The Asian Journal of Professional and Business Studies, Volume 6, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 177–187
https://journal.uptm.edu.my/index.php/ajpbs
e-ISSN: 2716-666X, ISSN 2462-1072

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

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

ABSTRACT

TikTok, a video-sharing social media platform, has rapidly become one of the most popular social networking sites in recent years, with over 1 billion monthly active users, making it an effective and engaging learning tool. With its easy-to-use interface, short-form videos, and viral content, TikTok offers educators an innovative way to engage and educate students. This paper investigates TikTok's usefulness as an educational tool by creating a fun, interactive learning environment. TikTok is an ideal platform for effective, engaging learning because it lets students be creative and use their imagination to create unique, meaningful content across subjects such as science, math, social studies, and language arts. Furthermore, TikTok encourages students to communicate and collaborate with their peers, which enhances their learning experience. Several studies have shown that TikTok can be a valuable learning tool, improving students' engagement, motivation, and overall learning experience. Despite its popularity, TikTok use in education also raises concerns and challenges that scholars need to address. The study collected data from KPTMAS students through an online survey, and the findings reveal notable differences in TikTok use and educational perceptions across locations. Results suggest that while TikTok offers engaging and accessible learning content, it also presents challenges such as content regulation and potential distractions. Despite these challenges, the study highlights TikTok's growing role as an informal learning tool, particularly for younger, digitally adept generations. However, the platform's educational use remains underexplored, warranting further investigation into its structured integration in academic environments.

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

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 way for people to interact, and they have been adopted in learning environments (Jacobs, Pan & Ho, 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, as it has become one of the most widely used social media apps globally.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok, a prominent social media platform, saw an exceptional surge in global downloads (Piedra, 2020). 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 personalized 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).

According to Wang and Lin (2021), TikTok's short-form videos can deliver educational content in an interactive way, catering to the needs of today's learners. 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 not only to music videos but also narrative content.

Despite its popularity, scholars recognize that TikTok's widespread use in education raises concerns and presents challenges that must be acknowledged and resolved. One main concern about using TikTok in education is the potential for inappropriate content, as TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system may expose students to material unsuitable for their age or educational level, potentially harming their mental health and well-being (Chen & Chen, 2021). Another issue related to using TikTok in education is the potential for cyberbullying. Kowalski et al. (2019) suggested that educators need to take measures to prevent cyberbullying and ensure that students feel safe and supported in the classroom. This can be achieved by monitoring their online activities to ensure alignment with the educational objectives and standards of the school or institution.

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 (Clarissa & 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). Beyond its entertainment and educational value, TikTok has faced regulatory and legal challenges in several countries, such as India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, due to privacy concerns, inappropriate content, and safety issues. This has raised concerns among parents (Wang, 2020). 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 TikTok's usefulness as an effective learning tool.

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, Ramli & Ismail, 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, students are primarily Generation Z, and TikTok aligns with their level of maturity, mental health, and prior experience (Rach & Lounis, 2020). Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) claimed that TikTok inspires pupils, produces an engaging teaching environment, and fosters qualities like 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 desire to understand 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, 2020). 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 purposeful sampling of KPTMAS students, with data collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. The survey comprises three parts: Part A gathers demographic information, Part B explores students' experiences with TikTok, and Part C examines students' perceptions of TikTok's use in education. The collected data were analysed using SPSS Statistics version 27 for closed-ended questions and thematic analysis for open-ended questions. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to deliberately select participants with specific characteristics, ensuring the data collected is relevant to the research objective. The online survey is a convenient and efficient method of data collection, particularly in times when face-to-face interactions may be limited. Using both SPSS and thematic analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the data collected and enables the researchers to draw valid and reliable conclusions from their findings.

3.2 Pilot Study

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.871	9

A pilot test was conducted among 23 students to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires. The measures of Cronbach's alpha for all 9 items are 0.871, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items. This suggests the items are well correlated and show strong internal consistency. This indicates that participants are likely to respond consistently to these items.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Students' experience of using TikTok

Table 1
Location, gender, and TikTok users

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

The results showed that in Big Cities, there were 12 female TikTok users and 8 male TikTok users. This suggests that TikTok was relatively popular in Big Cities, with more female users than male users. However, in Rural Areas, the data showed fewer TikTok users than in Big Cities. Only 1 female and 2 male TikTok users were in this category. The data highlighted a significant difference in the number of TikTok users in Small Cities or Towns compared to Big Cities and Rural Areas. This category had 68 female and 25 male TikTok users, indicating that TikTok was highly popular in Small Cities or Towns. Overall, the analysis showed that TikTok was most popular in Small Cities or Towns, followed by Big Cities, and least popular in Rural Areas. The platform also had a larger female user base across all locations. Moreover, the data suggested that in Small Cities or Towns, the adoption rate of TikTok was exceptionally high, leaving almost no non-TikTok users in that category.

Table 2
Location, gender, and TikTok video ownership

		LOCATION					
		Big city		Rural area		Small City or town	
		GENDER		GENDER		GENDER	
		Female Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male 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 compared to video owners, especially for 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 hard to create visually appealing, engaging videos and adapt to TikTok's ever-changing trends and engagement periods.

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

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 Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male 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 engaging in educational pursuits. 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 a significant 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 additional learning material

		LOCATION					
		Big city		Rural area		Small City or town	
		GENDER		GENDER		GENDER	
		Female Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male Count	Female Count	Male 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 their additional learning materials, indicating that individuals in Rural Areas 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 in all locations have used TikTok as additional learning material, which contributes to their educational growth and development.

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

		LOCATION					
		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 data analysis highlighted perceptions of TikTok's educational advantages across different locations and genders. Small Cities or Towns have the highest number of individuals who perceive educational advantages, followed by Big Cities and then Rural Areas. In Small Cities or Towns, 68 females and 23 males perceive educational advantages. In Big Cities, 13 females and 8 males perceive educational advantages. Meanwhile, in Rural Areas, 13 females and 7 males perceive educational advantages. This positive perception indicates that individuals in these locations believe they have access to valuable educational opportunities.

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 it easier to remember the content. 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[a]	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 ($\chi^2 = 4.402$, $p = 0.111$) indicates no statistically significant association between a respondent's location and TikTok use. Since the p-value is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that, within the dataset analysed, respondents' location does not meaningfully influence their likelihood of using TikTok. Consequently, these findings suggest that geographical location is not a determining factor in TikTok usage.

Table 7
The relationship between location and learning purpose

LOCATION * LEARNING_PURPOSE

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.292[a]	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 a value of 1.292 with a p-value of 0.524, which is well above the conventional significance level of 0.05. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their use of TikTok for learning purposes. This suggests that, based on the analyzed data, geographical location does not appear to influence whether individuals use TikTok as an educational tool. Therefore, location is not a meaningful factor in determining TikTok's role in learning among respondents in this sample.

Table 8
The relationship between location and additional material

LOCATION * ADDITIONAL_MATERIAL

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.065[a]	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 produced a value of 0.065 with a p-value of 0.968, which is far greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. Given this high p-value, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their use of additional materials on TikTok. The results suggest that location does not influence whether individuals use TikTok for supplementary resources, as the dataset provides no evidence of a relationship between these variables.

Table 9
The relationship between location and advantage education

LOCATION * ADVANTAGE_EDUCATION

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.632[a]	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 value of 1.632 with a p-value of 0.442, which is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no statistically significant association between respondents' location and their perception of TikTok as advantageous for education. This suggests that, based on the data, geographical location does not play a meaningful role in influencing whether individuals view TikTok as beneficial for educational purposes. Therefore, location does not appear to be a relevant factor in shaping these perceptions.

The data analysis using Pearson's Chi-Square tests consistently revealed no statistically significant associations between respondents' location and their use of TikTok for various educational purposes. Across all variables analyzed—whether it was general TikTok usage, use for learning purposes, engagement with additional materials, or the perception of TikTok as advantageous for education—all p-values were greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. Consequently, in each case, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

These findings suggest that geographical location does not have a meaningful impact on respondents' use of TikTok, either as a social media platform or as an educational tool. Whether individuals use TikTok, how they engage with it for learning, and their perception of its educational value appear to be independent of where they are located. This indicates that TikTok's potential as an educational tool transcends geographical boundaries, and location is not a determining factor in shaping how individuals view or use the platform for educational purposes.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, TikTok has become increasingly popular in recent years, with many users worldwide. Its success is due to its ability to engage with its audience through engaging and creative content. However, the app has proven to be more than a mindless entertainment source. It also has the potential to be used as a learning tool (Clarissa& Lobo, 2022; Adnan, Ramli & Ismail, 2021; Hayes et al, 2020). Content creators use the platform to create short videos that educate others on a wide range of topics, from science, math, etc, cooking, and even self-help tips. This content can be informative, interesting, and even fun to watch.

One of how TikTok represents a learning potential is its ability to distil vast amounts of information into easily digestible chunks. Users can create videos that are just 15 seconds in length, perfect for short attention spans. Due to its nature, the platform lends itself well to concise and straightforward explanations, making it an excellent platform for sharing knowledge in a way that resonates with younger people.

Another way in which TikTok remains a potential for learning is through its engagement levels. The platform not only allows users to express their creativity through creative discussions, collaborations, and feedback. Users can comment on videos, tag influences, and share their thoughts, which opens up opportunities for dialogue and sharing knowledge.

That said, TikTok's potential as a learning tool should not be overemphasized. Educational content on the platform is still relatively sparse, and most content is still entertainment oriented. This lack of structured learning resources implies that the effectiveness of such content in the facilitation of learning or academic pursuit is still unclear. TikTok may focus on simplified information, and such information may get mis-circulated, leading to misinterpretation or a lack of sufficient knowledge on a topic. However, the lack of a centralized educational structure implies that its potential, especially in academic learning or research, should still be appropriately monitored. Ultimately, TikTok remains a versatile social media tool that has much to offer in the realm of creative communication and education.

6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude 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.

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