

# Engagement or Enlightenment? Understanding TikTok's Role in Learning: A Statistical Exploration

Hasnah Am Abdul Aziz<sup>1\*</sup>, Siti Zaiton Mohd Dali<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> General Studies Department, KPTM Alor Setar, 05150 Kedah, Malaysia

**Corresponding author:** Hasnah Am Abdul Aziz

**Email:** [hasnah\\_aaziz@gapps.kptm.edu.my](mailto:hasnah_aaziz@gapps.kptm.edu.my)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.61688/ajpbs.v6i1.400>

## Article History

| Received      | Revised     | Accepted    | Published    |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 16 March 2025 | 20 May 2025 | 31 May 2025 | 30 June 2025 |

## ABSTRACT

TikTok is a widely used short-video social media platform with growing potential as an informal learning resource. This study examines KPTM Alor Setar students' experiences with TikTok and their perceptions of its educational use. Data were collected from 140 students through an online survey using purposive sampling. Closed-ended responses were analysed in SPSS Statistics version 27 using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and Pearson's chi-square tests, while open-ended responses were grouped into recurring themes. Descriptive results show substantial use of TikTok for learning and supplementary materials, together with generally positive perceptions of its educational value. However, location was not significantly associated with TikTok use (chi-square = 4.402,  $p = .111$ ), learning purpose (chi-square = 1.292,  $p = .524$ ), supplementary-material use (chi-square = 0.065,  $p = .968$ ), or perceived educational advantage (chi-square = 1.632,  $p = .442$ ). Open-ended responses identified benefits such as accessible and engaging content and increased motivation, as well as challenges related to visibility, editing skills, data consumption, and network stability. The findings support TikTok's potential as a supplementary informal learning tool, while indicating that its educational use should be integrated with clear pedagogical guidance.

**Keywords:** TikTok, Learning tools, engaging, online learning, social media

## How to Cite

Am Abdul Aziz, H., & Siti Zaiton Mohd Dali. (2025). Engagement or enlightenment? Understanding TikTok's Role in Learning: A Statistical Exploration. *The Asian Journal of Professional & Business Studies*, 6(1), 177–187.  
<https://doi.org/10.61688/ajpbs.v6i1.400>

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected education systems worldwide. To prevent the spread of the virus, many schools and universities have transitioned to online learning, allowing for greater flexibility and access to education, especially for those who may not have been able to attend classes in person (Ali, 2020). However, the transition to online learning has also brought about numerous challenges. One of the most significant challenges is unequal access to technology and reliable internet connections, particularly in low-income areas and developing countries. This has widened the digital divide and prevented some students from participating in online classes, putting them at a disadvantage.

Students who learn online, however, miss out on several aspects of classroom-based learning, such as the social connections fostered in a purpose-built learning environment. Additionally, the traditional classroom setting encourages social interactions, enabling students to engage with peers and instructors, share their ideas, and collaborate on assignments. In contrast, online learners study from the comfort of their homes or wherever they have access to a computer and the internet. Students may lack a sense of belonging to a community and feel isolated from peers and instructors, which can negatively affect their motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Thamri et al., 2022). Therefore, social media applications have emerged as a common means of interaction and have been adopted in learning environments (Jacobs et al., 2022; Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021; Hayes et al., 2020). Over the past decade, numerous social media platforms have grown in popularity, including Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. This study focuses on using TikTok as a learning tool, given its status as one of the most widely used social media apps globally.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok's popularity increased substantially (Salasac & Lobo, 2022). In 2016, ByteDance, a Chinese technology company, introduced TikTok, which has experienced an unparalleled surge in popularity. With more than one billion active users globally, the app owes its success to its distinctive algorithm that recommends personalised content tailored to individual users' preferences. Its user-friendly interface and innovative editing features also contribute to its widespread appeal. Guarda et al. (2021) credited TikTok's success to its ability to create a sense of community among users, with many participants engaging in challenges and trends that have become viral sensations. TikTok's meteoric rise has not gone unnoticed by researchers, who have begun to investigate the app's impact on society and culture (Yang, 2022; Zhang, 2021; Zuo & Wang, 2019).

Jacobs et al. (2022) reported that TikTok-based learning can support learner engagement and performance in an introductory statistics context. Teachers and educators have begun leveraging TikTok to create educational content, such as quick tutorials, fun facts, and interactive challenges, to engage students and promote learning. Moreover, using TikTok in education lets educators tap into culturally relevant content that captures students' attention and bridges the gap between their interests and academic content (Kaye et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2020). Furthermore, TikTok allows diverse users to share videos covering various topics, distinguishing itself by accommodating videos lasting from fifteen seconds to one minute. Self-recorded videos dominate this trend, often featuring music as a central component, contributing to both music videos and narrative content.

Despite its popularity, scholars recognise that TikTok's use in education raises concerns and challenges that need to be addressed, including the quality and suitability of content presented to students. Educational use therefore requires appropriate guidance so that students can distinguish relevant learning material from entertainment and potentially misleading content.

Furthermore, TikTok can distract students in the classroom and reduce valuable learning time. Educators must balance using TikTok as a learning tool with minimizing distractions by establishing clear guidelines and expectations for students and monitoring their use of the app (Salasac & Lobo, 2022). It is crucial to train teachers on these tools, given that many face substantial digital constraints, compounded by the scarcity of technological resources within educational institutions (Arranz et al., 2023). Although TikTok offers various learning-aligned features, its use in education remains largely unexplored. Nevertheless, the educational potential of TikTok has been largely ignored, as most studies on educational innovation focus on other social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Therefore, this paper examines students' experiences with TikTok and their perceptions of its educational use.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 TikTok Application in Education

TikTok was released in China, and within three months, it had over 45 million downloads, making it the most downloaded app and surpassing Facebook and WhatsApp (Adnan et al., 2021). As a result, TikTok's emergence as a potential educational tool has garnered significant attention and sparked discussion among scholars and educators. According to Syah et al. (2020), TikTok can be used as a modern teaching tool. TikTok is now an audio-visual medium that has been transformed into engaging learning content that was previously abstract and challenging to visualize in reality. Because of its unique and intriguing features, including access to learning materials, it can also inspire pupils to learn. Also, the students are primarily Generation Z, and TikTok aligns with their maturity, mental health, and prior experience (Rach & Lounis, 2020). Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) claimed that TikTok inspires pupils, creates an engaging learning environment, and fosters qualities such as creativity and curiosity. The authors suggested TikTok as a teaching or learning tool for sports studies because of its effective instructional capacity and compatibility for expressive and artistic content through music and movement (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Meanwhile, a study using the TikTok platform found that it promotes the use of action verbs in an enjoyable learning environment and enhances information retention through viewing user-created videos (Hidayati, 2022). Thus, the TikTok app is a form of social media that has been found to boost students' enthusiasm and drive for learning, as the content is clear and comprehensible, particularly when it aligns with the interests of like-minded individuals (Cahyono & Perdhani, 2023).

To promote public science communication through a systems-thinking approach, Hayes et al. (2020) used TikTok to create 15–60-second chemistry outreach videos that were entertaining, intriguing, and engaging. The authors found that TikTok may be used to increase the public's interest in understanding how chemistry is entertaining and part of daily life, as well as to boost students' interest in chemistry and technology. Hence, #LearnOnTikTok and #DidYouKnow are two hashtag initiatives TikTok launched to boost online learning; TikTok collaborated with more than 800 content creators, including experts, real-world skill creators, and educators (Taha, 2021). Although TikTok is often seen as geared toward dancing and art content, many subjects have emerged on the platform, encouraging creativity and memes in videos and making TikTok learning videos more engaging and appealing (Putri, 2021). The TikTok community's feedback showed that viewers liked the teaching videos and engaged with them; indeed, TikTok proved able to attract people of different ages, interests, and levels of education (Taha, 2021).

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data Collection

This study used purposive sampling to recruit 140 KPTM Alor Setar students for an online survey administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised three parts: Part A collected demographic information, Part B examined students' experiences with TikTok, and Part C examined students' perceptions of TikTok's use in education. Closed-ended responses were analysed using SPSS Statistics version 27 through frequencies, cross-tabulations, and Pearson's chi-square tests to examine associations between respondents' location and TikTok-related variables. Open-ended responses were reviewed and grouped into recurring themes. Because the sample was purposively selected from one institution, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific and should not be generalised to all students.

#### 3.2 Pilot Study

##### Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .871             | 9          |

A pilot test involving 23 students was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the nine questionnaire items. Cronbach's alpha was 0.871, indicating good internal consistency among the items.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Students' experience of using TikTok

**Table 1**  
Location, gender, and TikTok users

|             |     | Big city |       | Rural area |       | Small City or town |       |
|-------------|-----|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
|             |     | GENDER   |       | GENDER     |       | GENDER             |       |
|             |     | Female   | Male  | Female     | Male  | Female             | Male  |
|             |     | Count    | Count | Count      | Count | Count              | Count |
| TIKTOK_USER | No  | 2        | 1     | 1          | 2     | 4                  | 0     |
|             | Yes | 12       | 8     | 12         | 5     | 68                 | 25    |

Descriptively, 20 of 23 respondents in Big Cities, 17 of 20 respondents in Rural Areas, and 93 of 97 respondents in Small Cities or Towns reported using TikTok. Female users outnumbered male users in each location category. The highest proportion of TikTok users was observed in Small Cities or Towns. These descriptive differences should not be interpreted as statistically significant without reference to the inferential tests reported in Section 4.3.

**Table 2**  
Location, gender, and TikTok video ownership

|                 |     | Big city |       | Rural area |       | Small City or town |       |
|-----------------|-----|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
|                 |     | GENDER   |       | GENDER     |       | GENDER             |       |
|                 |     | Female   | Male  | Female     | Male  | Female             | Male  |
|                 |     | Count    | Count | Count      | Count | Count              | Count |
| VIDEO_OWNERSHIP | No  | 6        | 2     | 5          | 5     | 25                 | 11    |
|                 | Yes | 8        | 7     | 8          | 2     | 47                 | 14    |

The data analysis highlighted interesting trends in video ownership across different locations and genders. The results showed 8 female video owners and 7 male video owners in Big Cities. This suggests video ownership was relatively common among both genders in Big Cities, with slightly more female video owners. In contrast, in Rural Areas, there were 8 female video owners and 2 male video owners. Meanwhile, in Small Cities or Towns, 25 females and 11 males did not own videos. The data suggested that the number of non-video owners was relatively higher in Small Cities or Towns than among video owners, especially among females.

#### For an open-ended “What difficulties did you encounter when using TikTok?”

Responses were categorised into several subthemes, namely social engagement, data consumption, and network. Social engagement relates to the challenges of getting videos to appear on the For You Page (FYP), which is crucial for gaining visibility and reaching a wider audience. Respondents often felt like TikTok is a competitive space, and the algorithm seemed unpredictable at times. Additionally, Respondents admitted that their poor editing skills made it difficult to create visually appealing, engaging videos and to adapt to TikTok's ever-changing trends and engagement cycles.

Another issue was the amount of data TikTok consumed, which sometimes strained their mobile data plan. Respondents struggled with an unstable network connection, resulting in laggy video playback and difficulty uploading content smoothly. Furthermore, the amount of data TikTok consumes varies with several factors, including the duration and quality of videos watched or uploaded, as well as the frequency of app use.

## 4.2 Students' perceptions on the use of TikTok

**Table 3**  
Location, gender, and the use of TikTok for learning purposes

|                  |     | LOCATION |       |            |       |                    |       |
|------------------|-----|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
|                  |     | Big city |       | Rural area |       | Small City or town |       |
|                  |     | GENDER   |       | GENDER     |       | GENDER             |       |
|                  |     | Female   | Male  | Female     | Male  | Female             | Male  |
|                  |     | Count    | Count | Count      | Count | Count              | Count |
| LEARNING_PURPOSE | No  | 2        | 2     | 1          | 1     | 4                  | 5     |
|                  | YES | 12       | 7     | 12         | 6     | 68                 | 20    |

The data analysis for all three locations - Big Cities, Rural Areas, and Small Cities or Towns - provided valuable insights into the prevalence of using TikTok for learning purposes among different genders. The data revealed that in Big Cities, 12 females and 7 males used TikTok for learning purposes. This indicates that many individuals in Big Cities want to learn and are actively pursuing education. Moreover, in Rural Areas, 12 females and 6 males used TikTok for learning purposes. The data indicates notable interest in learning among individuals in Rural Areas, although the number of males using it for learning is slightly lower than that of females. The data also revealed substantial interest in TikTok usage for learning in Small Cities or Towns, with 68 females and 20 males actively engaged in educational pursuits. This substantial count of individuals with learning purposes highlights a strong culture of education and personal growth in these areas

**Table 4**  
Location, gender, and the use of TikTok as an additional learning material

|                     |     | LOCATION |       |            |       |                    |       |
|---------------------|-----|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
|                     |     | Big city |       | Rural area |       | Small City or town |       |
|                     |     | GENDER   |       | GENDER     |       | GENDER             |       |
|                     |     | Female   | Male  | Female     | Male  | Female             | Male  |
|                     |     | Count    | Count | Count      | Count | Count              | Count |
| ADDITIONAL_MATERIAL | No  | 2        | 2     | 3          | 1     | 15                 | 4     |
|                     | YES | 12       | 7     | 10         | 6     | 57                 | 21    |

This survey highlighted the use of TikTok videos as additional learning materials across different locations and genders. In Small Cities or Towns, 57 females and 21 males used TikTok videos as supplementary resources to support their learning. This suggests that individuals in Small Cities or Towns positively accept TikTok as a valuable tool for enhancing their learning experiences. In Rural Areas, 10 females and 6 males used TikTok as additional learning materials, indicating that individuals there rely on TikTok to support their learning endeavours. Moreover, in Big Cities, 12 females and 7 males accessed additional learning materials through TikTok. Overall, it is encouraging that most individuals across all locations have used TikTok as supplementary learning material, which contributes to their educational growth and development.

**Table 5**  
Location, gender and perception of TikTok advantage in education

|                     |     | Big city     |            | Rural area   |            | Small City or town |            |
|---------------------|-----|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
|                     |     | GENDER       |            | GENDER       |            | GENDER             |            |
|                     |     | Female Count | Male Count | Female Count | Male Count | Female Count       | Male Count |
| ADVANTAGE_EDUCATION | No  | 1            | 1          | 0            | 0          | 4                  | 2          |
|                     | YES | 13           | 8          | 13           | 7          | 68                 | 23         |

The descriptive results show generally positive perceptions of TikTok's educational advantages across all three location categories. Small Cities or Towns recorded 68 female and 23 male respondents who perceived educational advantages, Big Cities recorded 13 female and 8 male respondents, and Rural Areas recorded 13 female and 7 male respondents. These counts describe the sample and do not, by themselves, establish a statistically significant difference in location.

**For an open-ended question: “What are the benefits of TikTok for learning?”**

Firstly, TikTok's diverse content can increase understanding, knowledge, and even English proficiency. Users can find educational videos, tutorials, and informative content on various subjects, allowing them to learn in a bite-sized and visually engaging format.

Additionally, TikTok's fun, attractive video format makes learning entertaining, captures attention, and makes content easier to remember. The platform's short-form videos are often concise and packed with valuable information, making them more digestible and appealing to learners.

Furthermore, TikTok can inspire and motivate users toward their studies and future careers. Engaging with educational content on TikTok can spark curiosity and enthusiasm, encouraging individuals to explore further and pursue their academic or professional aspirations.

**4.3 The Relationship Between Respondents’ Location and Their TikTok Usage, Purpose for Learning, Additional Material Use, Or Perceived Educational Advantage.**

**Table 6**  
The relationship between TikTok users and Location

| LOCATION * TIKTOK_USER |                    |    |                                   |
|------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|                        | Value              | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square     | 4.402 <sup>a</sup> | 2  | .111                              |
| Likelihood Ratio       | 3.989              | 2  | .136                              |
| N of Valid Cases       | 140                |    |                                   |

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.43.

The Pearson chi-square test (chi-square = 4.402,  $p = 0.111$ ) indicates no statistically significant association between respondents' location and TikTok use at the 0.05 significance level. Thus, the data provide no evidence of a location-TikTok-use association in this sample.

**Table 7**

The relationship between location and learning purpose

**LOCATION \* LEARNING\_PURPOSE**

|                    | Value              | df | Asymptotic<br>Significance<br>(2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 1.292 <sup>a</sup> | 2  | .524                                    |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 1.150              | 2  | .563                                    |
| N of Valid Cases   | 140                |    |                                         |

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.14.

The Pearson chi-square test yielded chi-square = 1.292 with  $p = 0.524$ . Because  $p > 0.05$ , there is no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their use of TikTok for learning purposes in this sample.

**Table 8**

The relationship between location and additional material

**LOCATION \* ADDITIONAL\_MATERIAL**

|                    | Value             | df | Asymptotic<br>Significance<br>(2-sided) |
|--------------------|-------------------|----|-----------------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | .065 <sup>a</sup> | 2  | .968                                    |
| Likelihood Ratio   | .067              | 2  | .967                                    |
| N of Valid Cases   | 140               |    |                                         |

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86.

The Pearson chi-square test yielded chi-square = 0.065 with  $p = 0.968$ . Because  $p > 0.05$ , there is no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their use of TikTok as supplementary learning material in this sample.

**Table 9**  
The relationship between location and advantageous education

**LOCATION \* ADVANTAGE\_EDUCATION**

|                    | Value              | df | Asymptotic<br>Significance<br>(2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 1.632 <sup>a</sup> | 2  | .442                                    |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 2.723              | 2  | .256                                    |
| N of Valid Cases   | 140                |    |                                         |

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.14.

The Pearson chi-square test yielded a chi-square statistic of 1.632 with  $p = 0.442$ . Because  $p > 0.05$ , there is no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their perception of TikTok as advantageous for education in this sample.

Across the four chi-square tests, all p-values exceeded 0.05. Accordingly, the study found no statistically significant association between respondents' location and general TikTok use, use for learning purposes, use as supplementary material, or perceived educational advantage.

These findings provide no evidence of a location-based association with the four TikTok-related outcomes in this sample. However, each chi-square output indicates that 33.3% of cells had expected counts below 5; therefore, the asymptotic chi-square results should be interpreted with caution. The findings should also be understood within the purposively selected KPTM Alor Setar sample rather than generalised to broader student populations.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

This study of 140 KPTM Alor Setar students indicates that TikTok is widely used and is commonly perceived as useful for learning and supplementary materials. Descriptive results showed high levels of TikTok use across Big Cities, Rural Areas, and Small Cities or Towns. However, Pearson's chi-square tests found no statistically significant associations between location and TikTok use, use for learning, use as supplementary material, or perceived educational advantage (all  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, the descriptive location differences observed in the cross-tabulations were not statistically supported in this sample.

Open-ended responses suggest that students valued TikTok for accessible, concise, and visually engaging content that could support understanding, language development, motivation, and exploration of educational topics. At the same time, respondents identified challenges involving visibility on the For You Page, editing skills, data consumption, and unstable network connections. TikTok is therefore better interpreted as a supplementary informal learning resource rather than a substitute for structured teaching.

Because purposive sampling was used and several chi-square tables had expected cell counts below 5, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Further research with broader samples and more robust inferential designs could examine how TikTok use relates to learning outcomes, engagement, and academic performance.

## 6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to KPTM Alor Setar for providing the resources and support necessary to complete this study. We would also like to thank all participants who contributed their time and insights to this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who offered valuable feedback during the development of this manuscript.

## 7.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

## 8.0 AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Hasnah Am Abdul Aziz and Siti Zaiton Mohd Dali jointly contributed to the conceptualisation, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## 9.0 ETHICS STATEMENT

This study involved an online survey of students. Data were analysed and reported in aggregate form, and no personally identifying information is presented in the manuscript. Participant responses were used solely for academic research purposes, and confidentiality was maintained during analysis and reporting.

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