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*Social Media
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Is Tik Tok suitable as a tool for teaching and learning of the English language for university students?

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Did you know that TikTok was a lip-syncing app known as Musical.ly, established in Shanghai, China, in 2014? Musically only allowed users to create a video from 15 seconds to 1 minute. In 2018, the app was acquired by ByteDance, headquartered in Beijing, China, and its name was changed to TikTok. It allows users to create and share short video postings using filters, stickers, voiceovers, sound effects, and background music. In 2022, TikTok changed the maximum length of video uploads from three to 10 minutes. TikTok can be accessed as a phone app on Android and iOS systems. It can also be accessed as a web app on personal computers using various browsers, such as Chrome, Google, or Microsoft Edge.

Figure 1
TikTok on a smartphone (Unsplash, n.d.)



The following statistics provided by GilPress (2024) indicate that TikTok is a popular social media site among young people. Interestingly, most TikTok users are 18 to 24 years old (37.3%), followed by 25 to 34 years old (32.9%), 35 to 44 years old (15.7%), 45 to 54 years old (8.3%) and more than 55 years old (5.8%). Apparently, university students at the diploma and degree levels generally age between 18 and 24 years old.

According to GilPress (2024), the percentages according to gender in the age groups do not differ much. The statistics according to gender for the age ranges are: (1) 18–24 years old (18.2% females, 8% males), (2) 25–34 years old (15.2% females, 16.9% males), (3) 35–44 years old (7.9% females, 8.6% males), (4) 45–54 years old (4.4% females, 4.3% males), and (5) more than 55 years old (3.4% females, 3% males). This signifies that the preference for using TikTok is not associated with gender.

In terms of video viewing and time spent on TikTok, GilPress (2024) provides the following reports. More than 1 billion videos are being viewed daily on TikTok. Besides, an average TikTok user allocates more than 1.5 hours every day for viewing TikTok.

TikTok is not designed for educational purposes, as it was originally a social media platform for entertainment and business, similar to other social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, or Instagram. Therefore, is TikTok suitable for use as a tool in teaching English to university students?



Referring to the statistics, TikTok predominantly attracts users within the 18–24 age range, which is closely aligned with university students and is preferred by both genders—females and males. Therefore, TikTok can be a suitable platform for posting English video lessons, as the videos may capture university students who want to learn English. Since TikTok can be accessed conveniently using Android and iOS smartphones, it can be practical for students to use TikTok as a learning tool for learning the English language, as it may promote personalised learning whereby students can choose the learning videos that are suitable for their proficiency level and can learn at their own pace from anywhere and at any time. Learning requires engagement, authentic language use and community to use the language learnt. Does TikTok offer these? Here is the discussion about the aspects.

As for engagement, TikTok offers users the format and features such as filters, background music, and templates to design interesting and fast-paced videos. These can be particularly useful for video creators to create engaging learning videos that may capture the interest of university students in learning the English language. Videos can also be incorporated with audio, which can help enhance speaking and listening skills and subtitles, which can help increase reading skills and vocabulary. With the maximum length of video creation, which is ten minutes, adequate learning content can be crafted through a fun and interesting presentation to sustain students' engagement. Thus, TikTok can serve as a tool for English language learning due to the fact that fun and interesting videos can be created and posted on the platform and support the enhancement of various language skills. Another aspect is authentic language use. If language instructors post the learning videos, there will be no issue with this as the video creators are professionals in teaching and learning English. Since anyone can post videos on TikTok, there will be possibilities for accurate language use in pronunciation, spelling, and grammar.

Therefore, students should choose appropriate and reliable learning videos on TikTok to learn the English language authentically. In this case, instructors should play their role in curating

authentic English learning videos for their students. Students who learn the English language in non-English speaking countries can obtain learning videos posted by native speakers on TikTok. The videos may provide the opportunity to expose students to the authentic way of speaking the language since they can hear the authentic pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress patterns from native speakers. Thus, TikTok is a significant learning tool for students to access authentic learning videos with the help of instructors.



The last aspect is community. Learning the English language requires a community that supports students in using the language. The community should encourage them to interact and collaborate in using English for communication, either in oral or written forms. Oral practice can be conducted by providing challenges for students to record videos of their oral communication, while writing practice can be performed by eliciting students' opinions or ideas by sending their comments. Thus, instructors should suggest a suitable community on TikTok for their students or create a specific community on TikTok for them to ensure the community is safe and reliable.

It is important to note that TikTok is a social platform where anyone can join, share content, collaborate, or communicate. Instructors should remind students about their privacy.

Instructors should also provide guidelines for students on applying TikTok for educational purposes. This may help students to be aware of what they can and cannot do on TikTok. Furthermore, students should be guided to avoid being bullied virtually, scammed, or exposed to inappropriate content. Since TikTok contains various types of entertaining videos, the possibility of students getting distracted by other activities than learning is very high. Therefore, instructors should balance using TikTok as a learning tool and different approaches to teaching and learning.

TikTok requires an Internet connection for access. Thus, instructors should not overestimate that all students have access to TikTok all the time. Instructors should consider certain factors when assigning tasks on TikTok. For example, instructors should provide sufficient time for the tasks so that students with poor Internet connections can complete them. Furthermore, students need to purchase mobile data to access the Internet. Hence, instructors should balance the tasks on TikTok and offline tasks to not burden students with the cost of subscribing to mobile data.

In conclusion, TikTok can be a suitable tool for teaching and learning the English language to university students. However, one should use it thoughtfully to maximize effectiveness and mitigate potential challenges.

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