

# Pedagogical Benefits and Challenges of Integrating TikTok Into EFL Learning

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## ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media, particularly among young people, has expanded its potential for educational opportunities and provided new ways to enhance learning. Nevertheless, the integration of TikTok into English learning still raises questions about its effectiveness and pedagogical implications. This quasi-experimental study investigates the benefits of this social network in enhancing creativity, engagement, digital literacy, and practical English application, while also exploring challenges such as linguistic accuracy, distractions, privacy concerns, and accessibility. The study sample consisted of 42 English as a foreign language pre-service teachers. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire, a rubric used to evaluate participants' TikTok videos created, and a focus group. The findings indicate that TikTok provides more benefits than challenges. Overall, the platform offers a viable learning environment that enhances learner motivation and facilitates interactive English learning, demonstrating that its limitations can be mitigated through thoughtful and well-planned strategies.

## KEYWORDS

Benefits, Digital Literacy, English, Learner Engagement, Language Learning, Limitation, Social Networks, TikTok

## INTRODUCTION

Technology and social media have significantly influenced English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction worldwide. Educators and researchers widely recognize the benefits of technology-enhanced learning environments, particularly their ability to foster learner engagement, boost motivation, and support the development of communicative competencies (Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017; Gu, 2024). Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube offer authentic opportunities for communication, collaboration, and content creation, shifting learners from passive recipients to active participants (Al-Senafi et al., 2024). These platforms are not only familiar and engaging for digital-native learners but also provide innovative, contextualized language practice that enhances learner autonomy and strengthens digital literacy (Zuraini et al., 2024).

Chaerani et al. (2024) emphasized that digital literacy supports the development of key 21st-century skills, including motivation, decision-making, critical thinking, and collaboration.

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Consequently, today's learners, especially modern university students, expect fast-paced, visually rich, and practical learning experiences that are immediately applicable. They increasingly seek interactive, personalized, and multimodal environments that mirror the dynamic digital ecosystems they engage with daily. Additionally, Gu (2024) pointed out that language teachers must not only meet the expectations of these tech-savvy learners but also spark curiosity, increase engagement, and deliver meaningful experiences tailored to diverse learning styles.

In line with this shift, Baturay and Yastibas (2022) argued that traditional teaching methods for teaching EFL must be re-evaluated to address the needs of a generation accustomed to highly visual, fast-paced, and interactive digital content. Smart learning environments, as described by Morze et al. (2015) and Oliveria et al. (2021), offer responsive learning spaces by enabling access to diverse content and promoting interaction through various devices and platforms.

In the Ecuadorian context, English is established as a compulsory subject within the national curriculum. Despite this mandatory regulation in the educational system, the country's overall English proficiency level remains low. According to Education First (2024), Ecuador ranked 82nd out of 116 evaluated countries, demonstrating that students had a low English proficiency level. Consequently, most students enter university with limited knowledge of English. Diverse factors contribute to this gap. Barus and Fadlia (2022) argued that student engagement in active learning is limited by elements such as the use of conventional teaching techniques that emphasize rote memorization and structural approaches rather than real-world, conversational language, thereby obstructing effective language acquisition and proficiency development. Echoing this concern, Soruc et al. (2021) emphasized that outdated teaching practices are increasingly misaligned with the realities of contemporary learners, whose needs are shaped by interactive, technology-driven contexts they engage with daily.

In this sense, the use of TikTok in this study is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes cognitive development through social interaction and the use of cultural tools. From this perspective, TikTok supports peer interaction and scaffolding within the zone of proximal development, facilitating collaborative and socially situated language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Al-Rahmi and Zeki (2017) underlined the positive impact of social media on motivation and academic success. Research highlights that social media platforms such as TikTok allow teachers to offer dynamic and flexible learning experiences. These platforms offer easy access to diverse resources, enhancing accessibility, engagement, active participation, and peer interaction (Zuraini et al., 2024). However, much of the existing literature has focused on the passive use of TikTok; and a gap remains in understanding learners' views concerning its impact when learners actively create content in English for learning purposes. This gap is particularly relevant in Ecuadorian higher education, where further exploration is needed to learn more about the benefits and limitations of using TikTok. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What perceived benefits do EFL students have when using TikTok video creation as a learning tool?
- What perceived limitations do EFL students have when using TikTok video creation during the language learning process?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media in EFL Learning

According to Sudirman (2025), digital literacy has a direct influence on EFL learners' ability to interact when learning through technological resources and platforms. This assertion is further substantiated by Alshumaimeri and Alzahrani (2024), who highlighted the value of incorporating critical digital literacy practices to make learners aware of the need to analyze, assess, and produce

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