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TikTok as Microlearning: Unveiling Vocational Students' Experiences in Learning Computer Systems

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the learning experiences of vocational high school students in using TikTok as a microlearning medium for computer systems. The study aims to identify the factors that support or inhibit this process. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 10th-grade students at a vocational high school in Surakarta. Data analysis was conducted thematically based on three aspects: Cognitive Strategies, Efforts, and Metacognitive Strategies. The results indicate that using TikTok in learning provides a positive learning experience. This positive outcome is due to TikTok's concise, visual, and easily accessible content. Students can learn independently through short videos, create summaries, engage in peer discussions, and manage their study time. Inhibiting factors also include distractions from non-educational content and the videos' limited depth of information. In conclusion, TikTok has the potential to be an effective microlearning platform for vocational high school students, particularly for learning computer systems. The implications of this study's findings fill a gap in the literature, particularly regarding TikTok-based microlearning for productive subjects in vocational education.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:
computer systems; learning experience; microlearning; TikTok; vocational education

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INTRODUCTION

Smartphones and the Internet provide learning platforms and information search capabilities that can be used anytime, anywhere (Dingler et al., 2017). This flexibility allows individuals to learn or search for information at home, at work, or while traveling (Samala et al., 2023). Currently, there is a shift in information access preferences from search engines to interactive vertical video content (Duong et al., 2025). Most people prefer using short-form video platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts over search engines (Duong et al., 2025). Short-form video platforms have become hubs for entertainment, self-expression, and communication, especially among younger audiences. Educators should understand this transformation to create learning that aligns with students' preferences. It is time for educators to consider social media for learning. Social media has transformed into a medium for communication and collaboration among students. Features such as high accessibility, instant connectivity, and personalized participation enable the emergence of innovative learning paradigms (Yang et al., 2025).

Microlearning is a learning approach that presents short, focused, and flexible content in small units (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2020; Marti et al., 2023). Its aim is performance improvement (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2020), learner engagement, behavioral change, and competitive advantage (Ulupui et al., 2021). Learners can manage their learning process by choosing the time, place, and learning materials that best suit their needs (Nowak et al., 2023). Microlearning is characterized by

its short duration and focus on a specific topic (Setiasih et al., 2025). Microlearning is effective in accelerating the acquisition of specific competencies (Kohnke, 2024), fostering active participation (Amin & Monorfa, 2024), strengthening retention, and increasing learning motivation (Santi et al., 2024). TikTok is a rapidly emerging digital platform that has become a potential educational tool for developing online microlearning environments (Yang et al., 2025). Since its release in 2016, the video-sharing platform TikTok has enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Few social media platforms have grown as rapidly as TikTok, particularly among teenagers and young adults, with global users increasing from 55 million in January 2018 to 1.7 billion in 2023 (Stoddard et al., 2023). TikTok has become a potential platform because it supports videos from 15 seconds to 3 minutes (Conde et al., 2024). This concept aligns with microlearning, which presents learning material in small, focused units centred on specific topics or competencies, enhancing comprehension and knowledge retention (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2020). With its short-video feature, TikTok enables the delivery of concise, engaging, and accessible content anytime and anywhere (Khlaif & Salha, 2021). Ideal microlearning duration is often considered to be under one minute; content of up to three minutes still fits microlearning principles when it is focused and structured (Anggraini et al., 2025). Studies confirm TikTok's effectiveness in enhancing learning engagement and satisfaction (Conde-Caballero et al., 2023; Asgar et al., 2025). Microlearning through TikTok is highly relevant to the learning style of the digital generation.

Innovation in learning media has become urgent, particularly in vocational high schools (Satria et al., 2024). Vocational high schools are tasked with preparing graduates to be work-ready with specific competencies in specific fields (Choirunnisa et al., 2020). However, a gap often exists between the needs of the workforce and the competencies of vocational high school graduates. Therefore, media development strategies are needed to improve students' mastery of skills. Vocational High Schools are tasked with preparing graduates to be job-ready with specific competencies in particular fields. Subjects such as computer systems are core components that students must master to develop their technological skills (Pratama, 2020). However, due to their abstract and complex nature, computer systems topics often pose significant challenges for students, especially when delivered using conventional methods such as lectures or textual explanations without interactive media support (Bratha, 2022; Garcia et al., 2022; Meliana & Seli, 2023).

Several studies have shown that visual and interactive media—including short-form videos—can help improve students' conceptual understanding and learning motivation. Garcia et al. (2022) emphasise that short videos simplify complex ideas into more concrete and digestible content, while Meliana and Seli (2023) argue that visual media enhances learning engagement and promotes student participation in classroom activities. Despite various educational innovations, studies that specifically explore the use of TikTok as a microlearning platform for teaching computer systems in vocational education remain limited (Yuniarsih et al., 2022). TikTok, which is already familiar to vocational students, offers creative features that support educational content delivery and align with the preferences of digital-native learners who value brief, visual, and flexible learning formats(Bahri et al., 2022; Pujiono et al., 2021; Saman, 2023). Therefore, integrating TikTok into classroom instruction could serve as a bridge between conventional teaching methods and students' actual needs in this digital age (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TikTok and microlearning in improving learning motivation, student engagement, and conceptual understanding across various educational levels (Conde-Caballero et al., 2023; Meliana & Seli, 2023), research explicitly combining these two—particularly for teaching Computer Systems in vocational education—remains scarce or has not been explored in depth (Stefany et al., 2024; Yuniarsih et al., 2022). Building on prior studies, this limitation underscores a significant gap in the literature. It strengthens the rationale for the present study, which aims to explore vocational

students' learning experiences with TikTok as a microlearning medium in the Computer Systems subject. A literature review of previous studies found that microlearning has been adopted in vocational schools (Wang et al., 2021). Several researchers have examined the implementation of microlearning in non-technical subjects, such as languages or social sciences (Rizal et al., 2023). Furthermore, several studies have examined the implementation of microlearning in engineering subjects. Furthermore, several studies on the implementation of microlearning via video media aim to bridge the gap in soft skills required in the workplace (Daniswara et al., 2026). Therefore, in this study, the researchers aim to fill this research gap by examining the implementation of microlearning in computer systems subjects. The researchers believe that further research is needed to explicitly explore TikTok-based microlearning in the context of vocational schools, particularly in computer systems, to provide more in-depth, contextually relevant insights (Jahnke et al., 2020).

The Computer Systems subject studies hardware, software, the Internet, and users, all interacting to process data into information (Islamiah et al., 2022). Hardware consists of its main components, including input, processing, output, storage, and control. This material is taught in the vocational school informatics curriculum, particularly regarding hardware and basic technology (Novita & Harahap, 2020). To avoid material complexity, the Computer Systems course will be broken down into smaller concepts and presented visually through TikTok-based microlearning (Conde-Caballero et al., 2023). This study adopts TikTok as a microlearning platform for teaching computer systems in vocational high schools. The platform is considered relevant and practical, as previous studies have proven its ability to facilitate effective learning, enhance student engagement, and improve conceptual understanding (Conde-Caballero et al., 2023). Abstract and difficult-to-visualize content in the Computer Systems subject can be transformed into short educational videos that follow microlearning principles. Presenting material in short video clips and reels is more accessible and engaging for students. Therefore, this study aims to explore vocational students' learning experiences using TikTok as a microlearning tool in computer systems courses. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examines the effectiveness, potential, and challenges of integrating TikTok into vocational education (Yuniarsih et al., 2022).

Learning experiences encompass students' interactions with subject matter, the learning environment, instructors, and peers, as well as their relationships, in shaping their perceptions and learning outcomes (Novitasari & Kurniawati, 2023). In vocational schools, technology-mediated experiences can enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Hariyono, 2023; Melati et al., 2023), improve retention, and increase motivation (Asgar et al., 2025). This research addresses an underexplored area: interactive, contextually rich learning experiences that strongly support vocational education goals. These findings can expand the literature on TikTok-based microlearning in vocational education. Furthermore, the findings can provide practical insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and education practitioners. This research contributes to supporting the transformation of technology-integrated learning in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which demands more flexible, creative, and adaptive educational strategies.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative research is an empirical scientific approach to examining phenomena in natural settings and interpreting them based on the meanings people assign to them (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). This study aims to explore students' learning experiences when using TikTok as a micro-learning medium in Computer Systems subjects. This research was conducted at a Vocational High School in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, from February 2024 to June 2025. This time span includes several stages, including

proposal development, instrument preparation, proposal seminar, field research, data analysis, and final reporting.

The use of TikTok in this study was integrated strictly into the formal classroom instruction during dedicated Computer Systems lessons. It was not conducted as an independent learning activity outside of class. This approach was implemented to ensure maximum control over the research. All study participants accessed the same dedicated TikTok account, which contained six uniform microlearning videos specifically designed to support the understanding of the material being studied in class. The microlearning material presented on TikTok was rigorously structured around the Computer Systems learning module used by Informatics teachers in schools. This module served as the reference for chunking the material into several microlearning videos, ensuring that each video comprehensively represented a specific part of the material and remained fully integrated within the curriculum. During the intervention period, the researcher actively instructed students to access only this pre-prepared microlearning content.

The researcher's direct role was essential in directing student access and maintaining focus, thereby ensuring the learning process remained structured and directly aligned with the research objectives. The research participants were students from class X PPLG A who had been involved in learning using TikTok. From a total of 29 questionnaire respondents, 10 students were purposively selected as key informants for interviews based on their diverse experiences and engagement levels. This purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure the data collected reflected the relevant perspectives of learners who had directly experienced TikTok-based instruction. The sample size was considered sufficient to reach meaningful qualitative saturation, as supported by Wutich et al. (2024), who stated that 9 to 12 interviews are typically sufficient to reach basic saturation.

Data collection in this study utilised two main techniques: open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Both instruments were developed based on the framework proposed by Akram and Abdelrady (2025), which outlines 13 indicators grouped under three core aspects of learning strategies: Cognitive Strategies, Efforts, and Metacognitive Strategies. The questionnaire was designed to obtain a general overview of students' engagement and learning behaviours. To ensure content validity, both instruments underwent a rigorous expert review process involving two Informatics and Computer Engineering lecturers. The experts assessed the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each indicator to the context of TikTok-based microlearning in Computer Systems. Revisions were made based on their feedback, particularly in formulating questions related to abstract concepts and metacognitive strategies. The interview protocol was structured to delve deeper into their experiences, including both supporting and inhibiting factors encountered while learning on TikTok. The detailed aspects and indicators used as the foundation for developing the instruments are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Aspects and Indicators of Learning Experiences

Aspects	Indicators
Cognitive Strategies (CS)	Revisiting study materials
	Preparing for upcoming lectures
	Expanding comprehension
	Summarizing to understand
Efforts (E)	Participating actively
	Sharing thoughts
	Receiving feedback
	Deeper understanding
	Enhancing communication skill

Aspects	Indicators
Metacognitive Strategies (MS)	Goal setting
	Working on weak areas
	Managing time
	Prioritizing tasks

To ensure the credibility of findings, the study employed methodological triangulation by combining questionnaire and interview data. This technique enabled the researcher to validate and cross-check results, enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, allowing the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes. Although the study did not implement manual coding procedures, the analysis was conducted systematically by organising data according to the three predefined learning experience aspects. The themes were constructed deductively and supported with direct quotes from participants, providing depth and maintaining contextual meaning. The entire research process was divided into three phases: preparation, implementation, and post-research. During the preparation phase, the researcher developed the research proposal and data collection instruments and conducted a proposal seminar to refine the study design. During the implementation phase, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Lastly, in the post-research phase, the researcher analysed the data and compiled a comprehensive research report, followed by a thesis defence as part of the academic validation process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to investigate students' learning experiences using TikTok as a microlearning platform for computer systems. The study was conducted at a vocational high school in Surakarta. Data were collected using two methods: a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Questionnaires were distributed to 29 10th-grade students to obtain an overview of their learning experiences. In addition to the questionnaire, 10 students were purposively selected as interview informants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and supporting or inhibiting factors in more detail. Participants were 29 vocational high school students, 22 males and 7 females, ages 15–16. From this group, 10 students were purposively selected for interviews based on their active participation in TikTok-based learning. This selection was intended to ensure the data's relevance and richness.

This questionnaire focused on gathering students' learning experiences using TikTok in the Computer Systems course. The instrument adopted 13 indicators derived from three core aspects: cognitive strategies, effort, and metacognitive strategies (Akram & Abdelrady, 2025). Data analysis was conducted using only data from the 10 students who also participated in the interviews to facilitate cross-referencing and more in-depth analysis. Overall, most indicators were dominated by the categories “Agree” and “Strongly Agree.” For example, the “Expanding Understanding” indicator received the highest positive responses, with all students selecting either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” Similar patterns were observed for indicators such as “Prioritising Tasks” and “Deeper Understanding.” Although minor variations were observed in indicators such as “Time Management” and “Reviewing Lessons,” the overall response remained predominantly positive. These findings indicate that students generally view TikTok positively as a learning tool, particularly in supporting self-directed learning and enhancing conceptual understanding in the computer systems course. Students acknowledged its flexibility and accessibility, which align with the core principles of microlearning. Interview analysis was structured around three dimensions: Cognitive Strategies, Effort, and Metacognitive Strategies. The interviews also explored factors that supported and hindered students' learning experiences. Interview results indicated that using TikTok videos for

learning can strengthen students' understanding. Many of them reported rewatching videos multiple times, summarising the content, and referring to saved materials when they encountered difficulties.

R00: "*If it is a video, I might rewatch it...*"
R02: "*If the material is a video, of course I will rewatch it... If it is written, I will reread it.*"
R06: "*I usually rewatch the video and often save the video link.*"

These quotes illustrate students' habit of rewatching and taking notes on important information. This finding, as previously reported, suggests that students can pause and rewatch videos repeatedly to enhance their understanding (Kohnke, 2023). In addition to comprehension, video playback also promotes self-practice by allowing rewatching and repeated practice (Choirunnisa et al., 2020). The short, focused format of the videos enabled quick reviews, consistent with Corbeil et al.'s (2023) description of microlearning as accessible, concise, and targeted. Interview results suggest that revisiting saved material when encountering difficulties is highly relevant to the concept of Just-in-Time (JIT) learning (Román-Sánchez et al., 2023). Interview and observation results indicate that students are actively engaged in learning. They interact with the content by reading comments, discussing with peers, and seeking additional information.

R05: "*I usually look at the comments on TikTok or discuss them with friends.*"
R07: "*If I'm confused, I ask a friend or discuss it with them.*"
R08: "*I can understand it well by listening and also reading the video content.*"

These responses reflect students' active participation and initiative in learning. Self-directed learning in microlearning increases student motivation and engagement. Students who take initiative in their learning process tend to retain their learning more effectively (Samala et al., 2023). This aligns with research indicating that most participants agreed they learned new things and enjoyed the learning (Gorham et al., 2023). Aligning with Ahnaf and Rosyidah's (2025) emphasis on user engagement as a key to successful microlearning. Students demonstrated awareness of how to set goals and manage their learning process and time using TikTok. Some students were able to plan specific study times, prioritize learning materials, and try to avoid distractions.

R03: "*I enjoy learning new things like computer systems.*"
R06: "*I usually set a study time beforehand, so I do not get distracted by other videos.*"
R09: "*I decide which one to study first so I do not get confused.*"

These behaviors demonstrate self-regulation and control over learning. The Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) approach using TikTok has the potential to inspire students to engage in independent learning. Students are encouraged to research and solve problems autonomously (Klinjuy, 2025). Reflecting Sucipto's (2017) view that effective metacognitive learners are those who plan, monitor, and evaluate their strategies. Many students appreciate TikTok's short video format, which facilitates their review and understanding of learning materials. For example:

R00: "*...if you do not understand, just repeat it. We know the features on TikTok, they are fast, and the videos are usually short...*"
R04: "*Yes, it can be helpful. For example, when we search for information on TikTok, it can be helpful.*"
R03: "*I enjoy learning new things, like computer systems.*"

This insight confirms that TikTok's format supports accessible and flexible learning. The concise nature of the videos allows for quick reviews and better engagement, as aligned with Corbeil et al.'s (2023) view that microlearning provides short, self-contained, and easily accessible learning units. Despite its benefits, students expressed challenges with using TikTok. These include distractions from irrelevant content. Several participants raised this issue:

R00: "...it often distracts me, you know. When I watch a TikTok video, I think, 'Wow, there is this video that's more interesting,' it immediately distracts me and influences me..."
R01: "...sometimes I scroll through other videos."
R05: "If the deadline is closer, I will start working on it first... So, I focus on watching TikTok or YouTube videos that contain the material..."

This quote emphasizes the potential downsides of using an open social media platform like TikTok, particularly the risk of losing focus. Excessive daily TikTok use can impair students' ability to concentrate on course material and increase susceptibility to digital distractions when doing homework (Yang et al., 2025). Endless scrolling and replying to messages can ultimately disrupt learning that requires high levels of focus. This aligns with Luthfiyyah and Mukramin (2023), who highlight that without strong self-control, social media use during learning can disrupt concentration and effectiveness.

The findings of this study indicate that TikTok supports personalized and flexible learning (Ramírez & Cansino, 2023; Samala et al., 2023; Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2021). Microlearning with TikTok can divide complex topics into short, easy-to-understand materials (Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). These findings align with Nowak et al. (2023) and Samala et al. (2023), who found that microlearning enhances learners' ability to control their learning pace and environment (Samala et al., 2023). The Cognitive Strategies observed confirm that TikTok helps strengthen understanding through repetition and visualisation (Samala et al., 2023). In addition to watching videos, students also explore the content to deepen their understanding. This process enables students to engage in constructive and independent learning (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2020; Nowak et al., 2023; Samala et al., 2023). The Effort dimension reflects social and collaborative learning. By discussing with peers and exploring community responses within the app, students expand their knowledge beyond the content itself. TikTok encourages more collaborative, interactive learning for both educators and learners. This interaction occurs through activities such as watching videos, commenting, and participating in live streams, which promote social engagement (Yang et al., 2025). Social support and collaborative interactions between learners play a crucial role in optimising intrinsic motivation and strengthening cognitive understanding of academic material (Yang et al., 2025).

Several studies emphasize that TikTok has the potential to foster communication and critical thinking (Ramírez & Cansino, 2023; Greene et al., 2023; Romanenko, 2023; Samala et al., 2023; Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2021). TikTok provides a multimodal environment that supports students in developing language and public communication skills (Klinjuy, 2025). The use of TikTok in education encourages students to move from being passive consumers to active creators, a higher-order cognitive process (Fidan, 2023). Regarding Metacognitive Strategies, learners demonstrated awareness of how to regulate their learning environment (Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023). They created study plans, prioritised the content they engaged with, and attempted to minimize distractions (Karlsen et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025). Such strategies are essential for effective digital learning, particularly within informal learning contexts (Waldia et al., 2023). Additionally, two key themes emerged related to external factors influencing learning: supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include short video duration, which made repeated viewing easier. high accessibility through mobile devices, familiarity with the TikTok interface, and social encouragement from peers who share similar content. In comparison, the inhibiting factors include distractions from unrelated entertainment content, limited depth of information in some videos, and the absence of structured sequencing, as TikTok content does not always follow a formal curriculum.

These findings suggest that while TikTok has potential as an educational tool, its effectiveness depends heavily on learners' self-control and purpose-driven use. Educators may consider curating or creating content that aligns with learning objectives or guiding students in selecting educational TikTok content. This study has several weaknesses that need to be taken into account. Implementation in a single subject may lead to less in-depth exploration. Furthermore, this study does not fully reflect the diversity of vocational education contexts in Indonesia. The second limitation of the current study is its short intervention duration, necessitating future research to assess long-term retention. In future research, we recommend examining the impact of teacher-designed TikTok content on student learning outcomes. Because the current study's limitation is its short intervention duration, future research is needed to assess long-term retention.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok has the potential to serve as an effective microlearning platform in vocational education. TikTok can be used to cover abstract and complex subjects, such as computer systems. The research findings indicate that vocational students use TikTok in ways that align with cognitive, effort-based, and metacognitive strategies. TikTok facilitates students' active learning by allowing them to rewatch videos, summarize content, discuss with peers, and effectively manage their time and focus. TikTok encourages students to foster independent learning. The research findings also imply that using TikTok with guidance can provide relevant, accessible, and engaging learning experiences. TikTok enables a personalized and flexible learning environment that accommodates students' current digital habits. Caution should also be exercised when integrating TikTok into educational practices, as this can lead to disruptions such as digital distractions, endless scrolling, and disrupted learning focus. Careless distribution of material can lead to a lack of depth in the material taught. Future research should expand beyond exploring learning experiences to include more in-depth measures of cognitive learning outcomes and other aspects, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and learning motivation.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing process of this manuscript.

CONFLICTING INTEREST STATEMENT

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

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