TikTok and Language Learning: Microlearning and Communicative Competence Potential

Raiane da Silva

Supervisor
Pr. Dr. Eva Carolina da Cunha

Academic Month and Year:
November - 2024

☒**Article   ☐Undergraduate Dissertation**
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
[BA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING]

RECIFE
2024

Abstract

In this paper, the use of TikTok as a platform for basic language learning is discussed, offering insight into how it can be used to microlearning and develop communicative competence. The study reviewed the literature of practicality on how short-form video platforms like tiktok and others can provide vocabulary, speaking skill-pronunciation relevant to language learning especially in everyday communication. The article also examines the challenges that arise when integrating digital tools like TikTok into educational settings, emphasizing the role of teachers in guiding and structuring these tools to align with educational goals. The findings suggest that while TikTok offers a dynamic and accessible platform for enhancing language learning, its effectiveness depends on the proper alignment of technological tools with pedagogical strategies. By addressing both the opportunities and limitations of TikTok, this article contributes to the broader conversation about the role of digital platforms in modern language education.

Keywords: Digital literacy, teacher training, communicative skills, educational strategies.

Resumo

Neste artigo, o uso do TikTok como plataforma para o aprendizado básico de idiomas é discutido, oferecendo uma visão de como ele pode ser usado para "microaprender" e desenvolver competência comunicativa. O estudo revisou a literatura de praticidade sobre como plataformas de vídeo de formato curto como tiktok e outras podem fornecer vocabulário, habilidade de fala e pronúncia relevantes para o aprendizado de idiomas, especialmente na comunicação cotidiana. O artigo também examina os desafios que surgem ao integrar ferramentas digitais como o TikTok em ambientes educacionais, enfatizando o papel dos professores na orientação e estruturação dessas ferramentas para se alinharem aos objetivos educacionais. Os resultados sugerem que, embora o TikTok ofereça uma plataforma dinâmica e acessível para aprimorar o aprendizado de idiomas, sua eficácia depende do alinhamento adequado das ferramentas tecnológicas com as estratégias pedagógicas. Ao abordar as oportunidades e limitações do TikTok, este artigo contribui para uma conversa mais ampla sobre o papel das plataformas digitais no ensino de idiomas moderno.

Palavras-chave: Letramento digital, formação de professores, habilidades comunicativas, estratégias educacionais.

Introduction

TikTok, along with other social media channels, provides new opportunities for language learning and communication skills backing. Short videos and interactional use have placed TikTok in the limelight of educational initiatives, especially in the area of microlearning. Microlearning consists of presenting information in small, easy-to-follow snippets, which has shown to benefit students in expertise with vocabulary construction and fluency (Budiartha & Akmar, 2024). An additional interesting fact about TikTok is that it allows for language practice through creative expression and through real-life scenarios, which makes the platform advantageous for authentic language use (Ibrahim, et al., 2023).

A major advantage from TikTok, in addition, is that students become autonomous learners here. They could set their own pace of learning and choose content and directions that interest them, thus arriving at a personalized learning experience. Such an approach fits in with theories of autonomous learning, in which students are supposed to take ownership of their learning outside the classroom. It also instills confidence and independence in language learners (Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023). The additional features of TikTok--the various combinations of visuals, audio, and text--are catering to the various learning styles of each learner, thus aiding recall in its users later on (Meliana & Seli, 2023).

Challenges abound for TikTok to be usefully harnessed for formal educational use. Teachers have to find high-quality videos that meet learning objectives (Yang, 2020). Training would enable teachers to use the digital tools efficiently in assimilating TikTok into lessons, enabling meaningful engagement with the presented materials on students' part rather than superficial absorption (Ying, Siang, & Mohamad, 2021). It discusses who does what in the teaching and how the limitations and possibilities that fall within the spectrum of TikTok for language acquisition are pertinent to microlearning and communicative competence.

Based on a literature review, this study delves into the potential of TikTok as a language learning facility. The keys to improvement are communicative competence (encouraging vocabulary telling processes), pronunciation practice and real life communication. Meliana and Seli (2023) will enrich the discussion by offering details on how TikTok, supporting microlearning in these languages as absorption of pronunciation can functionally change when language concepts are broken down to smaller bits that reinforces better retention of a language.

Additionally, the article will explore the critical role of teachers in integrating TikTok into their instructional strategies, addressing the pedagogical challenges involved. Pratiwi (2023) discusses how autonomous learning on digital platforms like TikTok can empower students to take control of their language learning, enhancing both engagement and proficiency. However, the article will also examine the potential challenges highlighted by Yang (2020), who emphasizes the need for teacher training in digital literacy to ensure TikTok is used effectively in classroom settings. Furthermore, the article will consider the findings of Ying, Siang, and Mohamad (2021), who discuss the importance of content quality and teacher guidance in ensuring that students engage meaningfully with the material, rather than superficially.

The article will, therefore, also contextualize the use of a platform like TikTok to support language learning in response to current calls for integrating digital tools into language education through making learning perspectives more dynamic and relevant as well as being accessible. This article provides a balanced view of various opportunities and challenges posed by TikTok in a language learning context, through the eyes of different scholars.

The Evolution of Digital Tools in Language Learning

The way that digital tools have been integrated into language education has changed significantly over the last couple of decades. It began with the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) era, where quality was often sacrificed for grammar drills and vocabulary exercises aimed primarily at drilling students on basic conversational skills (Thornbury, 2017). These services provided meticulous personalized repetition while missing out on the interactive, communicative elements that could effectively discuss real-world applications of language that need to be put into use (Bukhmetov, A. 2023). Back then, language learning was predominantly mechanical, emphasizing linguistic form memorization versus meaningful communication.

Only when technology developed the internet emerged in the late 90s and early 2000s, presenting new ways of learning languages. Learners were introduced to online courses, interactive websites, and various multimedia resources (podcasts, videos, virtual flashcards) to suit diverse learning preferences. These resources provided pathways for independent and self-directed language practice, supporting students with variability in their learning paces and linguistic needs beyond the classroom setting (Ahmadi, 2018). Introducing interactive websites featuring visually aided texts, audio, and collaborative exercises added dimension to learning,

making it more exciting. This work explores how online platforms, particularly TikTok, can be leveraged as effective tools for language learning, promoting practical language skills and fostering a deeper engagement with real-life communication.

The advent of mobile devices further facilitated language learning, leading to an explosion of apps catering to learners from every spectrum of society. Applications like Duolingo, Memrise, and Babbel made language learning portable. Still, the days of being chained to a computer were gone, as students could now study on public transportation or during meals. These apps employed gamification to engage learners through milestone tracking, badges, and leaderboards. Students could learn in short, regular 'bites,' each reinforcing vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Adaptive learning algorithms, commonly found in mobile apps, customize the learning experience based on user proficiency level and progress (Ahmadi, 2018).

Language learning has always been a core area in educational standards, like Brazil's Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCNs). The PCNs from 2000 focus on the development of four essential competencies in language: oral comprehension, oral expression, reading, and writing (Brasil, 2000). These competencies are approached in an integrated way, considering both the social uses of language and its technical aspects. This approach promotes communication, discussion, and collaborative activities in a skills-based classroom. Although the document emphasizes the importance of all four competencies, it prioritizes language as a tool for social interaction and the construction of meaning, rather than isolating any specific skill.

Over the years, the educational environment has significantly changed due to digital technology becoming increasingly popular. Nowadays, classrooms have digital tools like Mobile Apps, Language Software, and Online and social media platforms. These tools can be seen as opportunities for learning through more dynamic, interactive practices and performances of the language (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023). Mobile apps such as Duolingo and Babbel provide interactive exercises for practicing language skills, making it easier to learn vocabulary and practice grammar rules through gamified learning.

Despite the growing importance of technology in education, the PCNs do not explicitly address the integration of digital tools into the language learning process, as they were developed at a time when such technologies were less prevalent in classrooms. However, educators can align the communicative goals outlined by the PCNs with modern technological resources, using them to support the authentic use of language in real-life contexts. Tools such as videos,

podcasts, and social media interactions with native speakers can provide students with access to authentic language materials, thus complementing the communicative focus encouraged by the PCNs.

Otherwise, digital tools are a possibility for a more student-centered approach to language learning. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and language exchange apps facilitate exposure to various accents, dialects, and cultural nuances, enriching learners' linguistic experiences beyond what is possible in a traditional classroom setting. As Ibrahim *et al*. (2023), note, TikTok, in particular, offers opportunities for students to engage in creative expression, which can enhance their speaking skills by producing short videos. Self-directed learning helps students gain confidence and fluency by using language in authentic, real-world scenarios.

Moreover, tools like Google Classroom and other Learning Management Systems (LMS) can foster collaborative learning, allowing students to work on group projects, engage in discussions, and peer-review each other's work. According to Yang (2022), these platforms not only enhance interaction among students but also support the development of the four language skills in an integrated manner. For example, students can use discussion boards to practice writing and reading skills, while video calls and voice recording features can enhance speaking and listening practice.

However, integrating digital tools into language learning takes work. The variation in technology adoption across different educational settings depends on factors like teacher training, access to resources, and institutional support (Yang, 2022). Many teachers, especially those trained in more traditional methods, may lack the digital literacy needed to incorporate these tools into their lesson plans effectively. Additionally, schools with limited funding or infrastructure may need help to provide students with sufficient access to devices and reliable internet, creating a gap in the equal use of technology in education.

The Role of Teachers in Navigating Digital Tool Integration

The role of teachers in navigating digital tool integration in language learning is multi-faceted and demands more than basic technological proficiency. Educators must exercise informed judgment to select the most suitable digital tools based on their students' learning needs, cognitive abilities, and the specific objectives of their lessons.

As Demissie *et al.* (2022) points out, "teachers must be able to adapt digital tools to their instructional strategies and tailor them to the diverse needs of learners". This requires an understanding of how different technologies function and how to strategically integrate these tools into teaching practices to enhance learning outcomes. Moreover, researchers have highlighted that selecting the right digital tools involves considering the "pedagogical implications and how these technologies can foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment" (Qureshi, 2021).

Moreover, effective integration aligns with teachers' pedagogical adaptability. Digital tools should be seen as enablers that enhance traditional language teaching, not replacements. Teachers must balance these tools with educational principles, ensuring that technology complements and strengthens rather than substitutes key language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In this regard, the role of the teacher involves organizing tools that encourage active, student-centered learning fostering opportunities for students to engage in authentic language practice through platforms like virtual exchanges, gamified tasks, and collaborative online projects (Ortega, 2013)

Furthermore, ongoing professional development in digital literacy is crucial for teachers to feel confident and capable of using these tools. Without it, teachers may struggle with integrating technology in a way that transforms language learning, relying instead on familiar methods that can fail to engage students in more dynamic or interactive ways. Institutions need to provide continuous training and technical support, enabling educators to stay updated on new advancements in educational technology and experiment with emerging digital tools. This will foster an environment where innovation in teaching methods is both encouraged and supported (Ahmadi, 2018)

Finally, institutional support is essential for the long-term success of digital integration. Schools must ensure teachers have access to the necessary infrastructure, be it reliable devices, up-to-date software, or good internet connection, to prevent technical limitations from making the learning process difficult. Additionally, developing a clear digital strategy at the institutional level helps align technology with educational goals, ensuring that digital tools are not just supplements but integral to enhancing language proficiency while also providing collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking among students (Gagić *et al.*, 2023).

Microlearning and Autonomous Learning

In the language education field, digital tools have become essential in supporting both formal and informal learning. Among these tools, TikTok has gained popularity, particularly for its potential to facilitate microlearning, a method where learners acquire information in short, focused segments. TikTok's format, with videos typically ranging from 15 to 60 seconds, offers a prime example of this approach. Through its engaging design, TikTok encourages users to engage with content regularly, making it an ideal platform for delivering quick lessons on language topics such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Given these characteristics, this section focuses on TikTok as a tool to explore the potential of microlearning in language acquisition.

As Meliana and Seli (2023) highlight, TikTok's short, dynamic videos are well-suited to microlearning, allowing users to take in small, manageable information such as new words or phrases, in each video. On TikTok, language learners are exposed to content that mirrors real-life language use, including slang, idioms, and diverse accents, enriching their understanding of the language and its variations. This exposure to authentic linguistic materials helps learners develop a broader awareness of how language operates in different contexts, something that is often difficult to achieve through traditional classroom methods (Ibrahim *et al*., 2023).

A critical advantage of TikTok in language education is its ability to promote autonomous learning. Microlearning on platforms like TikTok allows students to control their learning process by engaging with lessons at their own pace and on their schedule. Budiartha and Akmar (2024) argue that this autonomy fosters deeper engagement, as learners can explore content that is personally relevant to their language goals. This self-directed learning environment encourages students to be in control of their progress, which is an essential element in modern language acquisition theories.

Furthermore, TikTok's algorithmic design enhances the personalized learning experience by suggesting videos based on user preferences and interaction. As Budiartha and Akmar (2024) point out, this level of personalization can boost learner motivation, particularly for those who may struggle to remain engaged in traditional classroom settings. The platform's ability to personalize content to the user's interests and proficiency level supports ongoing learning beyond formal educational environments, allowing students to continuously develop their language skills in an informal, interactive context.

The multimodal nature of TikTok also plays a significant role in reinforcing language concepts. According to Meliana and Seli (2023), TikTok's combination of visual, auditory, and textual elements serve diverse learning styles, making it easier for learners to retain information. For instance, a video that pairs text captions with spoken language and visual cues can help learners understand and remember vocabulary or grammatical structures more effectively than through text alone. This multimedia approach can provide a richer, more immersive learning experience that enhances comprehension and retention.

However, despite these benefits, there are notable challenges to integrating TikTok into language learning. One primary concern is content quality. As a user-generated platform, TikTok does not have the same quality controls as traditional educational resources, which means that video accuracy and pedagogical value can vary significantly. Meliana and Seli (2023) warn that with proper guidance, learners may discern helpful content from clear and correct material. To navigate this, educators must teach learners media literacy skills, enabling them to critically evaluate the content they encounter on the platform. This includes assessing sources' reliability and verifying the accuracy of the language usage presented in the videos.

Moreover, while TikTok provides an engaging platform for microlearning, it should not be seen as a substitute for comprehensive language instruction. As Budiartha and Akmar (2024) point out, language proficiency requires more than just short bursts of vocabulary or grammar practice; it involves sustained development in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These skills demand more structured and continuous effort, often under the guidance of educators who can provide personalized feedback and support. Therefore, TikTok is best viewed as a supplementary tool that complements traditional language teaching methods rather than replacing them entirely.

In conclusion, TikTok offers a dynamic and accessible platform for promoting microlearning in language education, particularly regarding vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, and exposure to real-world language use. However, to fully leverage its potential, educators and learners must be mindful of the challenges, particularly regarding content quality and the need for a comprehensive approach to language proficiency. When integrated thoughtfully, TikTok can be a valuable resource that enhances traditional learning methods while promoting autonomous and flexible language learning.

Integrating TikTok and Microlearning into Language Education

Integrating microlearning through platforms like TikTok into language education offers new avenues for engaging learners with flexible and digestible content. However, as Bukhmetov (2023) emphasizes, successfully integrating any digital tool in language learning must align with clear pedagogical objectives. Teachers need to develop structured strategies that leverage TikTok as a supplementary tool and an active part of the learning process. This can involve tasks where students analyze TikTok videos to identify new vocabulary, discuss cultural nuances in language usage, or critically reflect on the content's authenticity.

Ying *et al.* (2021), highlights that the effectiveness of digital tools in language education lies in how they are integrated with traditional classroom activities. Teachers should not simply assign TikTok videos as homework; instead, they should guide learners in selecting relevant content that supports language learning goals. For example, students can be tasked with creating their own videos to practice speaking skills, which encourages active use of the language and fosters creativity. These activities also allow learners to engage with the language in a way that feels natural and aligned with real-world communication.

Ibrahim *et al.* (2023), suggest that TikTok can enhance language learners' engagement, offering a platform for immersive language practice in an informal setting. However, this integration requires more than enthusiasm; educators must critically evaluate the platform's content quality to ensure it meets educational standards. Developing assessment rubrics for microlearning tasks on TikTok can help assess students' progress in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and cultural understanding.

The benefits of microlearning, as discussed by Meliana and Seli (2023), are grounded in its ability to deliver content in small, manageable chunks, making it easier for learners to absorb and retain information. When applied through TikTok, this approach allows students to review short lessons multiple times, reinforcing language structures and vocabulary at their own pace. Budiartha and Akmar (2024) further support this by arguing that platforms like TikTok promote autonomous learning, enabling students to take control of their language development, particularly in vocabulary acquisition.

However, challenges remain. According to Yang *et al.* (2022), teachers must possess adequate digital literacy to guide learners using platforms like TikTok effectively. Educators may need proper training to incorporate these tools meaningfully, leading to superficial engagement

rather than deep learning. Institutional support and ongoing professional development are crucial to ensure teachers are well-prepared to integrate microlearning platforms into their language instruction.

Furthermore, Clark and Mayer (2016) caution that digital tools must be aligned with the science of multimedia learning, emphasizing that educators need to be mindful of cognitive load and content pacing. While TikTok's short-form videos can be advantageous, careful planning is required to ensure the material is pedagogically sound and effectively supports language learning.

In conclusion, the potential of TikTok and microlearning in language education is vast, but educators must carefully consider how to integrate these tools into their teaching. By aligning TikTok content with pedagogical goals, fostering student engagement, and providing teachers with the necessary training, platforms like TikTok can play a transformative role in modern language acquisition.

The Perspective of Digital Tools in Language Education

As technology advances, new digital tools and platforms are being introduced that expand the possibilities for language learning. For instance, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) create immersive environments that allow students to practice language in contextually rich settings (Jane, 2024).

These tools simulate real-life situations, providing students with interactive, hands-on experiences beyond traditional classroom activities (Putri, 2021). Similarly, platforms like TikTok have emerged as powerful tools in language education, offering short, engaging videos that enable learners to practice pronunciation, vocabulary, and cultural nuances in a fun and accessible way.

The potential of AR, VR, and TikTok to transform language teaching and learning is significant. TikTok's interactive features, such as user-generated content and community engagement, encourage learners to immerse themselves in the language actively and authentically (Pratiwi, 2023). The platform allows students to create their own content, thereby applying language skills in a practical context while fostering a sense of community among learners.

In conclusion, the evolution of digital tools in language education has progressed from essential grammar-focused software to more interactive, socially integrated, and contextually rich platforms (Jane, 2024). Mobile apps and social media, particularly TikTok, have increased engagement, flexibility, and opportunities for authentic language use, allowing learners to tailor their experiences according to their needs and interests. However, the success of these tools depends on teachers' digital literacy, the support of institutions, and the thoughtful integration of technology into teaching practices. By continuing to explore and adapt these tools, educators can make language learning more dynamic, accessible, and relevant to students (Putri, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, TikTok has good potential for language learning particularly in terms of microlearning and ideas for communicative competence. The short-form videos from the app are great for students, giving them a chance to work with language without having too much all at once and makes it more interactive than simply reading documents; Through autonomous learning opportunities like this, students can improve vocabulary, pronunciation and practicing the language at an authentic level using TikTok in their own time.

Yet merely being keen on incorporating TikTok into the educational design is not going to cut it. To leverage TikTok in the classroom effectively, teachers must be highly intentional about connecting their use of the app to educational goals toward which students should actively engage rather than passively consume. Additionally, continuous professional development is crucial to equip educators with the necessary digital literacy skills to use these tools effectively in the classroom.

While challenges such as content quality and the need for media literacy remain, TikTok's interactive and flexible nature offers great potential when used alongside traditional teaching methods. By thoughtfully integrating TikTok into language learning, educators can create a more dynamic, accessible, and relevant learning experience for today's students.

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