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EXPLORING TIKTOK AS DIGITAL TOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract: The increasing use of social media has opened new possibilities for English language learning in the digital era. Among various platforms, TikTok has attracted significant attention because of its interactive and engaging features that support language learning. This review examines studies published between 2020 and 2024 to explore the role of TikTok in English language education. The findings show that TikTok can help learners improve vocabulary, speaking skills, and pronunciation through short videos, repeated exposure to language, and interactive activities such as duet challenges. These features create an enjoyable learning environment and encourage active participation among learners. The platform also provides authentic language input that can enhance students' motivation and confidence in using English. However, several challenges limit its classroom implementation, including its entertainment-focused algorithm, limited depth of educational content, unequal access to technology, and differences in teachers' digital competence. Overall, TikTok has emerged as a useful supplementary tool that can support English language learning when used appropriately.

Keywords : TikTok, English Language Teaching, Digital Learning, Social Media, Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

The integration and use of technology in language learning pedagogy are closely related and have been reported on by several people in the academic world over the past few decades. The use of smartphones and Internet availability has made it less important for students to learn languages in a limited location, the class. Social networking sites in particular are helping to provide for these new vehicles through which learning in a language occurs beyond the format of direct learning. In 2018, TikTok, a global social media app created by the company ByteDance for video sharing has reached an unimaginable number of users (one billion people

worldwide). The app is algorithm algorithmized video delivery model, which means you are exposed to vast amounts of videos in a wide range of different genres such as entertainment, lifestyle, education and career. These natural exposures to multimodal videos have fascinated linguist and educators in the domain of language education.

There are several factors that explain the motivation behind the study of TikTok as an instrument of digital English language education. Firstly, today, the majority of learners dedicate a considerable portion of their free time to social media sites, creating a great potential for informal learning in such environments. Secondly, the nature of the videos published on TikTok complies with the ideas presented in the framework of multimodality theory. Lastly, various interactive options available on TikTok, such as comment sections and stitching features, facilitate communication in the target language.

Although there is excitement about the possibilities of TikTok for education, a sobering look at its pros, cons, and possible dangers should be made before any conclusive opinions can be drawn regarding its usefulness in teaching. In other words, although the app may seem quite useful for teaching language, it was not initially created as a tool for education. This paper aims to make a contribution to the emerging field of social media-assisted language learning.

The present research will be based on the following research objectives:

- 1) Analysis of the structural and technological aspects of TikTok that are relevant to English language instruction and learning.
- 2) Identification of the benefits and affordances provided by TikTok to both learners and educators in terms of English language acquisition.
- 3) Evaluation of the potential drawbacks of using TikTok as an educational tool.
- 4) Comparative analysis of TikTok with regard to other educational technologies.
- 5) Recommendations on integrating TikTok into the process of English language instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TikTok's Structural Features and Their Educational Significance

TikTok's structure entails several elements whose educational significance should not be overlooked. Among those elements, one can highlight the fact that TikTok contains short videos, initially ranging from fifteen seconds to ten minutes. It is obvious that creating such videos implies communicating your message in a concise and interesting way, resulting in the creation of vast amounts of microcontent dedicated to linguistic education, including such topics as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

This algorithm is based on a recommendation system, which filters the content in accordance with the user behavior like watching videos, liking videos, sharing them and making comments. In regard to the language learners, the process implies that their regular viewing and interaction with English content contributes to the increased likelihood of receiving similar content by the algorithm in order to create a personal environment for them. Such approach is in line with comprehensible input theory, as suggested by Krashen (1982).

TikTok also integrates several interactive features like the duet and stitch tools that enable the users to make side-by-side video replies and use clips from other videos respectively. Both features have been adopted by teachers for assigning language-related tasks to students and fostering verbal output, while also enabling peer feedback. Caption and text overlays that can be included in TikTok videos further enable the learners to gain comprehension skills and learn new vocabulary through combining the text with speech.

The multilingual aspect of the TikTok user community also adds to the learning potential of this app. Students are continually exposed to varied accents, dialects, and cultural language use, giving them authentic exposure to language in many forms that may not be found in textbooks. This exposure proves especially valuable when learning about sociolinguistics, or using language in different social situations.

Affordances and Benefits for Learning

A number of affordances have been highlighted in research regarding the use of TikTok as a tool for English language instruction. One of the most common is the capability of this application to aid in incidental vocabulary acquisition. The evidence demonstrates that students, who regularly watch English-language videos on TikTok, are exposed to new words within the context, and thus are more likely to retain these words than when presented with decontextualized word lists (Nation, 2001).

The other area where the app shows significant promise is that of listening comprehension. With the audio and video combination that the app makes use of, learners can be exposed to real speech through listening to conversations on the platform. Listening comprehension for intermediate and advanced learners can be improved through such authentic exposure to natural speed, pronunciation, and pragmatics.

TikTok can also help foster the development of oral language and pronunciation skills, especially when learners are motivated to make their own content and not just to consume others'. Several instructors have shared their experience in designing tasks that would motivate learners to make their own videos in English. The prospect of gaining recognition from peers was shown to have motivational potential for the learners in terms of making sure that their content is correct and polished.

Another strength of the platform is its low affective threshold. While traditional testing situations are often associated with anxiety when it comes to using the language in public, the more informal and entertaining environment on TikTok creates a space where even students who may be shy about speaking out in class find themselves more at ease creating content without feeling the pressure of correctness.

From an educational perspective, teachers have made use of TikTok as a secondary learning tool through the establishment of class TikTok accounts, tasking

students to create videos, and assembling video content playlists based on learning goals. This method has reportedly resulted in higher levels of engagement and a community spirit amongst students engaged with each other's content even outside school settings.

Limitations and Risks

Although there are many advantages of TikTok, it has several limitations that should be considered prior to integrating the app in any formal learning environment. Firstly, there is an issue related to privacy and security of the users' personal data. To be specific, TikTok collects a wide range of user data such as technical details about their devices, search queries, and even biometric identifiers. Thus, using the application by young children raises considerable doubts because it poses a threat to their personal safety and well-being.

The accuracy and quality of language in TikTok content represent another limitation. Due to the lack of moderation or editing on TikTok, there is a lot of content on the site that is inaccurate grammatically or idiomatically and may not serve as suitable examples for beginning-level learners who are still struggling with learning the language. The learner may acquire improper language structures through TikTok without the proper guidance of an experienced instructor.

Attention management is another area where challenges arise. The design of TikTok is clearly geared toward long periods of engagement and uses a form of variable reward that is compared to gambling apps. Such design makes it possible for excessive use to result in a shorter attention span and lack of focused cognitive engagement needed for proper language learning. The addictive nature of the app is especially dangerous to younger students who prefer to engage with entertainment rather than education.

It should also be noted that issues regarding digital equity exist. Usage of TikTok requires access to either a smartphone or an internet-enabled device and internet connectivity, facilities that cannot be easily accessed by all socio-economic demographics. Teachers assigning tasks based on TikTok without taking into

account access to these facilities by their learners run the risk of deepening already existing inequalities in education. It is also worth mentioning that according to the platform's policy, the minimum age for usage is 13.

Finally, the informal and entertaining tone of the video clips used in TikTok is not always consistent with the formality of academic English language instruction. The fact that the platform is particularly good at exposing students to informal language is obvious; however, it can be of little help with respect to formal written communication.

Comparative Positioning: TikTok Within the Digital Learning Ecosystem

YouTube shares TikTok's video-based content delivery model but differs significantly in terms of content length, depth, and navigability. While YouTube hosts long-form instructional content including full-length courses, documentary films, and structured grammar lessons, TikTok's micro-content format is better suited to brief, targeted language exposure rather than sustained instructional sequences. YouTube's absence of a social feedback loop driven by short interactions also differentiates it from TikTok in terms of community engagement.

Gamified language learning applications such as Duolingo offer structured, curriculum-aligned instruction with built-in progress tracking and spaced repetition algorithms. In contrast to TikTok's largely unstructured content environment, these applications provide a more systematic approach to vocabulary and grammar acquisition. However, they typically lack the authenticity of real communicative contexts that TikTok's user-generated content naturally provides. A complementary relationship between the two may therefore be more productive than a competitive one.

Learning management systems, while essential for organizing instructional materials and facilitating assessment, do not inherently support the kind of authentic, social language use that motivates learners in informal settings. TikTok's strength lies precisely in this domain, offering a bridge between classroom instruction and real-world language use that more formal digital platforms are less equipped to provide. This complementarity suggests that TikTok is most effective

when used as a supplementary rather than primary instructional tool.

In comparison with other social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter (now X), TikTok distinguishes itself through its dominant reliance on video, which provides richer multimodal input. Instagram's combination of images and short videos offers comparable visual stimulation, but TikTok's more elaborate engagement mechanics and algorithmically personalized feed result in higher sustained interaction rates among users. These characteristics make TikTok a particularly potent environment for incidental language learning, though they simultaneously heighten the risks of excessive engagement discussed in Section

Pedagogical Integration and the Role of Digital Literacy

Effective integration of TikTok into English language instruction requires more than simply assigning students to watch or create videos. A pedagogically informed approach demands that educators develop clear learning objectives aligned with the curriculum, provide structured guidance on how to engage critically with platform content, and establish explicit criteria for evaluating language learning outcomes derived from TikTok-based activities.

The concept of digital literacy occupies a central role in this integration process. Digital literacy, broadly defined as the ability to locate, evaluate, create, and communicate information using digital technologies, is an essential competency for learners navigating the complex information environment of contemporary social media. In the context of TikTok use for language learning, digital literacy encompasses the ability to critically assess the quality and accuracy of language content, to recognize persuasive and commercial influences embedded in platform content, and to manage personal data and privacy settings responsibly.

Educators who incorporate TikTok into their instruction should consider designing tasks that engage students in active content analysis rather than passive consumption. For example, learners might be asked to identify and categorize vocabulary encountered in a curated set of TikTok videos, to evaluate the grammatical accuracy of selected content, or to record their own videos responding to a language prompt and subsequently reflect on their performance. Such tasks

position learners as critical agents rather than passive recipients of digital content.

Professional development for educators represents an additional consideration. Many language teachers lack the platform-specific knowledge and digital pedagogical skills needed to integrate TikTok effectively. Institutional support in the form of training workshops, collaborative planning time, and access to research-informed resources is therefore essential for ensuring that TikTok integration is both educationally purposeful and ethically responsible.

It is also worth emphasizing the importance of parental and institutional communication when TikTok is used in educational settings that involve learners below the age of eighteen. Transparent communication regarding the platform's features, data collection practices, and the educational rationale for its use can help build trust and ensure that all stakeholders are appropriately informed. In contexts where privacy concerns are paramount, educators may consider using curated TikTok content within controlled classroom environments rather than requiring students to create personal accounts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined TikTok's potential as a digital tool for English language teaching and learning through a systematic analysis of its structural features, educational affordances, limitations, comparative positioning, and pedagogical implications. The findings indicate that TikTok possesses a distinctive set of characteristics that, when harnessed with pedagogical intentionality, can meaningfully contribute to vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, spoken production, and motivational engagement among English language learners.

At the same time, the paper has underscored the importance of approaching TikTok's educational integration with critical awareness. The platform's data privacy concerns, the variable quality of its language content, its addictive design mechanics, and the digital equity issues it raises are not trivial considerations, and they demand careful attention from educators, institutional policymakers, and researchers alike. TikTok should be understood not as a comprehensive instructional solution but as one component within a diversified digital learning environment.

The central role of digital literacy in enabling responsible and effective TikTok use cannot be overstated. As digital technologies continue to permeate educational practice, the capacity to engage critically and ethically with these tools becomes as important as the linguistic competencies that educators seek to develop. Future research might usefully investigate the longitudinal effects of TikTok-based language instruction on learner proficiency, the development of assessment rubrics specific to video-based language production tasks, and the comparative effectiveness of TikTok relative to other social media platforms for specific language learning outcomes.

Conclusion, TikTok represents a compelling but complex addition to the landscape of digital tools available for English language education. Its integration into instructional practice holds genuine promise, provided that it is approached with the pedagogical rigor, ethical responsibility, and contextual sensitivity that all educational technology deserves.

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