App Review

TikTok: Benefits, Drawbacks, and Implications for the ELT Field[1]

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Abstract

TikTok has become one of the latest trends in education and in the ELT field in general since this application seems to bring potential benefits to the English classroom context. Although some studies have suggested that using *TikTok* as a classroom tool brings potential benefits to the teaching context, scholarly literature on the field has also suggested that there might be some limitations when implementing *TikTok* within Second Language (L2) teaching and learning contexts. Considering these aspects, in this literature review, we discuss the possible benefits and shortcomings of using *TikTok* in ELT situations along with some implications.

Resumen

TikTok se ha convertido en una de las últimas tendencias en educación y en el campo de ELT en general ya que parece ser que esta aplicación ofrece potenciales beneficios al contexto del aula de inglés. Aunque algunos estudios han sugerido que el uso de TikTok como una herramienta en el aula trae beneficios potenciales al contexto de enseñanza de la lengua inglesa, la literatura académica también ha sugerido que al momento de utilizar TikTok como herramienta de clase, algunas limitaciones pueden surgir. Teniendo estos aspectos en cuenta, en esta revisión de la literatura discutimos algunos de los posibles beneficios y limitaciones de utilizar TikTok en la enseñanza del inglés.

Introduction

Within the last few years, the incorporation of technological tools into the educational scenario has gained increasing attention. *TikTok* is no exception. Its popularity has risen, and the app has become one of the most widely used social networking sites, particularly among the younger audiences (Bresnick, 2019; Liqian, 2018). Young individuals use *TikTok* to post, create and watch short videos with various audio-visual effects. It gives them the liberty to create their own content as part of the current digital society (Anderson, 2020). As a result of this, multiple studies have begun to explore the impact these types of applications have on students. While some indicated that it contributes to reduce students' procrastination (Abuhmaid & Abood, 2020), others revealed its positive impacts on students' learning (Wu et al., 2018; Yang, 2020) in speaking practice, learning resources, motivation, and self-confidence, as well as enhancing some 21st century skills. This review explores the potential benefits and drawbacks of utilizing *TikTok* in ELT contexts, as well as its repercussions.

Benefits and Implications of *TikTok* for ELT Instruction

As suggested above, scholarly literature has suggested that *TikTok* can be beneficial for English language instruction in several ways. Here we tackle some of the possible benefits of using Tik Tok within the English language classroom context:

Expanding learning resources

Since *TikTok* is an application related to video production, it allows the students to practice their speaking skills. This fact has been supported by authors such as Guo et al. (2014) and Szpunar et al. (2013) who have found that home and classroom-based tasks including storytelling, reporting, role plays, simulations, among others, have given positive results implementing this tool. Furthermore, by producing their own videos, or by making them in pairs or groups, said application enables the learners to develop their skills individually and collectively.

In addition to this, the studies carried out by Mathew and Alidmat (2013) suggested that by implementing *TikTok*, the learners have the opportunity to expand their knowledge by watching recorded content, including English learning videos. This is possible because on *TikTok* there are numerous English learning channels that are easily accessed through hashtags, including #englishlearning, #englishlearningtips, #englishspeakingpractice, and many more. Of course, the content varies from narratives to short lectures, and covers several English skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Bearing in mind the previous aspects, teachers can create their own videos or carefully select from existing ones easily through the hashtags and then develop activities around them. For example, a teacher can assign students to watch several short videos and then do a trivia game in class about them. Also, students can recreate the activity in the video with their peers in class.

Promoting motivation and self-confidence

Because of the multiple audio-visual tools *TikTok* offers to work with, it has been suggested that incorporating these into the classroom context could contribute to improve the learners' motivation (Syaparuddin & Elihami, 2020). In relation to these aspects, in a study carried out by Mathew and Alidmat (2013), the authors found that audio-visual aids improved students' motivation since they created a pleasant and conducive learning atmosphere. Furthermore, in another study, Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) found that music along with other features enhanced corporal expression which led to increased self-confidence. Similar results were reported in the study implemented by Yang (2020) who found that English as a foreign language (EFL) students were motivated to learn English by watching *TikTok* videos independently. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that implementing technological tools that offer the possibility to work with audio-visual contents, as it is the case of *TikTok*, can contribute to the improvement of the learners' motivation and confidence.

Helping reduce procrastination

In addition to creating motivation, Zax (2009) and Alwagait et al. (2015) found that short videos help learners avoid procrastination as they appear to help learners to manage their time better.

Several studies have reported that procrastination leads to poor academic performance, pointing to a lack of time management skills (Schouwenburg, 2004), difficulties in setting independent goals (Wäschle et al., 2014), self-managing skills (Ugurlu, 2013), and academic dishonesty (Roig & DeTommaso, 1995). This can be exemplified by a case in which students intentionally postponed study-related tasks until the last minute before deadlines an action which might increase learning disengagement, mental stress, and cheating (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993; Rushkoff, 2013). The studies demonstrated that *TikTok*'s short-term video application can be utilized as a medium for creating more efficient use of time and lessen procrastination .

Other studies (Ge and Li, 2020; Hu, 2011; Qiu and Gao, 2007) have concluded that besides reducing the learners´ habit of procrastination, incorporating video-based lessons within formal English classroom instruction contributes to the overall improvement of the learners' cognition processes, and knowledge retention and transmission, among others. Thus, integrating digital contents in all its forms is highly recommended.

Improving 21st century skills

TikTok also promotes 21st century skills, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. In relation with to communication, as a social media, *TikTok* inspired online interaction among users because they can use the application to send messages, share information, videos, and make comments.

Regarding collaboration, McDonough (2015) found that using *TikTok* within the context of classroom instruction facilitates language development and helps improve the quality of peer interaction. Similarly, Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) concluded that incorporating *TikTok* as a classroom tool encourages more social, open, and collaborative teaching and learning processes.

On *TikTok*, collaboration is promoted in several manners, especially through duets[4]. Duets offer the possibility to create collaborative learning environments where the learners can interact with their peers through the creation of videos. In the time of COVID-19 where face-to-face collaboration is not encouraged as before, *TikTok* can be a solution students can use to create content together or interact by sharing their videos.

In addition to collaboration, other studies (Chawinga, 2017; Escamilla-Fajardo et al. 2021; Lackovic et al., 2017) have suggested that *TikTok* enhances creativity because, when a task is assigned to the students,

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[4] On TikTok, Duet allows users to post their video side-by-side with a video from another user in a split screen that play at the same time (TikTok, 2020). This feature can be accessed both using public and private accounts. However, the settings in the users' privacy will also determine the access to watch, comment on, download, or interact with the Duet.

they need to gather, analyze, understand, and evaluate information, which leads to the creation of new ideas.

Besides fostering creativity, *TikTok* cultivates the development of curiosity (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021) and critical thinking. Before generating their own digital content, the students feel attracted to a determined number of themes with which they will subsequently reflect, analyze, and critically select to make their own videos. Furthermore, they will actively engage with their peers in a constant idea exchange to finally make the most proper decisions, being that these two actions elements are directly related to the development of curiosity and critical thinking.

So far, as a tool, *TikTok* offers multiple benefits for English classroom instruction and students. Some of the most recurrent advantages are creating the opportunities to practice their speaking skill, increasing their degree of motivation and confidence, helping reduce their habit of procrastination, and finally contributing to the development of some of the 21st century skills, such as curiosity and critical thinking. However, even if there are potential benefits in the use of this app, there are still some limitations that need to be considered when implementing this application as a classroom tool.

Drawbacks of *TikTok* for EFL Instruction

Privacy issues

One of the potential limitations of the application is privacy. On the one hand, when the users use a public account, any type of audiences will have the possibility of viewing the digital content, as well as downloading if its configuration allows such actions. On the other, when the users set their accounts to keep their digital content private if other users get interested in their digital content, they will have to request permission to access such content. However, it seems to be that because of its specific features where interaction and collaboration are two essential aspects for the creation of content. This action is not ideal if teachers are planning to use it for educational purposes.

Furthermore, according to Kelion (2019), Tardáguila (2019), Zhong (2019) there have been cases where privacy has become a challenge for *TikTok* users as some of them have suffered cyberbullying, threats, and harassment. Thus, one recommendation to keep in mind when implementing *TikTok* as a classroom tool is that we must be careful with the information and privacy of our students.

Concerns about the content of the lesson

As students only make or watch a video with a maximum duration of one minute, they have to simplify what to say or create. Therefore, tasks that require a longer time, such as speech or project presentations, are not advised to be done using *TikTok*. As input, quality control on the content is an issue. Since *TikTok* is an app for the public, individuals from any background are free to create their preferred content, including English learning.

Improvements of 21st century skills

TikTok also promotes 21st century skills, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. In relation to communication as a social media, *TikTok* publishes some videos lacking quality information. Though *TikTok* can filter videos with the help of tags, there is no certainty whether the content is suitable for the students. Hence, the instructors should assist the students by suggesting quality channels they can follow when doing any tasks using the app.

Issues with other potential limitations

TikTok might also hamper their academic success because students might find this application a hindrance in their learning process (Abuhmaid & Abood, 2020). Students can access not only English learning videos, but also videos that are related to their preferences, such as travel, food, sports, beauty, gaming, and others. It is intuitive that these interests will distract them from what they are supposed to do, such as homework assignments. Furthermore, with the frequent use of social media, students tend to engage in non-related study or task content while doing assignments, which may lead to an addiction of using the app more than they should (Van den Eijnden, 2016). As a result, when this behaviour becomes a habit, Van der Schuur, et al. (2015) concluded that their focus to do the main activity to deal with the task will be eventually lost due to the constant interference. Since *TikTok* is known as the worldwide social app with its market of younger users, it is important for teachers to be aware of both the potentials and concerns in incorporating the app into assignments.

Conclusion

Since *TikTok* has become part of people's daily lives, teachers can use this application as a tool to enhance the teaching and learning of English in diverse scenarios through it their students can use the English language significatively for the creation of videos in both contexts: at home or within the school. Additionally, making and watching videos on *TikTok* are unique English learning practice media for students. In the time of COVID-19 where students study from home, *TikTok* becomes even more useful. The application can facilitate fun English learning activities and promote collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. However, besides the benefits, teachers should be aware of the drawbacks *TikTok* might cause. They have to strategically decide how to reduce the shortcomings while utilizing the app.

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