Journal of Educational Sciences
Journal homepage: https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES

P-ISSN 2581-1657
E-ISSN 2581-2203

The Influence of TikTok on Elementary Students' Interpersonal Communication in Learning Contexts

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 01 Aug 2025
Revised: 12 Aug 2025
Accepted: 03 Sept 2025
Published online: 10 Sept 2025

Keywords:

Communication Style, Elementary Students, Interpersonal Communication, Social Media, TikTok

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Article Doi:

https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.5.p.3688-3698

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A B S T R A C T

The growing popularity of TikTok among elementary school students has raised questions about its potential impact on how students communicate, especially within learning environments. This study aims to examine whether the use of the TikTok social media platform affects the interpersonal communication styles of fifth-grade students at SDN 62 Rontu. A quantitative research approach was used with a survey method. Data were collected from 19 students using a questionnaire that was validated by an expert in elementary education. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test showed that the data were normally distributed (sig. = 0.200), and Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance (sig. = 0.063). The result of the t-test indicated a significance value greater than 0.05, which means there was no significant influence of TikTok usage on students' communication styles. Although students were fairly active on TikTok and followed various communication trends from the platform, these habits did not directly shape the way they communicated in daily learning contexts. The findings suggest that communication behaviors are more strongly influenced by family interaction, peer relationships, and school culture rather than social media use.

1. Introduction

In recent years, technology has grown at an incredible pace and changed how people live, learn, and communicate. One of the most influential developments in this area is the internet. It has made it easier for people to connect, find information, and interact in ways that were not possible before (Nasrullah, 2015). As (Nasrullah, 2015) states, "social media is not just a communication tool, but a new cultural space that shapes the mindset and behavior of digital society." In line with this, (Chalim & Anwas, 2018) argue that "the internet can be a powerful learning resource if used wisely and purposefully." For many, especially the younger generation, the internet is now a part of everyday life. Supporting this shift is the widespread use of smartphones. These devices are no longer just tools for calling or texting; they have become gateways to various digital platforms, especially social media.

Apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and more recently TikTok have gained millions of users in Indonesia alone. According to DataReportal (2025), Indonesia had approximately 143 million social media users in January 2025, representing about 50.2 percent of the country's total population. Among these platforms, TikTok has shown particularly rapid growth. Launched in China in 2016 and later merging with Musical.ly in 2018, TikTok quickly became popular worldwide through its short videos, music integration, and viral trends. Furthermore, a report by Statista cited in CNN Indonesia (2024) indicated that Indonesia had the highest number of TikTok users globally, reaching 157.6 million people as of August 2024.

TikTok is popular with all age groups, including elementary school students. This is an interesting development, especially for teachers and parents, because the content on TikTok is highly diverse. Some videos are educational, but many are made for entertainment, often using slang, jokes, or exaggerated gestures. These styles of communication are very different from the formal and polite language often expected in schools. As students spend more time watching TikTok, they may begin to copy the language, tone, and expressions they see in those videos. While this can help them become more confident and expressive, it might also affect how they interact with others, especially in classroom settings. For example, they may use slang in class discussions, mimic influencers, or express themselves in ways that are less aligned with school norms.

Some studies have looked into how TikTok influences behavior. (Carolin et al., 2023), for instance, found that using TikTok was related to how young people see themselves, especially in terms of identity and confidence. Another study by (Kalsum, 2022) focused on high school students and found that communication through TikTok could have a positive effect on learning motivation. While these studies show that TikTok can shape behavior, most of the focus has been on older students or general self-expression. Very few studies have explored how TikTok might affect communication styles among younger students, particularly in learning environments.

At this stage, fifth-grade students are still developing how they express themselves, both verbally and nonverbally. Their communication is shaped by many things: family, friends, school, and now also social media. If children often see content that is casual, humorous, or even inappropriate for their age, they might start to adopt similar styles in everyday life. Over time, this could change how they speak, act, and interact in daily life, often without realizing it. To understand this better, the researcher conducted an observation at SDN 62 Rontu on July 8, 2025. Out of 19 fifth-grade students, 16 of them (or around 84%) already owned smartphones and used TikTok regularly.

Many of them were aware of the latest trends, popular creators, and viral content. They also often read the comment sections, which included both positive and negative messages. Interestingly, students who often used TikTok tended to be more expressive. They spoke with more variety, used different tones, and included gestures or slang in their conversations. Some of them even used jokes or phrases that were clearly taken from the app. On the other hand, students who did not use

TikTok were generally quieter and more reserved. They spoke in simpler ways and were less likely to initiate conversations, especially with people outside their usual social circle.

This situation raises important questions. Does TikTok actually influence how these students communicate? And if so, how strong is that influence? While some might argue that social media helps children become more creative or open, others worry that it could reduce their use of proper language, manners, and awareness of context (Febriany et al., 2023). In the context of this research, social media is positioned as a crucial object of study for understanding how communication between individuals and institutions can shape perceptions, build trust, or even create crises (Rahmadania & Risdiyanto, 2024). Social media, as a dynamic digital space, enables the massive and real time dissemination of information, allowing every message constructed within it to quickly.

Every form of communication that emerges within these digital platforms serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a contributing factor to the formation of social narratives that can strengthen or weaken the position of an individual or institution in the public eye. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of how messages are constructed, delivered, and received by audiences on digital platforms is necessary, including attention to the cultural, social, and psychological contexts of the intended audience, as each social group can respond to information differently depending on their level of understanding and background (Junawan & Laugu, 2020).

This goes beyond the delivery of messages, but also examines how these messages are processed, interpreted, and disseminated by the public within a non linear digital communication cycle that relies heavily on algorithms and ongoing virtual social interactions. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding media literacy so that the public is not merely a consumer of information but also able to filter and manage information critically. Media literacy is a crucial foundation for shaping a society that is not easily influenced by disinformation, hoaxes, or propaganda spread through social media, and encourages wiser and more active public participation in healthy digital discourse (Usrina, 2021). This literacy also helps strengthen the public's capacity to recognize the motives, actors, and impacts of messages circulating on social media, thus strengthening their resilience against information manipulation that can lead to the formation of false opinions or even social conflict.

Through this approach, the study is expected to contribute not only to academic understanding but also to practical efforts in improving communication among students in the classroom. As students become increasingly active in digital spaces like TikTok, it becomes crucial to equip them with communication skills that are both expressive and respectful. (Andriani et al., 2024) highlight the importance of digital literacy in helping young users navigate online interactions in a healthy way. Similarly, (Wumbu, 2021) found that the way students communicate on TikTok often reflects broader changes in how children express themselves in everyday school life. By understanding how these dynamics unfold, educators and parents

can better support students in developing positive, balanced communication habits that bridge both online and offline contexts.

This research aims to examine whether the use of the TikTok application has a significant effect on the interpersonal communication styles of fifth-grade students at SDN 62 Rontu in a learning context. As TikTok grows more popular among children, its impact on student behavior becomes a relevant concern. This research focuses on how digital exposure may influence the way students communicate in school. Using a quantitative method, the study provides measurable data to explore that influence. It also highlights the role of school, family, and peers as shaping forces in student communication. The findings are expected to help teachers and parents understand the boundaries between social media habits and classroom interaction. Therefore, this research plays a small but important role in understanding how students express themselves in today's digital era.

2. Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive quantitative design to explore and quantify the relationship between two variables: TikTok usage (variable X) and students' communication style (variable Y). A survey approach was chosen to enable data collection from all members of the population using a standardized instrument.

Subject or Participant

This research employed a quantitative research method with a survey approach to examine the influence of TikTok usage on students' interpersonal communication styles. The study was conducted on July 17, 2025, at SDN 62 Rontu, involving 19 fifth-grade students as the research participants, consisted of 9 male and 10 female students.

Instrument

Three instruments were used to collect data:

1) Observation Sheet, used to monitor students' in school behavior related to TikTok use and their interaction styles. The researcher recorded observable behaviors such as mimicking TikTok gestures or speaking in trendy phrases.
2) Closed-Ended Questionnaire (Likert Scale), consisted of 8 items for each variable (X and Y). The items were designed to measure the level of TikTok usage and the characteristics of students' communication styles. Responses were rated on a 4 point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).
3) Documentation, included relevant school records and supporting data on student demographics and academic background.

The research instrument was validated by Fakhri Khusaini, M.Pd., a lecturer of Primary School Teacher Education at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima. The validation assessed three aspects: concept, clarity, and language. The Instrument validation results are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Results of Instrument Validation

No	Aspect	Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1.	Concept	14	93.3%	Very Valid
2.	Clarity	18	90.0%	Very Valid
3.	Language	9	90.0%	Very Valid
	Total	**41**	**91.1%**	**Very Valid**

Based on the results in Table 1, the instrument achieved a total score of 91.1%, falling into the "Very Valid" category. This validation served as a strong foundation for continuing to the data collection phase.

Data Analysis

The collected data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Following the quantitative research framework as explained by (Sugiyono, 2021), data analysis aims to process and present data in a meaningful and objective manner to support decision-making in the study. The analysis included:

1) Normality Test: Conducted using the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to assess whether the data were normally distributed. The result showed a significance value of 0.200 (> 0.05), indicating a normal distribution.
2) Homogeneity Test: Conducted using Levene's Test to verify the equality of variances. The result showed a significance value of 0.063 (> 0.05), indicating that the data had homogeneous variance across groups.
3) Hypothesis Testing: Performed using an Independent Sample T-Test to determine if there was a significant difference in communication styles between students with high and low levels of TikTok usage. The significance value exceeded 0.05, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Thus, it was concluded that TikTok usage had no significant effect on students' interpersonal communication.

According to (Sugiyono, 2021), the use of statistical tests such as normality, homogeneity, and t-tests is essential in quantitative research to validate hypotheses objectively and ensure the reliability and validity of the results. Additionally, (Arikunto, 2013) emphasizes that following systematic procedures in data analysis strengthens the credibility and scientific rigor of the research findings.

3. Results and Discussion

This study involved a total of 19 fifth-grade students from SDN 62 Rontu as the research sample, consisting of 9 male and 10 female students. The students were between 10–11 years old and came from diverse family backgrounds. Based on questionnaires, supported by classroom observations, most of the students had

regular access to smartphones, although the level of digital exposure at home varied. Understanding the sociocultural background of students is important because it helps researchers interpret behavioral patterns more accurately (Karna et al., 2023). The learning environment at SDN 62 Rontu was marked by a structured academic schedule, positive interaction between teachers and students, and a communicative classroom atmosphere. These conditions shaped how students behaved and interacted during learning, which is consistent with studies showing that school culture and interpersonal communication influence the formation of students' social character (Jannah & Sukartono, 2022).

Although the school does not have a written rule that strictly prohibits students from bringing phones, students are generally expected to focus on learning during class hours. Observational data collected on July 8, 2025, revealed that students did not use phones during lessons but occasionally interacted with smartphones during break time. Some students brought their own phones, while others shared with friends. From the questionnaire results, 16 out of 19 students reported owning or using smartphones regularly. When asked whether they opened their phones during school breaks, many agreed, with TikTok, YouTube, and mobile games being the most frequently accessed apps. However, based on both observation and student responses, it was evident that phone use was limited to leisure time and not during active learning hours.

The data collection process was systematically carried out using three main instruments: observation, questionnaires, and documentation. The researcher directly observed students' behavior, particularly how they interacted with peers and whether their communication styles showed signs of digital influence. The use of triangulation, which combines different data collection methods such as observation, questionnaires, and documentation, has been proven to strengthen the validity and credibility of research findings (Fikri et al., 2025; Yusuf, 2014). A closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire with 8 items for each variable (TikTok usage and communication style) was distributed to all 19 students, who completed it individually under the researcher's supervision. Additional documentation, including attendance records and demographic information, was used to reinforce triangulation and enrich the interpretation of results. This comprehensive approach ensured that the data reflected students' actual behaviors and communication patterns, which then formed the basis for further statistical analysis.

This study aimed to examine whether the use of the TikTok application significantly affects students' interpersonal communication styles. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 22 and involved several statistical tests, including normality, homogeneity, and hypothesis testing. The first test was the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test, which resulted in a significance value of 0.200. Since this value is greater than 0.05, it indicates that the data were normally distributed. This suggests that the sample data met the assumptions required for parametric analysis. The normality results are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. Normality Test Results (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Variable	Statistic	Sig	Interpretation
TikTok Usage (Variable X)	0.158	0.200	Normal
Communication Style (Variable Y)	0.147	0.200	Normal

The second test conducted was the Levene's Test for homogeneity. This analysis produced a significance value of 0.063. Because this value is also greater than 0.05, it indicates that the data had equal variances across groups. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity was met, allowing further analysis using parametric statistical methods. The homogeneity results are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3. Homogeneity Test Results (Levene's Test)

Variable Comparison	Levene Statistic	Sig	Interpretation
TikTok Usage vs Communication Style	3.837	0.063	Homogeneous

The final analysis was the Independent Sample T-Test, conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in communication styles between students with higher and lower levels of TikTok usage. The test yielded a significance value of 0.570, which is greater than 0.05. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is no significant effect of TikTok usage on the interpersonal communication styles of fifth-grade students. This finding suggests that the frequency of TikTok use does not directly correlate with students' communication patterns in the classroom context. The Independent Sample T-Test results are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4. Independent Sample T-Test Results

Variable Comparison	t-value	df	Sig	Interpretation
TikTok Usage vs Communication Style	0.580	17	0.570	Not Significant

These statistical results were then visualized using a bar chart that compares the total scores of each student on TikTok usage and communication style. The visual helps clarify the variation among students and supports the statistical finding that there is no consistent trend or significant relationship between the two variables.

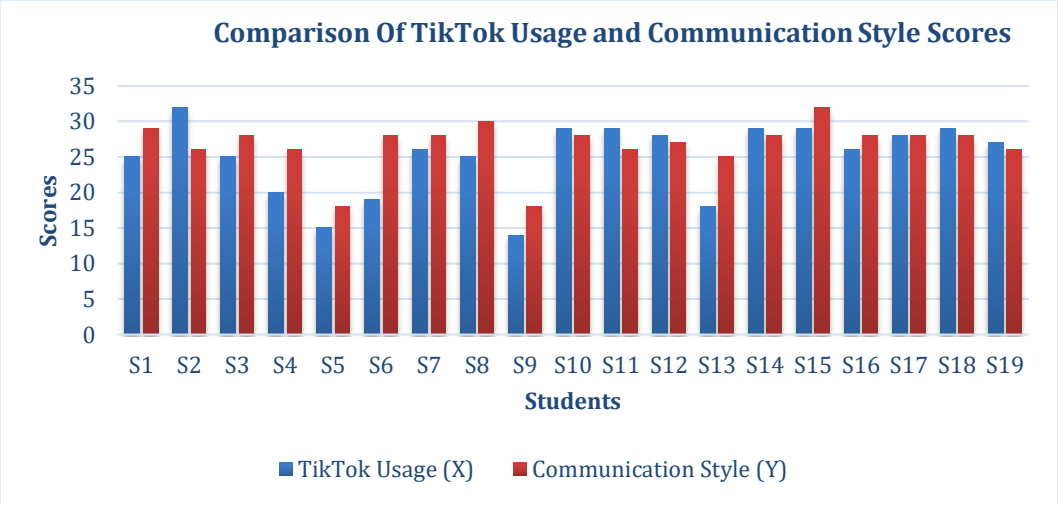

Figure 1. Comparison of TikTok Usage and Communication Style Scores

The visual comparison in Figure 1 reinforces the statistical findings, showing no consistent pattern that links higher TikTok usage with stronger interpersonal communication skills. While some students with high usage scores displayed moderate or even low communication scores, others with low TikTok engagement exhibited strong communication abilities. These inconsistencies suggest that the influence of TikTok on students' communication styles is minimal or possibly overshadowed by other social and educational factors.

These results demonstrate that although students were active TikTok users and engaged with various trending communication styles on the platform, this behavior did not directly influence how they interacted in school settings. Their communication patterns remained more strongly shaped by family interaction, peer relationships, and the communicative culture fostered within the school environment.

This finding supports (Junawan & Laugu, 2020), who emphasized that while social media messages can shape public communication behavior, their impact depends heavily on the cultural and social context of the audience. In this case, elementary students are still in the early stages of developing communication skills and are more influenced by direct social interactions than digital exposure. The results also align with (Carolin et al., 2023), who found that TikTok usage affects adolescents' self-perception but does not necessarily alter their interpersonal communication. Similarly, (Kalsum, 2022) concluded that learning environments, teacher support, and peer interaction have a stronger role in shaping communication and motivation than social media.

Therefore, even though TikTok is part of the students' daily lives, there is no strong evidence that it serves as a primary factor in shaping their communication behavior in academic settings. The role of teachers and parents remains essential in guiding students to develop appropriate, context-sensitive communication skills. This

reinforces the importance of integrating digital literacy with interpersonal communication training within elementary education.

Although TikTok has become a part of students' daily lives, there is no strong evidence that the platform directly shapes their interpersonal communication skills in school settings. Students' communication remains more strongly influenced by family involvement, teacher guidance, and peer interactions, as highlighted by (Achmad & Utami, 2023). Meanwhile, potential risks associated with social media use, such as excessive engagement or reduced social interaction, have been noted by (Mulida & Silma, 2025), emphasizing the need for monitoring and guidance. These findings reinforce the idea that while digital platforms like TikTok are a component of contemporary student life, the development of appropriate and context-sensitive communication skills continues to rely primarily on direct social interactions and educational support.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of TikTok on the interpersonal communication of fifth grade students at SDN 62 Rontu. The findings revealed that although students were active users of the platform, their communication behaviors in school were not significantly affected. No consistent relationship was found between the frequency of TikTok use and communication skills, which indicates that social media exposure alone is not a decisive factor in shaping communication within academic contexts.

The results suggest that while TikTok may inspire trends, language styles, or creative expression, these aspects do not directly translate into stronger communication abilities in structured environments such as classrooms. Instead, students' communication development appears to be more strongly influenced by family support, peer interactions, and the culture of the school environment. These factors play a larger role in shaping how students express themselves and build relationships in real life learning situations.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of balanced digital literacy for elementary students. Teachers and parents have a central role in guiding students to use social media wisely while also fostering effective communication skills in daily life. While TikTok can encourage creativity, it also carries potential risks such as reduced social interaction and dependence on digital content. Therefore, students need not only technological familiarity but also the ability to communicate empathetically, responsibly, and effectively in both academic and social contexts.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the guidance and blessings of Allah SWT, the academic support from STKIP Taman Siswa Bima, the cooperation of SDN 62 Rontu, and the unwavering encouragement from family and friends throughout the course of this research.

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How to cite this article:

Fahira, M., Saputra, A. Q., & Fatimah, N. (2025). The Influence of TikTok on Elementary Students' Interpersonal Communication in Learning Contexts. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, *9(5)*, 3688-3698.