

INTEGRATING TIKTOK INTO CYBERPRAGMATICS INSTRUCTION: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ANALYTICAL ENGAGEMENT

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Abstrak

Integrasi media digital dalam pendidikan tinggi membuka peluang baru bagi pembelajaran pragmatik melalui komunikasi daring yang autentik. Di antara berbagai platform media sosial, TikTok menyediakan beragam contoh wacana yang muncul secara alami sehingga dapat mendukung pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan bahasa dalam konteks digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan implementasi pembelajaran cyberpragmatik berbasis TikTok serta mengeksplorasi keterlibatan analitis mahasiswa selama proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan delapan mahasiswa semester enam Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas nonpartisipan, catatan lapangan, dan dokumentasi pembelajaran selama satu kali pertemuan mata kuliah Semantic-Pragmatic berdurasi 100 menit. Kegiatan pembelajaran mengarahkan mahasiswa untuk menganalisis video TikTok beserta kolom komentarnya dengan berfokus pada tindak tutur, strategi kesantunan berbahasa, dan implikatur percakapan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan wacana autentik dari TikTok mendorong partisipasi aktif mahasiswa, meningkatkan intensitas diskusi kolaboratif, serta mengembangkan kemampuan analisis terhadap makna kontekstual. Mahasiswa menunjukkan kemampuan yang lebih baik dalam menghubungkan konsep-konsep pragmatik dengan praktik komunikasi digital sehari-hari. Meskipun pada awalnya mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan dalam membedakan implikatur percakapan dengan inferensi serta memahami penggunaan bahasa gaul di media sosial, proses diskusi yang dipandu dosen membantu mereka membangun pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai konstruksi makna dalam komunikasi daring. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa TikTok berpotensi menjadi sumber belajar yang efektif dalam pembelajaran cyberpragmatik karena menyediakan data linguistik autentik yang mampu mendukung pengembangan kemampuan berpikir kritis, kompetensi pragmatik, dan literasi digital mahasiswa di pendidikan tinggi.

Kata kunci: cyberpragmatik, TikTok, pedagogi digital, pendidikan tinggi, pragmatic

Abstract

This study examined the implementation of TikTok-based cyber-pragmatics instruction and explored students' analytical engagement during the learning process. The study focuses on the integration of digital media into higher education, which has created new opportunities for teaching pragmatics through authentic online communication. Among various social media platforms, TikTok provides abundant examples of naturally occurring discourse that can support students' understanding of language use in digital contexts. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved eight sixth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat. The data were collected through

non-participant classroom observation, field notes, and learning documentation during a 100-minute Semantic-Pragmatics class. During the learning process, the students were required to analyze TikTok videos and comment sections focusing on speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicatures. The results of this study indicated that authentic TikTok discourse encouraged active classroom participation, collaborative discussion, and critical analysis of contextual meaning. Students demonstrated increased awareness of pragmatic phenomena by connecting theoretical concepts with everyday digital communication. Although students initially had difficulty distinguishing conversational implicature from inference and interpreting internet slang, guided discussion helped them develop a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in online interaction. This study suggests that TikTok can serve as an effective pedagogical resource for cyber-pragmatics instruction by providing authentic data that enhance students' analytical thinking, pragmatic competence, and digital literacy. These findings contribute to the development of research on the use of digital technology in higher education.

Keywords: cyber-pragmatics, TikTok, digital pedagogy, higher education, pragmatics instruction

INTRODUCTION

The vast development of digital technology has significantly transformed higher education circumstances, particularly in the way knowledge is delivered, accessed, and constructed. The students' learning experiences have shifted toward interactive, technology-mediated learning. By encouraging collaboration, active learning, and student engagement, digital technologies have become essential components of contemporary higher education (Bond, et al, 2020). Consequently, educators should develop digital pedagogical competence to integrate technology meaningfully into classroom instruction rather than merely using it as a supplementary tool (Redecker, 2017).

One of the most rapidly emerging platforms that is educationally potential among university students is TikTok (Yang, et al, 2026). Originally designed as an entertainment application, TikTok has gradually evolved into a platform that facilitates educational content sharing, collaborative learning, and knowledge dissemination. TikTok possesses considerable educational potential because its short-video format promotes learner participation, creativity, and engagement (Escamilla-Fajardo, Alguacil, and López-Carril, 2021). Likewise, TikTok-based learning environments can positively influence students' motivation and interaction when instructional activities are carefully designed (Guo et al, 2023). There is no wonder that TikTok-assisted instructional approaches have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing learning motivation and participation, improving academic performance, and mitigating mental health issues as well (Yang et al, 2026).

In the language education field, TikTok may provide authentic examples of natural-occurring communication. Unlike textbook dialogues, interactions on social media contain spontaneous language use, contextual expressions, humour, indirect meanings, speech acts, emojis, hashtags, and other multimodal resources that reflect genuine communication practices. Accordingly, language on social media tends to be more informal, flexible, and adaptive, creating space for the development of new linguistic forms and influencing communication patterns in everyday life (Nani, 2024). These kinds of interactions offer valuable materials for teaching pragmatics, enabling students to analyze language as it is used in real communicative contexts rather than in artificially constructed classroom conversations.

The sophistication of digital communication has also expanded pragmatic studies. Conventional pragmatic theories primarily explain face-to-face communication, whereas online interaction involves additional contextual variables such as digital interfaces,

asynchronous communication, hyperlinks, emojis, memes, comments, and platform-specific affordances (Sari et al., 2026). To explain these phenomena, Yus (2011) introduced the cyber-pragmatics framework, which was grounded in Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory. According to Yus, meaning in internet-mediated communication is constructed through users' cognitive environments while simultaneously being influenced by technological affordances that shape interpretation and contextual accessibility. Therefore, cyber-pragmatics extends traditional pragmatic analysis into contemporary digital communication.

Within language education, cyber-pragmatics provides an analytical framework that helps students understand how contextual meaning is negotiated in online interaction. Students are encouraged not only to identify linguistic forms but also to examine how meaning emerges through contextual inference, shared background knowledge, digital conventions, and communicative intentions. As Yule (2020) explains, pragmatic competence requires language users to interpret intended meaning beyond the literal meaning of utterances. In digital communication, this competence becomes increasingly important because online interaction frequently depends on implicit meanings, contextual assumptions, and multimodal cues.

Despite the increasing popularity of TikTok in education, previous studies have largely concentrated on vocabulary learning, speaking performance, learner motivation, and language acquisition. Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021), for example, investigated TikTok as an innovative learning platform in higher education, while Yang (2020) examined students' acceptance of TikTok as a mobile learning application. These studies consistently reported positive perceptions of TikTok in educational contexts. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to its implementation in teaching cyber-pragmatics, particularly as an instructional medium that supports students' analytical understanding of authentic digital discourse. Most existing research views TikTok as a learning medium rather than as a source of naturally occurring pragmatic data.

This gap is particularly relevant to linguistics education because university students spend considerable time interacting through social media while classroom instruction often relies on conventional examples separated from digital communication. Integrating TikTok into cyber-pragmatics instruction offers opportunities to bridge theoretical concepts with students' everyday communicative experiences. Students are able to observe speech acts, implicatures, contextual meaning, politeness strategies, and digital interaction patterns through digital discourse as they naturally occur in communication.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of TikTok-based cyber-pragmatics instruction in a university classroom and to explore students' analytical engagement throughout the learning process. Rather than evaluating instructional effectiveness experimentally, this study focuses on describing how authentic TikTok discourse can facilitate students' understanding of pragmatic concepts within higher education. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the growing literature on digital pedagogy, cyberpragmatics, and technology-enhanced linguistics education.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the implementation of TikTok-based cyber-pragmatics instruction in a university classroom setting. The approach is appropriate since the purpose of the study is to understand and present a detailed description of a naturally occurring phenomenon without manipulating the learning environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than measuring the effectiveness of an instructional intervention, this study focused on describing the learning process, students' engagement, and their analytical responses during classroom activities.

The research was undertaken in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat, Indonesia. The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a linguistics-related course in which cyber-pragmatics constituted one of the instructional topics. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in the learning activities observed in this study. By using purposive sampling, researchers were able to obtain rich information from participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2015).

The instructional activities were designed around TikTok materials. During lecturing sessions, students watched selected TikTok videos and saw the comment sections. These materials were chosen because they represented authentic examples of digital communication containing speech acts, implicatures, contextual meanings, humor, politeness strategies, and other pragmatic phenomena frequently encountered in online interaction. Students worked both individually and collaboratively to identify pragmatic features, interpret contextual meanings, and discuss how digital contexts influenced communication. The lecturer facilitated classroom discussions by connecting students' observations with key concepts in cyber-pragmatics, particularly those concerning contextual inference and relevance in computer-mediated communication as proposed by Yus (2011).

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). The analysis involved four interconnected stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observation, field notes, and documentation. Classroom observation was employed to capture students' participation, interaction patterns, and analytical engagement throughout the instructional process. Field notes were used to record significant classroom events, students' responses, and reflective observations that could not be adequately represented through documentation alone. Meanwhile, documentation, including students' analytical worksheets and presentation materials, was collected to support the interpretation of classroom observations. Using multiple sources of evidence is recommended in qualitative inquiry because it enhances the credibility of research findings through data triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, during data condensation, classroom observations and field notes were organized into meaningful categories related to students' participation, analytical engagement, collaborative interaction, and responses toward TikTok-based learning activities. The categorized data were subsequently displayed in narrative form to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns that reflected the implementation of cyber-pragmatics instruction using TikTok in the observed classroom.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted the qualitative criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was strengthened through prolonged classroom observation and triangulation of observational data, field notes, and learning documentation. Dependability was supported by maintaining detailed records of classroom procedures and data analysis, while confirmability was addressed by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the collected data rather than the researcher's personal assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of TikTok-Based Cyberpragmatics Instruction

The classroom observation was conducted during a 100-minute Semantic-Pragmatic course involving eight sixth-semester students from the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat. The

instructional objective was to introduce students to the concept of cyber-pragmatics through authentic digital discourse obtained from TikTok.

The lesson began with a brief explanation of cyber-pragmatics and its relevance to contemporary digital communication. The lecturer introduced the fundamental concepts of speech acts, politeness, implicature, and contextual meaning before presenting a TikTok video discussing a contemporary social issue. The selected video was accompanied by its public comment section, allowing students to observe naturally occurring online interactions rather than textbook-based examples.

Students first watched the video individually and were subsequently asked to read the accompanying comments. Working collaboratively, they identified pragmatic phenomena appearing in the comments, including speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicatures. After completing the analysis, each student presented and defended his or her interpretation, followed by an open-class discussion moderated by the lecturer. This learning sequence reflects the principle that authentic digital communication can function as meaningful instructional material because students are exposed to language as it naturally occurs in online communities. Internet-mediated communication provides rich contextual information that requires users to interpret intended meanings through contextual inference rather than relying solely on literal expressions (Yus, 2011).

2. Students' Analytical Engagement

The observation indicated that students actively participated throughout the learning process. Rather than passively receiving theoretical explanations, students engaged in collaborative discussions while negotiating different interpretations of the selected TikTok comments. The authentic nature of the material appeared to encourage active participation because the students were already familiar with the platform and its communication style. One notable observation was the emergence of classroom debates concerning the interpretation of specific comments. Students frequently proposed different explanations regarding whether an utterance represented a direct speech act, an indirect speech act, or a conversational implicature. These discussions demonstrated that students were beginning to evaluate contextual meaning instead of relying exclusively on literal interpretation.

Pragmatic competence requires language users to understand speaker meaning rather than sentence meaning alone (Yule, 2020). The classroom discussions illustrated this process, as students continuously referred to contextual clues, background knowledge, and communicative intentions when interpreting the TikTok comments. The observation also showed that collaborative discussion encouraged students to compare alternative interpretations before reaching a shared conclusion. This finding supports the view of Vygotsky (1978) that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and dialogue. In this study, learning occurred not only through lecturer explanation but also through peer discussion and collective meaning negotiation.

3. Challenges Encountered During Learning

Although students demonstrated high engagement, several learning challenges were observed. The first challenge involved distinguishing conversational implicature from inference. Some students initially assumed that every inferred meaning automatically constituted an implicature. During the discussion, the lecturer clarified that implicature refers to meaning intentionally communicated by the speaker, whereas inference refers to the hearer's interpretative process. This distinction is consistent with the explanation provided by Grice (1989) and further elaborated by Yule (2020).

Another challenge concerned the interpretation of TikTok slang and informal expressions. Several comments contained abbreviated forms, internet slang, humorous expressions, and culturally specific references unfamiliar to some students. Consequently,

students occasionally required additional contextual explanation before accurately identifying the intended pragmatic meaning.

Interestingly, these difficulties became opportunities for deeper discussion rather than obstacles to learning. Students were encouraged to justify their interpretations using contextual evidence instead of relying on intuition alone. Such activities reflect the central principle of cyberpragmatics, which emphasizes that successful communication depends on contextual accessibility and relevance rather than linguistic forms alone (Yus, 2011).

4. Development of Students' Analytical Awareness

The observation suggested positive development in students' analytical awareness throughout the learning activities. Compared with the beginning of the lesson, students became increasingly capable of relating theoretical concepts introduced in class to authentic examples of digital communication. Students demonstrated greater confidence when identifying speech acts, explaining politeness strategies, and discussing contextual meanings within TikTok interactions. Rather than memorizing theoretical definitions, they attempted to apply pragmatic concepts to naturally occurring discourse.

Table 1. Spontaneous student reflections further illustrated this development

Student	Spontaneous Reflections
1	I just realized that TikTok comments can actually be analyzed linguistically.
2	Pragmatics is actually interesting.
3	Now I don't easily believe everything I read online.

Those reflections indicated that the learning activities not only supported students' understanding of cyber-pragmatic concepts but also encouraged greater critical awareness toward digital communication. This finding aligns with Yus (2011), who argues that internet users continuously construct meaning by evaluating contextual information and cognitive assumptions. Likewise, Sperber and Wilson (1995) maintain that successful interpretation depends on the hearer's ability to evaluate contextual relevance rather than process linguistic information literally.

The findings suggest that integrating TikTok into cyber-pragmatics instruction created an authentic learning environment in which theoretical concepts were directly connected to students' everyday digital experiences. Unlike conventional textbook examples, TikTok comments presented naturally occurring discourse characterized by implicit meanings, indirect communication, humor, and contextual ambiguity. Such characteristics encouraged students to engage in analytical discussion while negotiating multiple possible interpretations.

These results support previous educational studies that emphasize the pedagogical potential of TikTok. Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) reported that TikTok promotes active participation and learner engagement by presenting instructional content in an interactive and familiar format. Similarly, Redecker (2017) argues that meaningful integration of digital technologies should enable students to become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This present study extends previous discussions by demonstrating that TikTok functions not only as a digital learning medium but also as a valuable source of authentic pragmatic data. Students analyzed genuine online interactions that reflected contemporary communication practices, thereby narrowing the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world language use.

Furthermore, the classroom discussions revealed that students gradually shifted from identifying isolated linguistic forms toward interpreting speaker intentions, contextual assumptions, and communicative purposes. This progression reflects the development of pragmatic competence described by Yule (2020) and is consistent with the cyber-pragmatic

perspective proposed by Yus (2011), in which meaning emerges through interaction between linguistic input, contextual information, technological affordances, and users' cognitive environments.

Overall, the classroom observation indicates that TikTok can serve as an effective pedagogical resource for introducing cyber-pragmatics in higher education. Although the present study involved only a small group of participants and was descriptive in nature, it illustrates how authentic digital discourse can stimulate critical thinking, collaborative interpretation, and contextual language analysis among university students.

Table 2. The Aspects and Evidence

Observed Aspect	Classroom Evidence
Student participation	Students actively discussed and debated interpretations of TikTok comments
Learning focus	Speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicatures.
Learning challenges	Distinguishing implicature from inference; interpreting internet slang.
Learning outcomes	Students demonstrated more critical thinking and connected pragmatic theory with everyday digital communication.
Student reflections	"I just realized that TikTok comments can actually be analyzed linguistically"; "Pragmatics is actually interesting"; "Now I don't easily believe everything I read online."

CONCLUSION

This study described the implementation of TikTok-based cyberpragmatics instruction in a Semantic-Pragmatics course involving sixth-semester students of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat. The classroom observation demonstrated that integrating authentic TikTok discourse into instruction created an interactive learning environment in which students actively participated in discussions, debated different interpretations, and applied pragmatic concepts to naturally occurring digital communication.

The findings indicate that authentic TikTok videos and comment sections provide meaningful learning resources for introducing key concepts of cyberpragmatics, including speech acts, politeness strategies, and conversational implicatures. Rather than relying solely on textbook examples, students were encouraged to interpret contextual meaning through authentic online interactions. Although students initially experienced difficulties in distinguishing conversational implicature from inference and interpreting internet slang, collaborative discussion and lecturer guidance enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of pragmatic meaning in digital communication.

Furthermore, the learning activities fostered students' analytical awareness by encouraging them to critically evaluate online discourse instead of accepting digital messages at face value. Students also demonstrated the ability to connect theoretical concepts with their everyday experiences on social media, suggesting that authentic digital communication can effectively bridge linguistic theory and real-world language use.

Overall, this study suggests that TikTok is not merely a social networking platform but also a valuable pedagogical resource for cyber-pragmatics instruction in higher education. The integration of authentic social media discourse offers opportunities to enhance students'

pragmatic competence, critical thinking, and digital literacy through contextualized language learning.

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