

## THE BENEFITS OF USING TIKTOK FOR INCIDENTAL SLANG VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG GEN-Z STUDENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRAK

Tinjauan pustaka tematik naratif ini mengkaji manfaat penggunaan TikTok dalam pembelajaran kosakata slang secara insidental pada mahasiswa Generasi Z. Kajian ini mensintesis berbagai penelitian terdahulu dengan mengidentifikasi pola tematik terkait pemerolehan kosakata, pembelajaran bahasa berbantuan media sosial, dan penggunaan slang dalam konteks digital. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa TikTok mendukung pembelajaran kosakata slang secara insidental melalui paparan bahasa autentik, konteks penggunaan yang bermakna, unsur audiovisual, serta peningkatan motivasi dan keterlibatan belajar. Konten multimodal dan berdurasi singkat memungkinkan paparan slang secara berulang dalam situasi komunikasi nyata, sehingga membantu inferensi makna. Namun, beberapa penelitian menunjukkan perbedaan temuan terkait kedalaman penguasaan kosakata, retensi, dan kemampuan pembelajar dalam menggunakan slang secara tepat, khususnya dalam konteks akademik. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan penelitian kualitatif lanjutan yang secara khusus mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa Gen-Z terhadap penggunaan TikTok dalam pembelajaran kosakata slang secara insidental, sehingga diperlukan penelitian kualitatif lanjutan untuk memahami bagaimana mahasiswa memaknai, mengevaluasi, dan mengelola penggunaan slang yang diperoleh melalui TikTok dalam konteks akademik maupun informal.

**Kata kunci:** TikTok, kosakata slang, pembelajaran insidental, Generasi Z

### ABSTRACT

*This narrative thematic literature review examines the benefits of using TikTok for incidental slang vocabulary learning among Generation Z students. This review synthesizes data by identifying recurrent patterns rather than assessing individual studies, drawing on prior research on vocabulary acquisition, social media-assisted language learning, and slang use in digital contexts. The analysis reveals that TikTok facilitates the acquisition of accidental slang vocabulary learning through contextualized meaning use, real-world language exposure, audiovisual elements, and enhanced learner motivation and engagement. The platform's short-form, multimodal content which allows for frequent exposure to slang in authentic communication circumstances, facilitating meaning inference and informal vocabulary awareness. However, variations across studies indicate differences in vocabulary depth, retention, and learners' capacity to control proper slang usage, especially in academic settings. While most studies report positive perceptions of TikTok as an informal learning space, issues related to the informal nature of slang and the absence of structured pedagogical guidance remain underexplored. This review identifies a research gap in empirical studies that specifically examine Gen-Z students' perceptions of TikTok for incidental slang vocabulary. Thus, more qualitative study is advised to investigate how students view, assess, and handle slang they have learnt via TikTok in both academic and informal settings.*

**Keyword:** TikTok, slang vocabulary, incidental learning, Gen-Z

## **INTRODUCTION**

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of English language learning, supporting learners' abilities in language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Alqahtani, 2015; Meyer & Schmitt, 2002). Despite its importance, many students particularly those from Generations Z experience difficulties in vocabulary acquisition due to low motivation and the limitations of traditional teaching methods (Saptiany et al., 2024; Arochman et al., 2023). As a digital native, Gen-Z students are highly accustomed to technology-driven environments and trend to engage more actively with digital platforms that provide interactive and contextualized learning experiences (Eldridge, 2023; Prensky, 2001).

In recent years, social media platforms have gained attention as informal learning spaces that support incidental vocabulary learning. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular applications used by Gen-Z, offering short videos, audiovisual content that combines entertainment and education (Guerrero, 2023; Kennedy, 2020). TikTok content frequently slang, which is integral to Gen-Z communication and identity construction in digital spaces (Kolla et al., 2022; Saputra & Marlina, 2019). Given these characteristics, TikTok present potential benefits for incidental slang vocabulary learning.

This literature review is important because existing studies had largely focused on general vocabulary learning through TikTok, while limited attention has been paid to slang as a specific form of informal vocabulary. Therefore, this narrative thematic literature review aims to synthesize previous findings related to benefits of using TikTok for incidental slang vocabulary learning.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a narrative thematic literature review to synthesize existing research on the use of TikTok for incidental slang vocabulary learning

among Generation Z students. A narrative thematic approach was selected because it allows for the integration of findings across diverse studies by identifying recurring patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships rather than evaluating studies individually (Green et al., 2006; Snyder, 2019). This method works especially well for investigating new fields of study, such social media-based informal language learning.

The data sources for this review consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on vocabulary learning, incidental vocabulary acquisition, slang usage, and social media-assisted language learning. Scholarly search engines and academic databases were used to find pertinent studies. The inclusion criteria required that studies (1) discuss vocabulary learning in digital or informal learning contexts, (2) examine TikTok or similar short-video social media platforms, and (3) provide insights relevant to incidental learning, slang use, or Gen-Z learners.

Each selected study was critically examined with attention to its research objectives, methodology, participant characteristics, and key findings. The analysis focused on identifying recurring concepts related to the benefits of TikTok for incidental slang vocabulary learning. Through an iterative reading process, similar findings were grouped and categorized into broader themes, such as authentic language exposure, audiovisual support, and learner motivation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Theme 1: Authentic and Contextual Slang Exposure through TikTok**

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that TikTok facilitates incidental slang vocabulary learning by providing authentic and context-rich language exposure embedded in everyday digital communication. TikTok content frequently includes slang used in natural interactions, allowing learners to encounter informal vocabulary in socially meaningful contexts (Yuejia & Lee,

2024; Kolla et al., 2022). According to the theory of incidental vocabulary learning, vocabulary recognition without conscious recollection is supported by frequent exposure to new lexical items in relevant contexts (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000).

However, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, a number of research highlight how social identification, situational appropriateness, and community standards are intimately related to slang acquisition (Saputra & Marlina, 2019; Bardi et al., 2025). As a result, when contextual cues are misread, learners may develop incomplete knowledge or incorrect usage. When combined, these results imply that although TikTok offers rich, real-world input for incidental slang learning, exposure by itself might not guarantee learners' conscious knowledge or proper control of slang use.

### **Theme 2: Audiovisual Features and Meaning Inference in Incidental Learning**

Another prominent benefit identified across studies is how TikTok's audiovisual elements aid in language acquisition and meaning inference. The combination of sound, sights, gestures, and situational signals improves learners' capacity to deduce the meanings of novel slang terms, according to studies on short-form audiovisual learning (Hu & Du, 2022; Mulyani & Bahri, 2024). Theories of incidental vocabulary learning, which highlight recurrent exposure to intelligible material as a crucial process for vocabulary development, are consistent with these multimodal characteristics (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000).

Despite these benefits, some studies caution that audiovisual exposure by itself could not always result in long-term vocabulary retention or useful mastery. Deeper lexical knowledge and long-term retention are inconsistent among research, despite learners' receptive recognition of slang meanings. According to the literature, TikTok's audiovisual affordances help with initial comprehension; nonetheless, learners' engagement with the content

and the frequency of exposure determine how deeply they learn incidental slang terminology.

### **Theme 3: Learner Motivation, Engagement, and Incidental Vocabulary Awareness**

Motivation and engagement emerge as central themes in studies examining TikTok as an informal learning platform. research on social media-assisted language learning, TikTok's engaging, adaptable, and learner-centered features encourage students to interact with English content, which fosters the development of incidental vocabulary (Crookall, 1987; Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Positive attitudes toward TikTok help Gen-Z students in particular stay exposed to and interact with slang-rich content on a regular basis (Weng & Xu, 2025; Faruk, 2025).

However, there are conflicting opinions in the literature regarding whether or not greater engagement always leads to more profound vocabulary understanding and effective use. According to some research, students passively interact with TikTok videos, ingesting language without analyzing or controlling novel slang terms. This variation shows that although motivation increases exposure, it does not always result in conscious vocabulary acquisition or proper usage. Therefore, rather than being a guarantee of successful accidental slang vocabulary growth, learner engagement should be seen as a facilitating condition.

Taken together, this narrative thematic synthesis demonstrates that TikTok provides Gen-Z students with significant advantages for incidental slang vocabulary learning through multimodal input, authentic exposure, and increased learner motivation. However, different studies' findings about vocabulary richness, retention, and contextual appropriateness point to significant drawbacks of incidental learning in casual digital settings. These results imply that a key factor in

determining TikTok's efficacy as a language learning tool is learners' views, awareness, and control of slang usage. Therefore, more investigation is required to determine how Gen-Z learners view and handle slang terms learned via TikTok in both casual and official settings.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This narrative thematic literature review demonstrates that TikTok has considerable potential to support incidental slang vocabulary learning among Generation Z students. Three main themes emerged from the evaluated studies: improved learner motivation and engagement, multimodal audiovisual support, and exposure to real and contextual language. Because of these characteristics, TikTok is positioned as a valuable informal learning environment where students might come across slang organically through frequent exposure to it in regular digital interactions.

However, the synthesis also reveals notable variations in findings, particularly regarding vocabulary depth, long-term retention, and learners' ability to regulate the appropriate use of slang across different contexts. While TikTok facilitates awareness and comprehension of slang, the informal and unstructured nature of the platform may limit learners' control over productive and contextually appropriate usage, especially in academic settings.

Despite the growing interest in TikTok-assisted vocabulary learning, existing research has largely focused on general vocabulary acquisition rather than slang as a distinct and socially situated form of language. Furthermore, Gen-Z students' opinions of incidentally learning slang through TikTok and how they assess its advantages and disadvantages have received less attention. Therefore, future qualitative research is recommended to explore learners' perceptions in greater depth, particularly how Gen-Z students

perceive, manage, and regulate slang learned through TikTok in both informal and academic contexts. A more comprehensive understanding of informal digital learning in English language instruction might result from such study.

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