findings by Cebula in Gasma et al. (2017), which suggested that music aided memory processes. Amelia et al. (2022) also indicated that TikTok's audio-visual elements provided contextual cues that enhanced vocabulary retention.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that integrating social media platforms such as TikTok into educational practice can serve as an effective strategy to enhance vocabulary acquisition and student engagement by aligning academic content with students' digital interests. For teachers, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating culturally relevant and technologically familiar materials to foster a more engaging and student-centered learning environment. However, limitations of this study include its focus on a single educational context—Islamic-based madrasahs—and a relatively short intervention period, which may affect the generalizability of results. Future research should consider longer-term studies across diverse educational settings and investigate how different types of TikTok content can impact various language skills. Additionally, exploring teacher readiness and training for integrating social media into curricula could provide valuable insights to support effective



implementation. Overall, leveraging digital media like TikTok offers promising avenues for innovative language education tailored to the evolving interests and needs of contemporary learners.

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