

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring how TikTok contents drive student's motivation for linguistic competence in English

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ABSTRACT

TikTok use has rapidly emerged as a global phenomenon, transforming from a niche social media app to one of the most popular platforms worldwide, especially among younger generations. Its short video format can be utilized to break down complex concepts into bite-sized, easily digestible content, making learning more engaging and accessible. The study purpose was to explore the impacts of TikTok contents on the students' motivation for linguistic competence in the English language. This exploratory study used narrative data from one-on-one interviews represented into themes. College students (n=12) were purposively sampled to be interviewed in the study. Findings indicated that exposure to TikTok videos helped students develop their vocabulary, particularly informal language and slang, which strengthens their awareness of real-life communication and language use. TikTok encouraged students' language confidence by creating a relaxing environment in which they may witness and emulate normal language use, so lowering language anxiety and promoting more natural interactions. Being able to connect people from different linguistic backgrounds, TikTok allowed students to interact dynamically with content, resulting in a better awareness of linguistic diversity. TikTok and its educational content features—such as the subjects, subtitles, clear pronunciation, and appealing visuals—help to develop listening, reading, and comprehension abilities by providing context, assisting with memorization, and reinforcing language patterns. Integrating TikTok into educational practices allows instructors to harness its extensive capacity to cultivate creativity, motivation, and a deeper involvement with learning materials in a format that aligns with the preferences of today's digitally proficient students.

Keywords: language confidence; linguistic competence; TikTok contents; vocabulary

1. Introduction

The proliferation of social media can be attributed to the advancement of technology and the increasing number of applications that operate on the internet. Wireless communication has emerged as a rapid means of interpersonal connection, establishing itself as a prevalent cultural phenomenon due to its widespread and frequent utilization by people^[1]. Individuals primarily access social media apps for the purposes of convenience, flexible usage, and functionalities^[2], as well as enjoyment, entertainment, socialization, news, and academic pursuits^[3].

The transition from a teacher-centered learning model to a learner-centered approach has been a

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 9 September 2024 | Accepted: 22 November 2024 | Available online: 28 January 2025

CITATION

Siraji AD. Exploring how TikTok contents drive student's motivation for linguistic competence in English. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2025; 10(1): 3091. doi:10.59429/esp.v10i1.3091

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significant movement in education, particularly in foreign language pedagogy^[4]. Education is undergoing changes, with social media playing a transformative role in educational settings^[5]. Consequently, students enrolled in institutions of higher education exhibit a higher level of engagement as social media users, oftentimes making them the primary contributors of TikTok contents^[6]. It is not surprising that social connection has a significant impact on various aspects of daily lives and could have the potential to be utilized in the field of education and learning^[7]. Previous studies have shown that social media can enhance learning experiences through active participation and cooperation^[8,9] and being exposed to social media content has the potential to influence the self-image and social norms of students^[10].

In the Data Reportal Global Digital Reports, Philippines, being one of the major markets of social media contents, has 86.98 million internet users on the first quarter of 2024^[11]. Apparently, every Filipino internet user spend on average of 5 hours and 20 minutes on the internet^[12]. Filipino internet users engage more than the average person around the world when it comes to doing different things online. For example, they stream TV shows, play video games, watch online music videos once a week, how-to tutorial, or educational videos every week, and use online health systems once a week.

TikTok is a widely popular social media platform that enables users to generate short videos ranging from 15 to 60 seconds. TikTok is a popular app with millions of users for uploading short videos on social media^[13]. Content creators can produce videos with music, sticker filters, and various other creative tools, allowing users to express their creativity and engage with their audience^[14]. TikTok is an adaptable platform that serves not only as a source of entertainment and business opportunities, but also as a tool for educational purposes. The educational content provided by content creators is based on their individual expertise and experiences, allowing them to impart knowledge and have a beneficial influence on viewers^[4]. For example, the short videos in TikTok do not induce tension nor offer difficulty in managing the learning process for the student^[15].

However, the accelerating advancements in science and technology observed call for an increased level of consciousness regarding transformations in many aspects of life, with a particular emphasis on education^[16]. In his essay titled *Social Media in Higher Education*, Selwyn^[17] explored the educational impacts of social media for new learners, instruction, and academic provision. He noted that while there are inconsistencies over the effectiveness of social media for knowledge and skill development, educators face ongoing challenges in implementing it effectively in higher education settings. Hence, this paper wanted to explore the extent to which TikTok contents can be used in English language learning. This study aimed to address these gaps by investigating how TikTok content can be utilized to develop students' motivation for English language proficiency.

2. Literature review

2.1. Emergence of TikTok in the Philippines

In the Philippines, TikTok a popular social media platform for education^[18], business and marketing^[19], politics^[20], health^[21], and tourism^[22]. In an Inquirer.net report, the number of TikTok users in the Philippines skyrocketed where “*people seeking instant fame have been gobbling up the technology like crazy*”^[23]. It is estimated that there are 44.4 million Filipinos active users of the social media platform TikTok^[24]. Some popular contents published in TikTok Philippines were dance challenge, ‘story time’, funny skits, lip sync, food, challenge, and explainer videos^[24]. During the pandemic, there was surge on the use of TikTok in the country as Filipinos use TikTok to pent-up boredom and relentlessness because of heightened lockdowns^[25]. It seems that even after the pandemic, Filipinos were still spending time scrolling down their For You Page for short videos to watch. TikTok has gained significant popularity among Filipino youths,

particularly students, who utilize it for entertainment purposes during breaks or as a leisure activity after class [26]. However, concerns were raised about the proliferation of TikTok contents that violate the community guidelines of the platform. Over 4.5 million that were identified and subsequently removed in the Philippines due to their violation of TikTok Community Guidelines[27].

2.2. Linguistic competence in English

Linguistic competence refers to the development and mastery of a specific body of formal knowledge and the corresponding set of skills related to different components of a language including vocabulary, phonetics, and grammar[28]. According to Tahir[29], being the essential component of learning and teaching, linguistic competence refers to the ability of speakers and listeners to apply language knowledge in real-world situations. For example, the study of Peláez-Sánchez and Velásquez-Durán[30] analyzed the impact of Duolingo, a language learning app, activities like writing a vocabulary after seeing a picture enables the user to express their basic communication needs. They believed that linguistic competence is more than just knowing the laws of a language; it is also about being able to apply that knowledge to communicate effectively, facilitating meaningful interactions and developing higher language competency. Linguistic competence has frequently been the goal of second language classrooms. Output that is functional and communicative, frequent, redundant, and consistent with the character of the speaker is beneficial to the process of language learning[31]. In most cases, a proficient writer in a second language is required to have the ability to articulate ideas in a linguistically coherent manner[32]. Scholars are accepting that writers of a second language who have a higher level of linguistic competence produce work of a higher quality[33,34]. Word choice, syntax, and the ability to comprehend what is read are the three most important factors that determine how well a second language writer will perform[32]. Basically, linguistic competence is primarily driven by the language information that learners have accumulated over the course of their learning experience. Linguistic competence includes knowing how to construct meaningful sentences, understanding word meanings, recognizing proper word order, and applying grammatical rules. It allows people to generate and interpret sentences, even those they have never heard before, and to communicate in different contexts by adapting their language use to fit the situation.

2.3. Use of TikTok in language learning

The primary objective of teaching and learning in any language is to facilitate effective communication in the target language[35]. Constructivism redefines learning as a process when individuals interpret, correspond, represent, and elaborate on information, while advancing information and communication technologies shift learning towards a more socially oriented approach[36]. With that, it is imperative for educators to prioritize careful evaluation of effective strategies for disseminating knowledge that can stimulate activity, promote creativity, cultivate a positive mindset, enhance motivation, and promote the development of moral values[37]. Since the emergence of TikTok contents is new, it is particularly interesting to explore its learning peculiarities and impacts on education. In 2019, language learning videos were found to be the second most popular category of knowledge-sharing videos in TikTok[3].

Volume of studies were conducted on the application of TikTok contents in learning the English language, but findings seem to be fragmented. For example, in a survey conducted by Rama, Hamdani and Prihatini[36], it indicated that students possess a positive attitude towards employing TikTok to enhance their English vocabulary. However, because of the nature of their study as a generic survey, it lacks understanding on how the learning process happens, something that this current study addressed. Similar limitation was observed in a qualitative study designed by Ibrahim, Shafie and Rahim[38]. Their findings explored that using TikTok in learning enhanced the language skills of the students, particularly their grammar. However, the

qualitative data presented in the study lacked sufficient elaboration and contextualization, leaving some gaps in understanding how TikTok specifically contributed to these improvements. The absence of in-depth explanations about the students' experiences, examples of content that were particularly effective, and the specific learning mechanisms suggested a need for further exploration on the application of TikTok in language learning.

Mulyanah and Amarullah^[39], conducted a study at PGRI 11 Vocational School in Tangerang, Indonesia, had examined the effect of using TikTok as a learning tool on students' motivation. The sample included 40 students from class XI AKL, with 20 students in XI AKL 3 as the experimental group and 20 in XI AKL 2 as the control group, selected through purposive sampling. Both pre-tests and post-tests, validated beforehand, assessed learning motivation. TikTok's accessibility allowed students to engage with material repeatedly, making lessons more engaging and easier to understand than conventional methods alone. Results indicated that using TikTok effectively increased student motivation, suggesting that integrating social media enhances learning by fostering interest beyond traditional instructional techniques. However, a limitation of this study was its primary reliance on quantitative analysis, which, while effective in measuring changes in motivation levels, does not capture the deeper insights into students' experiences, perspectives, and attitude they have when using TikTok as a learning tool.

3. Objectives

The study purpose was to explore the how TikTok contents motivate students for linguistic competence in the English language, particularly focusing on how this social media platform can be utilized as a tool for language learning. Given that TikTok is a relatively new phenomenon in educational contexts, this study aimed to address the fragmented understanding of its effectiveness by providing understanding on the learning processes and mechanisms through which TikTok encouraged the development language skills online. Below are the objectives sought to be addressed in this paper.

- (a) To assess how TikTok contents develop students' motivation for English language proficiency
- (b) To analyze the characteristics of TikTok contents that contribute to development of motivation for English competence

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

This paper was an exploratory study on the impacts of TikTok contents to students' linguistic competence in the English language. Narratives from the students were analyzed to extract patterns and themes that represent how TikTok contents were used in learning. Exploratory studies generally seek to answer a question that arise from a phenomenon^[40], where that phenomenon can be the emergence of English contents in social media platforms. Social science exploration consists of diligent and systematic activities that are carefully planned with the goal of maximizing the identification of general patterns, ultimately leading to the description and knowledge of various aspects of social or psychological phenomena^[41-45]. Szabelska et al.^[46] suggested that exploratory research should eventually establish hypothesis based on its findings. This type of research is particularly valuable for revealing the complete nature of a phenomenon that is not well understood^[47]. Happell^[48] concurs that a qualitative exploratory design provides researchers with the opportunity to investigate a topic that has not been extensively covered in the existing literature. This design also allows the participants of the study to actively contribute to the generation of new knowledge in that specific area of research^[48].

4.2. Participants and sampling

Exploratory research designs do not necessitate the use of large sample sizes [49]. In these types of studies, researchers frequently concentrate on a more specific, smaller group to conduct a thorough examination of the key variables and relationships [50,51]. Exploratory designs typically have flexible number of participants provided that they fulfill a specific function in answering the research questions [50]. Hence, this paper utilized a small number of participants as the sample size to have focus and in-depth exploration of the research questions, enabling the identification of patterns, insights, and areas for further study. Twelve college students were purposively sampled to be interviewed in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that are relevant to the study [52-54]. Basically, the researcher determines what information is needed and seeks out individuals with relevant knowledge or experience [55,56]. This paper sampled participants who frequently use TikTok (at least 1 hour/day), watch English contents, of ages 18-24 years old, currently taking English-related subjects, has basic digital skills (including browsing the web, has social media engagement). Only college students who have these characteristics were then interviewed in the study.

4.3. Research instrument

Interview guide questions were developed to gather the responses from the participants. Interviews are used to acquire data and gain knowledge from individuals [57]. Interviews are a naturalistic and less organized data gathering approach that can enhance the understanding of examined phenomena [58]. For an effective interview process to happen, the researchers should develop interview guide that can extensively extract the responses from their participants [59]. An interview guide is a carefully developed compilation of clear and unambiguous questions, topics, and issues that the researcher intends to explore during the interview process, serving as a roadmap to ensure all necessary aspects are covered and the desired information is gathered from participants [57]. Hoyle et al. [60] believed that interview questions aim to motivate respondents to provide detailed answers while minimizing biases caused by social desirability, conformity, or disinterest. A semi-structured interview guide was designed for this study to provide a flexible framework for exploring key topics while allowing for in-depth discussions based on participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews are a valuable method for promoting the discussion of ideas between the interviewer and the interviewee [61]. This approach allows the interviewer to have some flexibility in changing the direction of the conversation or requesting additional details or clarification from the participant, based on their responses [62,63]. **Table 1** presents the interview guide questions developed for this study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions
To assess how TikTok contents develop students' motivation for English language proficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Can you describe how frequently you use TikTok, and do you think this usage has had any effect on your English language skills? b. Have you noticed any specific improvements in your English (e.g., vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar) that you believe are related to your exposure to TikTok content? c. Do you find yourself learning new English words or phrases from TikTok videos? Can you give examples? d. How do you think watching TikTok videos has impacted your confidence in speaking or writing in English? e. In your opinion, does TikTok provide opportunities for practicing English that you wouldn't get through traditional classroom learning?
To analyze the characteristics of TikTok contents that contribute to development of motivation for English competence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What types of TikTok videos do you find most helpful for improving your English skills? Can you describe specific content or creators? b. Do you think certain features of TikTok videos (e.g., subtitles, language style, visual aids) make them more effective for learning English?

Objectives	Interview Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Are there particular topics or themes in TikTok videos that have helped you better understand or use the English language? d. How do you choose the TikTok videos you watch when you want to improve your English? What characteristics do you look for? e. Can you recall any TikTok video that had a significant impact on your English learning? What was it about that video that made it so effective?

Table 1. (Continued)

4.4. Data gathering procedure

One-on-one interviews were conducted to gather the responses from selected college students. Interviews are a valuable method for researchers to gather in-depth qualitative data that can shed light on participants' experiences. Through interviews, researchers can gain insights into how participants describe their experiences and the significance they attribute to them^[63,64]. Interviews serve as a methodological approach for actively engaging in the process of listening to individuals and collecting their personal stories. Stories have served as a fundamental means by which individuals have sought to derive meaning from their experiences. These narratives play an essential part in providing individuals with a context to understand and interpret their own behavior^[65]. Interviews are a commonly employed method in the field of phenomenology where it focuses on understanding the lived experiences of individual participants, as opposed to studying group processes, i.e., as grounded theory, or exploring the cultural aspects of specific groups, i.e., an ethnography^[66]. In conducting an interview, Benlahcene and Ramdani^[67] suggested that the researcher should:

1. use background research to determine which data is important to collect;
2. ensure the confidentiality of participant's information;
3. simplify terms and concepts in the interview questions;
4. make sure interviewees feel comfortable and confident during the interview; and,
5. encourage reflection on their responses.

Before the interview, the researcher conducted thorough background research to identify the key data needed to address the study's objectives. This included reviewing relevant literature and existing data to understand the specific themes and issues to explore during the interview. Participants were assured that their identities would not be revealed, and the information they provided would be securely stored and only used for research purposes. The researcher gives the participant ample time to read and sign the consent form and encourages them to ask questions to clarify any concerns about confidentiality. Participants are informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. During the interview process, the researcher uses clear and simple language in both the interview guide and during the interview itself, avoiding jargon or technical terms that may confuse the participants. Participants might also use their accustomed language/dialect to make it easier for them to share their ideas. The researcher uses open-ended questions and follow-up prompts to encourage the interviewee to reflect on their experiences. For example, "Can you describe how frequently you use TikTok, and do you think this usage has had any effect on your English language skills?" or "Are there particular topics or themes in TikTok videos that have helped you better understand or use the English language?" Audio recorders were used to record the entire interview process with proper consent from the participants.

4.5. Data analysis

Narrative data was the primary data source of this study. Thematic analysis was carried out to analyze the narrative data from one-on-one interviews. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach used to identify, organize, and provide useful perspectives into patterns of meaning, also known as themes, within a given data set^[68]. Accessibility and flexibility were the major characteristics of thematic analysis which made it a popular choice for qualitative data analysis^[44,69,70]. These characteristics were essentially useful in conducting this exploratory study. Given that the paper aimed to uncover themes, the accessibility of thematic analysis allowed the researchers to effectively engage with the data, while the flexibility enabled them to develop their analytical process as new themes and patterns emerged. Specifically, reflexive thematic analysis was carried out in exploring the influence of watching TikTok contents to students' language competence in English. Reflexive thematic analysis is essentially 'reflexive' because it emphasizes the role of the researcher in the final assessment of the findings^[71,72]. Analysis is driven by the researcher's subjectivity, rather than being hindered by it^[72]. Reflexive thematic analysis, unlike other methods that aim to establish an unbiased perspective, is based on the researcher actively interacting with their data, directed by their research question. However, this does not mean that reflexive thematic analysis is 'biased' because it also reflects subjectivity to analysis. Terry and Hayfield^[72] believed that given thematic analysis has emphasis on flexibility, it becomes essential for the researcher to determine their specific viewpoint on the data and the implications for their study. Along with this, inductive method of thematic analysis was particularly adapted. An inductive approach to data processing and interpretation is a method that starts with specific observations and uses them to develop general conclusions. It is a bottom-up approach, meaning that it begins with the data itself rather than preconceived theories or hypotheses^[68]. This means that the codes and themes are derived directly from the data itself, ensuring that the researcher's analysis closely aligns with the substance of the data, stemming the direction of an exploratory study. Braun and Clarke^[73] established guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data to ensure flexibility. **Figure 1** presents the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. The process is iterative in nature, and thus, researchers might build up their ideas by revisiting the previous phases.

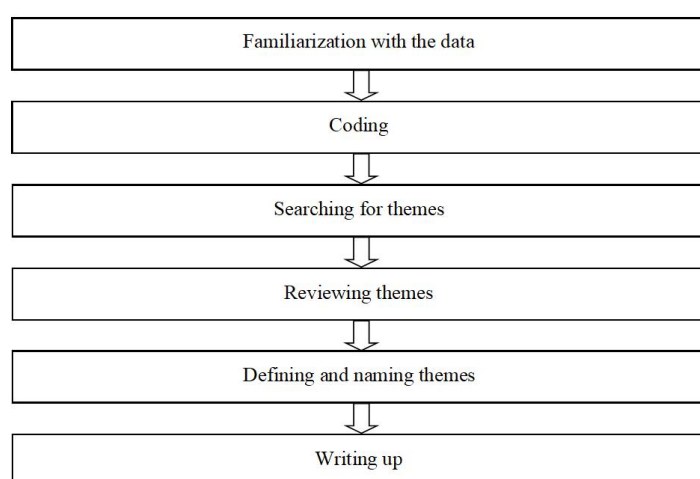


Figure 1. Six steps in conducting reflexive thematic analysis

5. Results

Objective 1: To assess how TikTok contents develop students' motivation for English language proficiency.

5.1. Improvement on vocabulary

College students noted how watching TikTok contents developed their motivation for learning vocabulary. They believed that watching TikTok contents exposed them to different ways words can be used. Some said that watching TikTok videos helped them learn new words. One major contributor for this was their consumption of contents from native English speakers who introduce words and phrases when speaking. This becomes a gateway for them to learn new things which they believed can somehow be helpful in other contexts.

“Watching native speakers or those fluent in English has helped me pick up new words and phrases.”

“This happens as they encounter new words and phrases in context, listen to native speakers, and see language used in various ways.”

Consequently, others who watched TikTok contents learned informal words like *lit*, *lowkey*, *FOMO*, or phrases like *spill the tea*, *vibe check*, and *on fleek*. For them, these words might not be helpful in academic purposes, but they were positive that learning them is still *helpful for understanding how people actually talk in real life*.

“Totally! I've picked some new words and phrases from TikTok. It's funny, because a lot of the slang and informal language I hear on TikTok wouldn't be used in a classroom setting. But it's really helpful for understanding how people actually talk in real life.”

“For example, I've learned phrases like on fleek (meaning perfect or impeccable) and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). These are terms that I might not have encountered in a traditional classroom setting but are commonly used on TikTok.”

“TikTok videos can introduce new English vocabulary. For example, learning slang or idiomatic expressions from popular videos, like on fleek or lit.”

“There are so many! I've learned things like lowkey, slay, spill the tea, and vibe check. Some of them are pretty common now, but I definitely wouldn't have known them before I started using TikTok.”

5.2. Boosts language confidence

College students also mentioned how watching TikTok videos helped them feel confident about their language skills. These videos made them *feel comfortable* in using the language themselves. For example, for one student, watching TikTok videos helped in following the correct pronunciation of a word.

“Watching TikTok videos has increased my confidence in both speaking and writing in English.”

“...improved my ability to follow the correct pronunciation.”

Others mentioned about how TikTok videos provides a *relaxed* and *informal* use of the language which the traditional English classes fail to provide. They believed that this form of discussion what led the students to be confident and expressive in a way that they can speak things without worrying about the language rules.

“Watching TikTok videos can boost confidence...by providing a more relaxed and informal context for language use.”

“TikTok offers a more informal and engaging way to practice English that traditional classrooms don’t always provide.”

“Hearing and seeing how English is used in everyday situations by different people has made me more comfortable using the language myself.”

Students also mentioned about how TikTok contents *inspired* them to practice which in turn, develops confidence within them. One student explained that TikTok contents offer different accents and ways of speaking. This cause her to believe that *there is no right way to speak English*, what matters the most is the clear ideas one conveys.

“Seeing others communicate effectively can inspire ourselves to practice and use English more confidently.”

“I hear so many different accents and ways of speaking on TikTok, and it made me realize that there's no ‘right’ way to speak English. As long as you can communicate your ideas clearly, that's what matters.”

5.3. Interaction

The way that TikTok contents interact its users across different demographics is what it makes the platform remarkable to language learners. It exposes them to contemporary language use, culture, and different languages/dialects. For one student, this is *fun* to observe as it makes the conversation *less structured yet interactive*.

“It's also fun to see how people from different cultures use English.”

“TikTok offers a less structured and more interactive way to engage with English. It exposes us to contemporary language use, cultural references, and various dialects or accents that might not be covered in traditional classrooms.”

Objective 2. To analyze the characteristics of TikTok contents that contribute to development of motivation for English competence.

5.4. Topics/themes

One major factor that might influence the development of college students’ motivation for language competence in English was the topics its users consume. They considered content topics/themes like *educational videos, daily life, culture trends, pop cultures, and current events* to be useful in their development.

“I find that videos featuring everyday conversations, vlogs, or educational content, like language tips and tricks, are the most helpful.”

For example, college students who watch TikTok videos that discuss pronunciation, language tips and tricks, and language guides were *helpful, funny, and memorable*. One student he watched educational video once about the difference between *a lot* and *alot*. For him, learning this was amazing because for just a small time spent in watching videos, one can learn *a lot!*

“Educational content, such as language learning tips or pronunciation guides, can be particularly helpful.”

“There was this one video where a comedian was explaining the difference between a lot and alot. It was so funny and memorable, and it really helped me to understand the difference between those two words. It's amazing how much you can learn from a few minutes of TikTok!”

Others were inclined in watching pop culture (like music, entertainment, and showbiz), cultural topics, and daily life. They believed about the practicality of the English language that does not only confine to formality and structure, but also in diversity of one’s interests.

“Topics like daily life, cultural trends, and pop culture are very useful because they expose me to the kind of English that’s commonly used in everyday situations. This helps me understand how to apply the language in real-world contexts.”

“Videos covering everyday conversations, popular culture, or specific interests can help me understand practical language use and slang.”

“I find that videos about pop culture, current events, and social issues are really helpful for learning about the different ways that English is used in different contexts.”

5.5. Having subtitles

College students noted about how subtitles were helpful in developing their motivation for linguistic competence. For them, the language of TikTok content creators were somehow difficult to follow, possibly because of their accent. With subtitles, it allows them to *connect spoken words with their written forms*. It is easier for them to follow the spoken language and effectively learn from the contents. They are able to understand the topic that the content creator is discussing.

“I also make sure that the videos have subtitles....”

“Subtitles are particularly helpful because they allow me to connect spoken words with their written forms.”

“Creators who use subtitles often make it easier to follow and learn from the content.”

“If the video has subtitles that I can be easily understand how she/he will discuss her topic.”

Others believed that subtitles clarify the pronunciation and the spelling of the new words they encounter.

“I also like videos that use subtitles, because it helps me to understand the pronunciation and spelling of new words.”

“The subtitles are a huge help, especially when you're trying to learn new words.”

5.6. Speech

Some language factors that can contribute to the development of motivation for linguistic competence were the clarity and conciseness of the speech a content has. They believed that speech, *i.e.*, the way the content is delivered verbally, can be a contributor to their motivation. College students prefer videos with clear and concise speech. They believed that being straightforward and concise of contents have *a lasting impact on their learning*. This can help them follow things along the way preventing them to *getting bored* or

overwhelmed. One student said that *breaking down the language* into smaller easier to understand block of ideas is essential.

“I really like videos where people are explaining things in a clear and concise way.”

“Creators who focus on teaching English or who use clear, engaging language are especially valuable.”

“I remember a video where a creator broke down common English idioms using simple language. Having clear explanations, visual aids, and examples made the idioms easy to understand and remember, which had a lasting impact on my learning.”

“And the fact that TikTok videos are so short and to the point means that you're not going to get bored or overwhelmed.”

“I also prefer videos that explain things in a simple, straightforward manner, making it easier for me to follow along.”

“Content creators who offer explanations or breakdowns of language can be particularly helpful.”

5.7. Visuals

Visuals also emerged as a contributing factor in developing students' motivation for language competence. Content creators use visuals to convey their ideas with clarity and specificity. With visuals, the users would immediately understand the context of the content. This can also help in learning new words or phrases with pictures presenting how/where these words/phrases are being used.

“Visual aids also enhance understanding, especially when a creator uses images or on-screen text to reinforce what they're saying.”

“Features like visual aids enhance learning by providing context and clarifying meaning. These help us understand and remember new words and phrases.”

“You're constantly exposed to new words, phrases, and ways of speaking. And because it's so visual, it's easier to understand the context of what people are saying.”

6. Discussion

Objective 1. To assess the influence of TikTok content on students' English language proficiency.

Improvement on vocabulary

Spending time watching TikTok contents might develop the motivation of students in learning vocabulary. College students noted that watching TikTok contents helped them *pick up new words and phrases*. Similar findings were found in a preliminary study conducted by Ining^[74] among college students of Kolej Vokasional Keningau taking up Early Childhood Education course. The author discussed that TikTok users learn new words by simply browsing through contents that are relevant to their interests. In a quantitative study, students exhibit a positive attitude towards utilizing TikTok as a tool for gaining English language vocabulary^[75]. The author cited an example that TikTok provides opportunity for people to learn new languages and explore different cultures. This is due to TikTok's appealing features, which draw users—especially the younger ones—and inspire them to make or watch films centered around taking part in trendy

challenges, which frequently involve dialogue or music. This also explains why Filipino college students were able to develop their vocabulary, oftentimes the informal one, because on how TikTok contents frequently use these terms. One student mentioned that he “...picked some new words and phrases from TikTok...a lot of the slang and informal language...wouldn't be used in a classroom setting. But it's really helpful for understanding how people actually talk in real life.” Most college students were learning informal vocabulary from TikTok contents, which might not be useful in academic activities, but still *very helpful* for them as they learn how the language is being used across different life situations. Essentially, this reflects the instrumentality of English language use in social media, where students gain exposure to diverse language use across various contexts, enhancing their practical understanding of how English is employed in real-life situations. Social media platforms like TikTok serve as informal learning environments, contributing to students' linguistic competence in a way that is different from traditional classroom instruction.

Boosts language confidence

Watching TikTok contents encouraged students to be confident about their language skills, motivating them to learn the language even more. Ferstephanie and Pratiwi^[76] has gone beyond the general conclusion that using TikTok helps EFL students become more proficient global speakers. The post-test results showed an increase in students' scores, with the average rising from 2.51 in the pre-test to 4.65 after implementing TikTok. The TikTok contents gave the Grade 10 science major students from Kristen Kalam Kudus Senior High School the opportunity to experience learning English in novel ways. The relevance to students' interests and experiences, authenticity, and up-to-dateness of TikTok contents were the likely contributor to their language confidence^[37]. This study among Filipino students supported the findings from Ferstephanie and Pratiwi^[76] and Herlisya and Wiratno,^[37]. Findings indicated that watching TikTok videos provided the students with an *informal* way of expressing their ideas which made them feel at ease when saying something. One student said that “...hearing and seeing how English is used in everyday situations by different people has made me more comfortable using the language myself.” This nature of TikTok contents can also be a gateway to reducing the language anxiety of students when speaking. For example, one student explained that “...so many different accents and ways of speaking on TikTok, and it made me realize that there's no ‘right’ way to speak English.” This exposure enables students to feel more at ease in expressing themselves, as they become aware that various kinds of English are considered acceptable and commonly used in everyday interactions. Consequently, TikTok can cultivate confidence and fluency in language usage, thus encouraging more regular and natural interaction with the English language beyond conventional educational environments.

Interaction

The way TikTok videos welcome the ideas of its users from different demographics makes the platform effective for language learners. Students believe that watching TikTok videos allows them to engage in a more dynamic form of language learning, as they can observe and interact with content created by people from diverse backgrounds, ages, regions, and linguistic proficiencies. The advent of the TikTok short video platform has had a profound impact on individuals' lifestyles and has also revolutionized the methods of cultural communication^[77]. Video communication is a form of communication that is known for its universal accessibility, timely delivery, and interactive nature that contribute to the speed and depth of communication^[78,79]. For example, TikTok is used in politics by framing political content in a way that aligns with the platform's entertainment-focused nature. Rather than presenting politics in a traditional, formal manner, TikTok videos often depict political events, figures, or debates as a dramatic battle or spectacle, which is referred to as the "game frame"^[80,81]. A similar phenomenon was observed in language learning as TikTok

users were also exposed to how language is used in an informal way. Just as TikTok reframes politics through a lens of entertainment, it also presents language in a relaxed, casual, and accessible manner. One student noted that TikTok “...exposes us to contemporary language use, cultural references, and various dialects or accents that might not be covered in traditional classrooms.” Language learning on TikTok is less about formal grammar or vocabulary instruction and more about engaging with real-life communication, including slang, colloquialisms, and accents. In both cases, TikTok has the characteristic to break down complex or traditionally formal subjects—whether politics or language—into relatable and digestible content that fits its fast-paced, entertainment-driven environment.

Objective 2. To analyze the characteristics of TikTok contents that contribute to development of motivation for English competence.

Topics/themes

Lin, Warschauer and Blake^[82] found out that students who utilize social networking sites to study a foreign language saw significant enhancements in their attitudes and motivation as well as made notable advancement in their listening and speaking abilities. Online engagement platforms enable language learners to cultivate unique aspects of their linguistic, cultural, and social identities, while shifting their focus from structure and form to meaning and function^[83]. One notable feature of TikTok is its ability to provide a young and global audience with access to a unique format of short educational videos. These educational videos are created by expert authors who possess specialized knowledge in their respective fields which offers numerous possibilities for efficiently and succinctly disseminating knowledge across broad scientific disciplines^[84-86]. Based on the engagement levels (*i.e.*, in terms of count likes), the study of Fiallos, Fiallos and Figueroa^[85] found out that Tiktok contents were mainly medicine and healthcare (16.99%), food and drink (13.53%), health (10.75%), science/chemistry (7.62%), technology/engineering (6.45%). It was discovered in this study among Filipino college students that such educational videos, including those that discuss about language learning, news, pop culture, were generally *helpful* for them in learning the English language. They revealed that “...these expose [them] to the kind of English that’s commonly used in everyday situations. This helps [them] understand how to apply the language in real-world contexts.” Watching English videos in TikTok enabled the students to learn the language and its practicality to one’s life, motivating them to learn. Exposure to different topics and themes enables individuals to acquire vocabularies and expressions, so increasing their familiarity with the usage of English in different professional domains and social contexts. Hence, the themes and topics of TikTok material might have a substantial impact on how students engage with the content and incorporate the language into their own communication.

Subtitles

One effective method to enhance listening ability is to offer written transcripts of the spoken language, such as subtitles^[87]. The practice of simultaneously listening and reading is widely acknowledged to enhance the association between the auditory and written aspects of a language^[88,89]. In traditional classrooms, for example, there is a growing trend of using subtitled films in foreign language classrooms because films assist students in comprehending and identifying the context by witnessing the actions of the characters and their dialogues^[90,91]. Same can be possible when watching TikTok contents, however, in an informal manner. Subtitles can help students redirect their minds into understanding the contexts of what they see. In the study of Chaichompoo^[92], watching English movies and television programs with subtitles can enhance learners' listening and reading skills by engaging both visual and auditory channels. The author cited the Dual Coding Theory explaining this simultaneous exposure helps learners better recall English words, phrases, and

expressions by reinforcing the language through multiple sensory inputs. Similar patterns emerged from the narratives of Filipino college students. They explained that subtitles “...allow [them] to connect spoken words with their written forms” which make it “...easier to follow and learn from the content.” Subtitles make it easier for learners to follow along with the content by breaking down language barriers that might otherwise make it difficult to understand spoken dialogue, especially when it includes unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, or new vocabulary. This multisensory engagement not only aids in memorization but also helps learners internalize language patterns and structures, possibly contributing to more natural language learning over time.

Speech

Speech, as an independent content characteristic, is essential in language learning when watching TikTok videos. Similarly, in an online classroom discussion, speech rate and clarity are the two primary feature dimensions^[93]. According to Chu et al.^[93], at a fundamental level, both aspects are considered as the primary criteria for assessing the quality of speech expression. Research conducted in nonverbal immediacy has shown that the communication characteristics exhibited by instructors have a significant impact on important student outcomes like development on affective and cognitive learning and student motivation^[94]. Similar mechanism was observed on how TikTok contents can impact the language learning of college students. For example, college students noted that TikTok creators “...who use clear, engaging language are especially valuable [in learning]” and “...having clear explanations, visual aids, and examples made the idioms easy to understand and remember.” Speech characteristics become one of the major factors why college students were able to learn from TikTok contents. As a result, the speech characteristics of TikTok content creators—such as clarity, tone, pace, and engagement—emerge as significant factors in determining how effectively college students can learn from and engage with TikTok content, ultimately motivating them to learn language skills. These speech elements create a more interactive and dynamic learning experience that can sustain the students’ interest and motivation for language learning. Given the technological advancements, there is an emerging application of TikTok contents to develop the student’ competence in English.

Visuals

Visual learning has become popular in the recent years because of distance learning curriculum. Visual learners are individuals who prefer learning with visual sensory channels. These learners rely on visual aids and stimuli to comprehend and process information effectively^[95]. Several studies have also discovered a correlation between learners’ visual learning style and their language achievement^[96,97]. For example, Digital storytelling approach places a greater emphasis on student-centered learning^[98]. This pedagogical approach aims to provide readers with an immersive experience, allowing them to actively engage with the story^[99]. The interactive art form under discussion is known for its ability to stimulate the audience's imagination by presenting various elements and visuals that contribute to the narrative^[100]. Visuals of TikTok contents also have similar impacts to the motivation of college students. They mentioned that “visual aids enhance learning by providing context and clarifying meaning” and “it's easier to understand the context of what people are saying.” Visual elements such as graphics, animations, and real-world images provide additional context, reinforce key ideas, and break down complex concepts which then enhances understanding and retention. The integration of visual components in TikTok content aligns with the preferences of visual learners and facilitates their overall language motivation and development.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this paper revealed that TikTok contents can serve as a valuable tool to develop students' motivation for English linguistic competence. The platform's content features—such as its informal content, themes, use of subtitles, engaging speech characteristics, and visual aids—have been shown to positively motivate students to strive for language competence like in vocabulary, language confidence, communication skills, and comprehension skills. By presenting language in real-life contexts, TikTok encourages students to learn and use English more naturally, promoting both linguistic competence and practical communication skills beyond traditional classroom settings.

Consequently, educators and language learners can benefit from incorporating TikTok and similar social media platforms into English language learning practices. TikTok and its informal contents can serve as a supplementary tool for exposure to everyday English, including slang, idioms, and various accents, which are often underrepresented in formal education. Furthermore, the platform's visual and auditory features, such as subtitles and clear speech from content creators, can enhance comprehension and retention of information. Hence, integrating TikTok into language learning curricula could provide a more holistic and engaging approach, bridging the gap between academic language learning and real-world language use.

While the study highlighted the potential of TikTok as a learning tool, several limitations must be considered. The platform is primarily built with informal language use, which may not always align with the fundamentals of academic or professional communication. TikTok content varies widely in quality and appropriateness, and not all videos are conducive to language learning. The focus on Filipino college students also delimited the generalizability of the findings, as cultural and linguistic contexts may differ across regions. Future research could explore the effects of TikTok content on different student populations and examine methods for curating educational content to maximize its effectiveness in language education.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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