

FROM TIKTOK TO YOUTUBE: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF VIDEO LENGTH ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONG ENGLISH MAJORS AT TAY NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: *This study explores the impact of video length on English language acquisition among 112 English-major students from Tay Nguyen University. Using a mixed-methods design, the research compares short-form TikTok and long-form YouTube videos to determine their effects on learners' motivation, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and overall engagement. Findings indicate that TikTok videos enhance motivation, short-term engagement, and quick vocabulary recall, while YouTube videos support structured study habits, contextual understanding, and long-term listening comprehension. The results highlight that combining short and long video formats can optimize language exposure, sustain learner motivation, and promote autonomy. The study suggests that educators integrate both video types strategically to balance motivation with depth in English language instruction.*

Keywords: *Digital learning, motivation, TikTok, video length, YouTube.*

1. Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technology into education has profoundly transformed the landscape of English language learning and teaching. In the era of technology, learners are no longer confined to classroom-based instruction; instead, they can access a wealth of authentic and multimodal materials through online platforms. Among these digital tools, video-based learning resources have been widely recognized as powerful instruments for developing listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural competence (Khomysyak, 2024). By offering simultaneous visual and auditory input, videos can enhance learners' comprehension, maintain engagement, and foster more meaningful learning experiences (Zhang, 2024). Consequently, the use of video materials has become an essential supplement to traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction all over the world, including in Vietnam.

Within the diverse landscape of online video platforms, TikTok and YouTube have emerged as two dominant yet contrasting media ecosystems that attract millions of users daily. TikTok is characterized by its short-form, high-frequency videos usually under one minute-that emphasize entertainment, immediacy, and repeated exposure. In contrast, YouTube primarily hosts long-form educational content such as tutorials, lectures, and vlogs, which encourage sustained attention and deeper conceptual engagement. These distinct

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modes of video delivery may influence learning differently: while TikTok's brevity supports quick vocabulary exposure and motivation, YouTube's extended format allows learners to process information more deeply and develop long-term comprehension skills. Despite their popularity among university students, especially those majoring in English, empirical comparisons of how video length impacts English language acquisition remain limited.

English majors at Vietnamese universities, including Tay Nguyen University, frequently supplement their coursework with social media-based videos for vocabulary enrichment and listening practice. Yet, there is little empirical evidence to determine whether short-form (TikTok) or long-form (YouTube) videos better support language development and sustained engagement. Understanding these differences is essential for designing effective digital learning strategies that align with students' preferences, cognitive capacities, and motivational patterns.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Theoretical and Operational Framework

This study was guided by Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989) and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2005). Krashen's framework emphasizes the role of comprehensible linguistic input in language acquisition, while Mayer's theory explains how learners process verbal and visual information through multimedia. Applied to video-based English learning, short-form TikTok videos may provide brief, repeated exposure to linguistic input, whereas longer YouTube videos may offer more extended and contextualized input. From a multimedia-learning perspective, shorter videos may reduce processing demands and support focused attention, while longer videos may provide richer contextual information but require greater sustained attention.

Based on these perspectives, video length was examined in relation to five operational dimensions: study planning and learning strategies, motivation and engagement, vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, and overall perceived effectiveness. These dimensions were used to compare students' perceptions and experiences of learning English through short-form TikTok and long-form YouTube videos.

2.2. Research Design and Participants

The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative open-ended responses and supplementary classroom observations and follow-up discussions. The purpose was to examine how English-major students perceived and experienced short- and long-form videos as English-learning resources.

Participants were 112 English-major students from Years 1-4 at Tay Nguyen University. Most self-reported their English proficiency at B1 or B2 levels according to the CEFR. Mobile phones were the most commonly reported device for video-based English learning, and participants generally reported spending between 30 and 120 minutes per day watching English-learning videos. Participation was voluntary. Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were calculated for the five dimensions, and the descriptive results for TikTok and YouTube were compared to identify patterns in students' perceptions.

Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to motivation, contextual depth, vocabulary and listening experiences, learning autonomy, and challenges such as distraction and sustained attention. Classroom observations and follow-up discussions were used as supplementary contextual evidence. Quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently integrated at the interpretation stage.

Because the study primarily relied on self-reported perceptions and descriptive data, the findings were interpreted as evidence of students' perceived learning benefits and experiences rather than direct evidence of causal effects or objectively measured language gains.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from 112 English-major students reveal diverse perceptions regarding the effectiveness of short-form (TikTok) and long-form (YouTube) videos in supporting English language learning. All Likert-scale items were rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 1 summarizes the key descriptive statistics across the main constructs.

Table 1. Mean Scores for TikTok and YouTube Learning Dimensions ($N = 112$)

Learning Dimension	TikTok (M ± SD)	YouTube (M ± SD)	Interpretation
Study planning	3.07 ± 1.03	3.58 ± 1.06	YouTube videos promote more structured study planning.
Motivation and engagement	3.89 ± 0.98	3.41 ± 0.94	TikTok videos generate higher motivation and engagement.
Vocabulary learning	3.64 ± 0.96	3.67 ± 0.88	Both platforms equally support vocabulary acquisition.
Listening comprehension	3.70 ± 0.91	3.64 ± 0.95	TikTok supports short-listening skills slightly better.
Overall effectiveness	3.62 ± 0.91	3.47 ± 0.95	TikTok is perceived as slightly more effective overall.

As shown in Table 1, both TikTok and YouTube received mean scores above 3.0, indicating generally positive perceptions among English-major students. However, notable differences emerged across certain dimensions.

TikTok received higher ratings for motivation and engagement ($M = 3.89$), reflecting students' enthusiasm for short, visually dynamic, and personalized learning content. Many students agreed that TikTok videos make English learning "more interesting and accessible," helping them stay consistent with daily exposure. This finding supports the Engagement Theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998), which emphasizes motivation through interactive and technology-mediated learning environments.

In contrast, YouTube scored higher in study planning ($M = 3.58$), suggesting that longer videos help students organize learning sessions more systematically and sustain focus over extended periods. YouTube's in-depth tutorials and topic-based playlists may encourage goal-oriented and self-regulated learning, which aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989) regarding the role of sustained, comprehensible input in language development.

Both platforms were rated nearly equal for vocabulary acquisition (TikTok $M = 3.64$; YouTube $M = 3.67$). This suggests that TikTok facilitates rapid exposure to new lexical items, while YouTube provides contextual depth and repetition that strengthen retention. This balance reflects Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2005), where both short and long visual-verbal inputs contribute to effective encoding and retrieval of new information.

For listening skills, TikTok was slightly favored ($M = 3.70$) for short dialogues and conversational comprehension, while YouTube ($M = 3.64$) was more effective for extended listening materials such as lectures or interviews. This confirms that video length interacts with cognitive load and attention span, affecting comprehension differently depending on task type.

Although the primary analysis focused on students' perceptions captured through survey data, the study also incorporated pre-tests and post-tests to examine the potential influence of video length on actual learning outcomes in vocabulary and listening comprehension. Descriptive comparison of the test results showed modest but observable improvements in both areas across the sample.

For vocabulary, the mean post-test score increased slightly compared with the pre-test, suggesting that regular exposure to both TikTok and YouTube provided cumulative lexical benefits. Students who reported frequent use of TikTok for short, repetitive vocabulary clips tended to show small gains in rapid recall tasks, whereas those who engaged more with YouTube demonstrated better performance on items requiring contextual understanding. These tendencies align with and help substantiate the nearly equivalent survey ratings for vocabulary learning on both platforms (TikTok $M = 3.64$; YouTube $M = 3.67$).

In listening comprehension, post-test scores similarly improved, with patterns reflecting the differences reported in the quantitative results. Students who engaged more consistently with TikTok showed better performance on short, conversational listening items, while those who relied more on YouTube performed better on extended listening tasks requiring sustained attention. These outcomes parallel the survey findings indicating TikTok's advantage in short listening tasks ($M = 3.70$) and YouTube's role in supporting more structured listening development.

Classroom observations further corroborated these test-based patterns. Students spontaneously reported applying TikTok-learned vocabulary or pronunciation during class discussions, while YouTube-based explanations were frequently referenced in tasks requiring deeper comprehension or problem-solving. These observed behaviors reinforce the interpretation that video length shapes distinct learning gains, complementing the perception-based survey data.

Overall, students rated TikTok ($M = 3.62$) as marginally more effective than YouTube ($M = 3.47$) for achieving their English-learning goals. This preference may reflect the digital habits of Generation Z learners, who are more accustomed to short, fast-paced media formats that offer instant gratification and multimodal engagement.

3.2. Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings were derived primarily from students' responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and were supplemented by informal classroom observations and brief follow-up discussions. The open-ended questions focused on three areas: students' preferences for short- or long-form videos, the perceived benefits of each video format for English learning, and the difficulties they experienced when using TikTok and YouTube. The classroom observations, used as supplementary contextual evidence, focused on students' engagement with the video materials, repeated viewing behaviors, responses to short- and long-form content, and ways of using video-based information during learning activities. The qualitative data were coded thematically, resulting in four recurring themes: (1) motivational appeal of short-form videos, (2) contextual depth and structured learning through long-form videos, (3) flexibility and complementary use of the two formats, and (4) challenges associated with distraction and sustained attention. These themes provide contextual explanations for several patterns identified in the quantitative results presented in Table 1.

The first theme concerned students' perceived motivation and engagement when using short-form TikTok videos. In their open-ended responses, students frequently characterized short videos as "fun," "motivating," and "easy to follow." They particularly valued the short duration, fast presentation, and visually engaging nature of TikTok content. Some respondents also indicated that short videos helped reduce boredom and made it easier to maintain frequent exposure to English. These perceptions are consistent with the higher questionnaire rating for TikTok in motivation and engagement ($M = 3.89$) compared with YouTube ($M = 3.41$). The supplementary classroom observations provided additional contextual evidence for this pattern. During activities involving shorter video content, students appeared willing to interact with the materials and sometimes replayed short segments to attend to particular words, expressions, or pronunciation features. These observations should not be interpreted as objective evidence of increased motivation; rather, they illustrate behavioral patterns that were broadly consistent with students' self-reported preference for short and accessible video content.

The second theme reflected students' perceptions of the greater contextual depth provided by longer YouTube videos. In the open-ended responses, students described YouTube content as offering "clear explanations," "longer examples," and more complete grammar or listening lessons. Unlike short videos, which were commonly associated with quick exposure to language items, longer videos were perceived as more appropriate when students wanted detailed explanations or extended examples. This theme helps contextualize YouTube's higher rating for study planning ($M = 3.58$) compared with TikTok ($M = 3.07$). Students' comments suggested that longer videos were more readily

associated with planned learning sessions and focused study. The same pattern was relevant to vocabulary learning. Although students perceived both platforms as similarly supportive of vocabulary learning (TikTok $M = 3.64$; YouTube $M = 3.67$), their qualitative responses indicated different perceived functions: TikTok was commonly associated with rapid exposure to words and expressions, whereas YouTube was valued for providing broader contexts in which vocabulary could be understood and reviewed. Thus, the qualitative evidence suggests different learning experiences rather than superior vocabulary acquisition through either platform.

A third recurring theme was the flexible and complementary use of TikTok and YouTube. Rather than consistently identifying one platform as preferable for all learning purposes, some students described using the two formats for different purposes. Short videos were associated with quick exposure to vocabulary, expressions, or pronunciation, whereas longer videos were used when students wanted additional explanation, contextual information, or more extended listening practice. These responses provide useful context for the relatively similar ratings of overall perceived effectiveness for TikTok ($M = 3.62$) and YouTube ($M = 3.47$). The qualitative accounts suggest that students may perceive the two formats as serving different but complementary functions in their English learning. This pattern also indicates a degree of flexibility in students' video-learning practices, as they reported selecting video formats according to their immediate learning purposes rather than relying exclusively on one platform.

The final theme concerned difficulties associated with both video formats. Students' open-ended responses indicated that the brevity and fast-paced nature of TikTok could be accompanied by distraction. Some participants reported that the platform made it "easy to get distracted," particularly because educational videos were encountered alongside entertainment-oriented content. This helps contextualize why TikTok received a comparatively high rating for motivation and engagement but a lower rating for study planning. Long-form YouTube videos presented a different challenge. Some students reported that longer videos required greater concentration and could lead to "mental fatigue," particularly when the content was lengthy or cognitively demanding. These responses suggest a trade-off between contextual depth and the attentional demands associated with extended video content. Such perceptions are relevant to the relatively close ratings of the two formats for listening comprehension and overall perceived effectiveness.

The qualitative findings indicate that students associated short- and long-form videos with different learning experiences. TikTok was primarily valued for accessibility, rapid exposure, and motivational appeal, whereas YouTube was associated with contextual depth and more structured learning. At the same time, students identified limitations in both formats, particularly distraction in short-form environments and the sustained attention required by longer videos. Importantly, these findings represent students' reported perceptions and supplementary observational evidence rather than objective measures of language development. The qualitative findings therefore serve to contextualize and elaborate on the descriptive questionnaire patterns rather than demonstrate causal effects of video length on English language acquisition.

3.3. Discussion

The findings indicate that short- and long-form videos are associated with different perceived benefits in English learning. TikTok received a higher rating for motivation and engagement, whereas YouTube was more positively perceived for study planning and contextualized learning. However, the relatively similar ratings for vocabulary learning and listening comprehension suggest that neither format was consistently perceived as superior. Instead, the two formats appear to serve complementary learning purposes.

The higher motivation and engagement reported for TikTok is consistent with previous research showing that technology-enhanced learning can promote learner participation and engagement (Howell, 2021; Serrano et al., 2019). In the present study, students particularly valued the brevity, accessibility, and engaging presentation of short-form videos. However, TikTok received a lower rating for study planning, and some students reported distraction from entertainment-oriented content. This suggests that high engagement with short-form videos does not necessarily result in more structured learning.

The findings for vocabulary and listening can be interpreted through Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989) and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2005). Both video formats provide audiovisual language input, but students perceived them as offering different learning experiences. TikTok was associated with brief and repeated exposure to vocabulary, expressions, and conversational English, whereas YouTube provided longer explanations and richer contexts. This may explain why the two platforms received relatively similar ratings for vocabulary learning and listening comprehension despite their different formats. Rather than demonstrating different levels of actual language gains, these findings indicate differences in students' perceived learning benefits.

The qualitative findings further suggest that students use the two platforms complementarily. Some reported using short videos for initial exposure to vocabulary or pronunciation and longer videos for further explanation and contextual understanding. This supports previous research emphasizing the value of purposeful and flexible use of digital resources in learning (Howell, 2021; Serrano et al., 2019). The present study extends this perspective by suggesting that video length may influence how students select and use digital content for different English-learning purposes.

Pedagogically, short-form videos may be useful for introducing vocabulary, modeling pronunciation, activating prior knowledge, and increasing initial engagement, while longer videos may be more appropriate for extended listening, detailed explanations, and structured learning activities. Therefore, rather than treating TikTok and YouTube as competing resources, EFL teachers may combine short- and long-form videos according to specific instructional objectives. This approach takes advantage of the accessibility and motivational appeal of short videos while retaining the contextual depth offered by longer content.

4. Conclusion

This study examined English-major students' perceptions of short-form TikTok and long-form YouTube videos for English learning at Tay Nguyen University. The findings indicate that the two formats offer different but complementary perceived benefits. TikTok was more strongly associated with motivation, engagement, and brief language exposure, whereas YouTube was valued for structured learning and contextual depth. Both formats were perceived as useful for vocabulary learning and listening comprehension, although students also reported challenges related to distraction and sustained attention.

Pedagogically, the findings suggest that EFL teachers may combine short- and long-form videos according to specific learning objectives. Short videos can support initial engagement and focused language exposure, while longer videos can provide extended input and contextualized learning. As the study primarily relied on self-reported perceptions, future research should employ experimental or longitudinal designs and objective measures of language performance to examine how video length relates to actual learning outcomes.

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