TikTok as Pedagogical Tool for English Language Learning: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: TikTok, a social media platform featuring short videos, has been utilised as an educational tool to help students develop communication skills, particularly in English language learning. This systematic literature review examines the effectiveness of TikTok as a pedagogical tool for enhancing English language acquisition. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of scholarly articles from SCOPUS and Web of Science (WoS). The review identified key themes related to TikTok's impact on students' learning experiences by grouping studies based on the main issues they explored, such as the learning outcomes highlighted and the ways TikTok was used as a teaching tool or instructional strategy in English classrooms. By exploring both the advantages and challenges of using TikTok, this study contributes to the expanding body of research on digital learning tools and their role in modern education, advocating for innovative strategies in English language teaching and learning.

Keywords: English language learning, ESL, pedagogical tool, pedagogical strategies, TikTok

Introduction

The integration of digital technologies is a fundamental aspect of Industry 4.0, which has not only spurred global progress but also led to the widespread use of English as the dominant language in digital interactions. Countries that were once reluctant to adopt foreign languages, such as China, Korea, and Japan, have now embraced English as the language of technological advancement. This phenomenon is also known as 'Digital English'. This transition highlights the growing relationship between technological innovation and language education, particularly in the context of English learning. Social media platforms are instrumental in this process, offering learners new ways to hone their English skills and connect with an international community. The interconnectedness of technological progress and English language learning has resulted in significant improvements in education, enriching both teaching methods and learning experiences worldwide.

The emergence of social media has been recognised as a bridge that connects the current community, especially the younger generation, with an interactive and engaging learning experience. One of the most popular social media platforms in recent years, especially among young learners, is TikTok. Its widespread popularity has brought attention to its educational potential as it aligns with Generation Z's use of social media for communication, idea sharing, and educational purposes. TikTok, known as a widely-used social media platform with over a billion global downloads, has significantly altered the way people interact and communicate. It allows users to create and share

short videos, often centred around music, dance, and comedy. While TikTok is typically viewed as an entertainment platform, it also holds significant potential as a language learning tool and makes substantial contributions to the education sector, particularly in online learning environments. Research has shown that social media platforms like TikTok can improve students' self-confidence and academic performance (Looichin & Chuah, 2021). The platform's role in education is being explored for its potential to enhance teaching and learning through methods like collaborative, reflective, and inquiry-based learning strategies (Tan et al., 2023).

Hence, this review paper focuses on TikTok as the platform of interest. Utilising TikTok, especially through short educational videos, supports learners in acquiring media skills and enhances their English proficiencies. Consequently, TikTok has emerged as a valuable resource for teaching English to second language learners and foreign language learners, serving as an effective pedagogical approach. In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL), students who are non-native English speakers are primarily instructed in English, with a stronger emphasis on language skills rather than content. Additionally, the technological advantages of TikTok contribute to improving students' quality of life by facilitating better engagement with peers and people worldwide. TikTok offers several notable features for this purpose, such as shared audio, which allows users to listen to and imitate voices. Another key feature is the duet option, enabling users to combine their videos with others to create content that resembles a conversation between two individuals. These features make it easier for students to engage in learning English, encouraging learners to use the platform positively. This approach also supports a blended learning model, which enhances the teaching and learning process for English as a second language, immersing students more fully in their learning experiences. When used effectively in an ESL classroom, the TikTok app can assist students in improving their reading and speaking skills.

According to Ibrahim et al. (2023), TikTok has been used as an effective tool in teaching and learning despite its nature being primarily centred on entertainment, creative outlets, and socialisation. Although TikTok is often seen as a platform for "dance performances" lacking educational merit, it has evolved into a valuable source of micro-learning content (Kaye et al., 2021; Lee, 2022). Some educators and learners particularly regard this platform as beneficial in teaching language skills, breaking down complex ideas, collaborative learning, personalised learning, and even as an outlet for creativity in different contexts. According to Chen and Kang (2023), this platform encourages learners to achieve fluency in English. Integrating this technology-driven environment also enhances students' self-confidence (Azlan et al., 2019). Furthermore, learners become more eager to engage in language learning activities, making technology not just an engaging educational tool but also a source of motivation (Pazilah et al., 2019).

Learners also face different challenges when using TikTok for language learning and speaking. One main issue is hesitation and lack of interest, as noted by Kashinathan (2021), which prevents students from actively participating in classroom speaking activities, especially for those who feel unsure about their skills. Large class sizes make this problem worse, making it hard for teachers to give personal attention and help to individual students. Additionally, Azizi et al. (2011) highlighted that students often struggle with self-confidence, a barrier that can be increased when using platforms like TikTok, where sharing content publicly can raise anxiety. These issues suggest that while TikTok has potential for enhancing speaking skills, significant challenges remain. These challenges need to be addressed to ensure its effective use in educational settings.

Nevertheless, incorporating appropriate theories and teaching methods is crucial when instructing English language learners in speaking skills. From the social perspective of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), teaching language skills should be framed within relevant contexts and should prioritise social interaction (Ellis, 1994). Savignon (2005) also highlighted that English language learners do not acquire speaking abilities through traditional structural methods, such as memorising phrases or performing speech drills. Rather, they develop communicative competence when language is taught within the sociocultural environments where it is used. Hence, this current paper adopts the views mentioned above to review a number of past studies that utilised TikTok as a pedagogical tool for English language teaching and learning, in order to determine the effectiveness and usefulness of this platform.

Methodology

This review aims to examine the current research literature regarding the effectiveness of using TikTok as a pedagogical tool for English language learning from 2019 to 2024 in the context of primary to tertiary education. The search was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. In particular, this review intends to address the following broadly focused research questions:

1. What aspects of TikTok can be utilised as a pedagogical strategy in English classrooms?
2. How effective is TikTok as a pedagogical tool in the English language learning experience?

In this systematic literature review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 checklist was used to ensure a comprehensive and standardised approach. The review includes four well-defined phases, which are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Phase 1: Identification Phase

This study conducted a thorough examination of scholarly articles through two electronic databases: Scopus and WOS. The keywords, for instance, "TikTok, pedagogical tools, English language learning, English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), social media application, learning, teaching, digital learning, and education" were employed to find relevant academic articles.

Before starting the review process, a clear research question was developed to direct the study's focus. The review focused on evaluating TikTok's effectiveness as a tool for teaching English without restricting the geographic location of respondents. The review involved two key steps: first, collecting relevant articles through a search process, and then applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to select articles for further analysis. These criteria were used to assess the quality of previous research, with article selection based on their relevance to the research question and the importance of their findings. The inclusion criteria primarily targeted topics directly related to the specified keywords.

Phase 2: Screening Phase

This phase involved detecting and eliminating duplicate records from Scopus and WoS. Subsequently, the remaining papers were evaluated to assess if they fulfilled the predefined criteria.

Phase 3: Eligibility Phase

This stage focused on selecting studies that specifically addressed the research question, with an emphasis on the use of TikTok as a pedagogical tool aimed at enhancing the English language learning experience. The primary goal was to thoroughly analyse and discuss the findings to enable a deep exploration of the research question. Articles for the review were also selected based on several criteria: (a) the article was published between 2019 and 2024, (b) the article was published in English, and (c) the article was related to the use of TikTok as a pedagogical tool for English language learning.

Phase 4: Exclusion Phase

In this phase, articles that did not match the specified parameters and keywords were discarded. The scope of the review was constrained by the accessibility of full-text articles. Exclusion was driven by the irrelevance of certain papers to the research focus, as some studies explored different contexts.

Charting the data

Following the selection process, every article was categorized based on its primary issues which are based on the outcome of using TikTok and the key pedagogical features of TikTok and strategies used as well as the research questions it addressed. Figure 1 presents a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram that outlines the steps taken to identify the relevant studies included in this review.
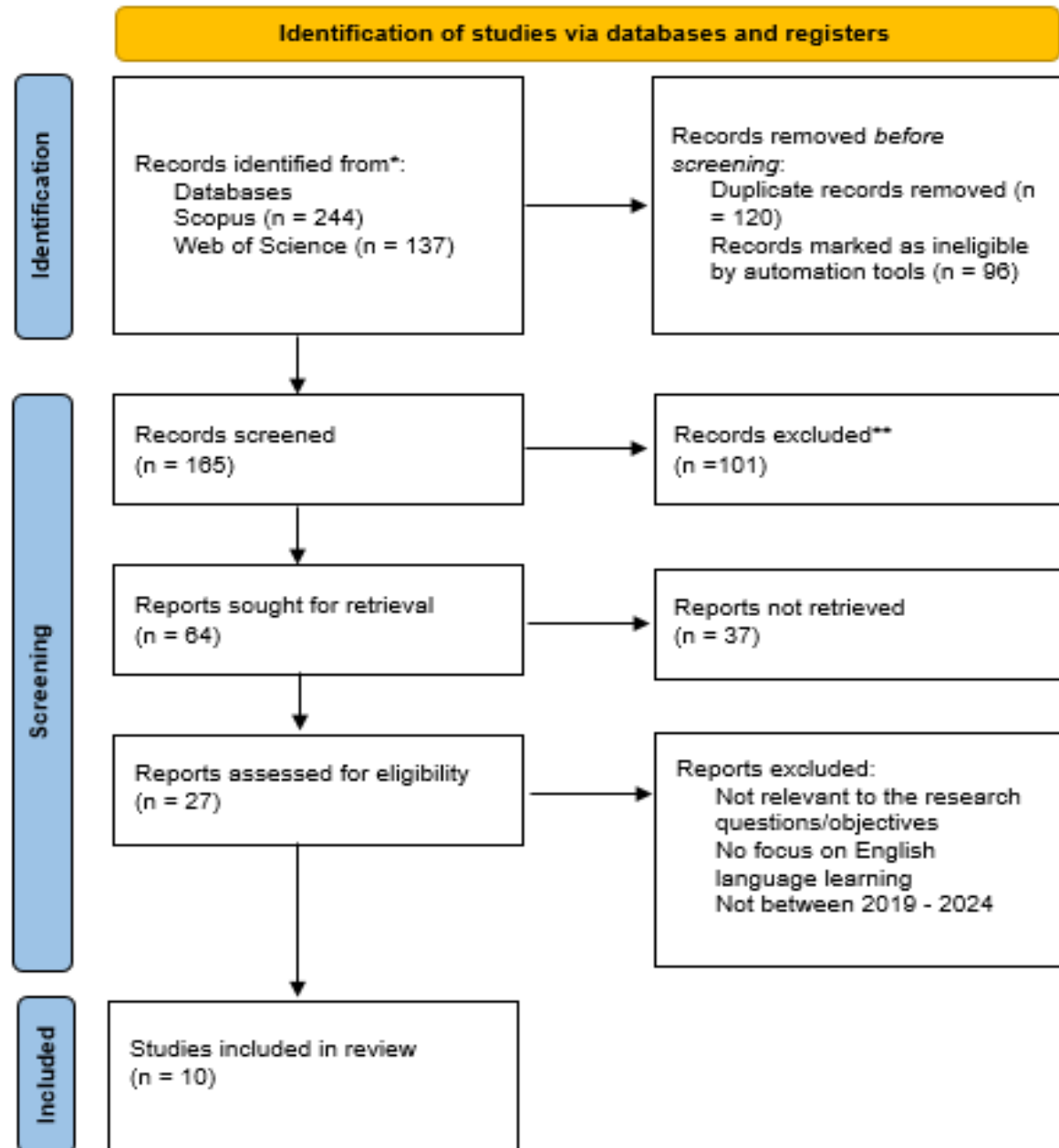

Fig. 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Analysis of the selected research

Authors	Purpose	Methodology	Key Features & Pedagogical Strategies	Outcomes
Mulyanah et al. (2024)	To evaluate the effectiveness of the TikTok application in enhancing the motivation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.	A quantitative research design, using pre and post-test to measure students' motivation among vocational school students in Indonesia. (n=40)	TikTok's video creation, music integration, filters, voice-changing, and collaboration features were used to foster interactive learning via collaborative projects. (collaborative learning)	TikTok significantly increased EFL students' motivation to learn English compared to traditional teaching methods, as evidenced by pre-test and post-test results.
Alghameeti (2022)	To investigate learners' attitude about using TikTok in learning English vocabulary and how it helps them expand their vocabulary.	A quantitative method using an online survey using 5-point Likert scale among Saudi secondary school students (n=50)	TikTok's engaging video content, subtitles, and user-generated material, alongside pedagogical strategies like teacher-created videos were accentuated to enhance vocabulary learning effectively. (affective learning)	Students demonstrated positive attitude towards using TikTok as it offers various features that assist in vocabulary expansion.
Revesencio et al. (2022)	To establish the advantages and disadvantages of using Tiktok for the development of English Grammar.	A descriptive quantitative research design via a quasi-structured questionnaire among university students (n=45)	The study highlights short videos and interactive content, alongside blended learning for improvement of grammar skills. (experiential learning)	Watching TikTok videos positively impacts students' English grammar skills by attaining new words and improve speaking abilities.
Amin (2023)	To explore how TikTok can be utilized as a	A qualitative research design using	The study emphasizes TikTok's	Students exhibited a strong interest in using TikTok for

	tool to enhance students' interest in reading English	observation, interviews and document analysis among secondary school students.	multimodal features that integrates text, video, and audio, effectively engaging students. Systematic observations and unstructured interviews were utilized to gain deeper understanding of students' reading interests and their experiences with the app. (experiential learning)	reading. The multimodal nature of TikTok (visual, auditory, text) makes it engaging.
Thanga Rajan & Ismail (2022)	To investigate the use of TikTok to improve knowledge acquisition and engagement in learning literature.	A quasi-experimental approach by using pre-test, post-test and questionnaire among secondary school students in Malaysia (n=150)	The study leveraged TikTok's short videos and interactive elements to improve literature learning, encouraging engagement through collaborative projects and evaluating knowledge with pre- and post-tests. (experiential learning)	The students' engagement in learning literature through TikTok was really high and showed significant improvement in knowledge acquisition.
Tan et al. (2023)	To investigate ESL learners' perceptions on TikTok's features and its impact on their motivation, attitude, and a positive environment for sustainable language learning.	A mixed-method approach which includes pre-test and post-test and questionnaire, were analysed using basic statistical methods, including descriptive and inferential statistics among ESL	TikTok's video creation, duet functionality, and engaging content enhance ESL learning, while structured practice, thematic focus, and assessments foster effective speech communication development. (collaborative learning learning)	The students perceived the use of TikTok as positive and encouraging which resulted in the introduction of innovative speaking practice measures and a renewed teaching methodology for speech communications.

			learners with limited proficiency. (n=100)	
Hu & Du (2022)	To explore EFL learners' perceptions of TikTok as a tool for (MALL) and its impact on language proficiency and motivation in formal learning contexts.	A mixed-method approach was employed, involving unstructured interviews and questionnaires, conducted with university students in China. (n=23)	Students preferred TikTok's interactivity, multimedia content, and accessibility. Pedagogical strategies included integrating TikTok into lessons, promoting social learning, and leveraging user-generated content to enhance engagement and motivation. (affective learning)	Students perceived TikTok positively for language learning, valuing its engagement potential, but some remain cautious about its educational effectiveness in formal settings.
Chuah & Ch'ng (2023)	To investigate the usefulness of TikTok voice-over challenges as speaking activities for ESL learners among Malaysian undergraduates.	A case study research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods was carried out with undergraduates in Malaysia. (n=60)	TikTok features bite-sized videos, micro-learning, interactive elements (duets), and educational content. Pedagogical strategies include comprehensible input, cooperative interaction, and explicit language focus to enhance ESL learning. (collaborative learning)	Participants found TikTok voice-over challenges helpful for improving speaking skills. The study showed strong engagement and agreement on TikTok's effectiveness for language learning. Its interactive, creative features boosted motivation and participation in ESL activities.
Hongsa et al. (2023)	To investigate the efficacy of using TikTok as a platform to enhance university students' speaking proficiency in English.	Mixed-methods approach using pre and post-test, questionnaires and interview among university students in Thailand (n=60)	TikTok's duet challenge helps students improve speaking skills and encourages interaction. Teaching strategies include task-based learning, peer feedback, and	Students perceived TikTok as an effective and engaging platform for enhancing their speaking abilities, fostering creativity and confidence in public speaking.

			reflection to effectively boost English-speaking skills. (learner-oriented) (collaborative learning)	
Zhai & Razali (2021)	To investigate how TikTok can help improve English speaking skills among EFL undergraduate students.	Qualitative approach using task-based assessment in China.	The duet challenge feature allows learners to practice speaking with others, including native speakers. (collaborative learning)	TikTok enhances EFL students' oral English communication skills, engaging them through creative video assignments and peer feedback.

From the analysis, 10 studies were selected according to the predetermined criteria of this review. These studies were grouped based on the main issues explored, such as the learning outcomes highlighted and the ways TikTok was used as a teaching tool or instructional strategy in English classrooms. The grouping also provides an overview of the review, detailing the authors, key objectives, research methods, features, instructional approaches, and study outcomes. The studies originated from Malaysia (5), followed by China (2), Indonesia (1), Saudi Arabia (1), and Thailand (1). A variety of research designs was applied across the studies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

This review identified various pedagogical strategies implemented via TikTok to create an English learning ecosystem, which were categorised into three major strategies: collaborative learning, experiential learning, and affective learning. Four studies employed the collaborative learning strategy by specifically using the 'duet' feature on TikTok to interact with fellow classmates or researchers. The duet feature enables users to create split-screen videos alongside another user's video. This feature could foster interaction with native speakers or peers, potentially boosting learners' willingness to communicate and offering opportunities for collaborative learning. This collaborative learning was adapted through group interaction and teamwork. Despite using the same TikTok feature, all the studies focused on different aspects, such as motivation, attitude, grammar, and speaking abilities. According to Mulyanah et al. (2024), this feature helps to boost students' motivation to learn English. The materials delivered via this application also attract students' interest and make it easier for them to understand. Most importantly, the content can be watched and listened to by students multiple times. One study demonstrated that using TikTok to enhance participants' speaking abilities had a substantial and positive effect (Tan et al., 2023). Comparable findings were reported by Cagas (2022), who noted that students achieved higher test scores after incorporating TikTok into their learning process. Consequently, their speech communication skills and grammar showed noticeable improvement. The positive progress in test scores also indicates that learners have gained greater confidence in using English, a finding supported by other research on the positive effects of TikTok (Zaitun et al., 2021; Escamilla-Fajardo, Alguacil, & López-Carril, 2021).

Regarding the experiential learning strategy, four studies employed TikTok as a teaching and learning tool in English classrooms. This approach is based on learning through direct experience and reflection. One study (Thanga Rajan & Ismail, 2022) focused on personal exploration, active participation, problem-solving, and creating a dynamic learning environment. It allowed learners to create content, promoting hands-on learning and enabling students to practise skills and solve problems independently. These studies primarily concentrated on improving students' reading and speaking abilities.

Based on the analysis, TikTok appears to be an effective platform for enhancing students' speaking and reading skills. For instance, Revesencio et al. (2022) found that students found TikTok useful for learning English grammar. This aligns with recent research indicating that using TikTok for

English pronunciation provides numerous benefits and supports students' learning processes (Pratiwi et al., 2021), while also improving their speaking and grammar skills (Cagas, 2022). Furthermore, TikTok can serve as a medium to foster reading interest by offering information, learning opportunities, and insights (Amin, 2023). Amin (2023) also noted that half of the learners found it easy to express ideas, upload videos, and engage in various activities on TikTok. This feature enables students to actively participate in literature classes and enhance their understanding of poems, short stories, and novels (Khan et al., 2017) through TikTok's unique social framework. Unlike platforms like Facebook or Twitter, TikTok's text-based interactions in video comments facilitate more complex and detailed audio-visual exchanges, which boost learning engagement.

The last pedagogical strategy discussed is affective learning, employed in two studies (Alghameeti, 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2021). Affective learning pertains to the emotional aspects of learning, including emotions, attitudes, values, and feelings. It is one of the three domains of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, alongside the cognitive (knowledge-based) and psychomotor (skills-based) domains. The affective domain focuses on developing students' emotional responses and their ability to value, appreciate, and internalise what they learn.

Alghameeti (2022) used this strategy to assess English language learners' attitudes towards using TikTok videos for vocabulary learning, while Zhai and Razali (2021) applied it to examine English language communication competence among EFL learners. Alghameeti (2022) found that students demonstrated a positive attitude towards using TikTok for learning English vocabulary, indicating that TikTok significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition through its diverse word levels and engaging features. Students can discover new words through subtitles and captions in videos (Bernard, 2021), and TikTok also allows learners to share videos with peers, facilitating easy content distribution. Zhai and Razali (2021) reported similar findings, but focused on speaking skill acquisition.

However, they also highlighted certain issues that should be brought to the attention of teachers or instructors. For instance, cyberbullying, privacy issues related to using this application for academic purposes, and potential distractions in learning English, with a possible tendency to be attracted by other videos, might be due to students' young age and low self-regulation. Hu and Du (2022) also raised concerns about the usefulness of TikTok, noting that while using TikTok to aid English language learning through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can improve proficiency, its impact may not be as strong as traditional classroom learning. Additionally, the emotional benefits of TikTok in L2 teaching are uncertain. While learners became more motivated for speaking activities with MALL, their reduced motivation for learning a second language and willingness to communicate remain a concern. While TikTok presents opportunities for language learning, it is important for educators to remain aware of these challenges. Addressing concerns such as privacy, distractions, and maintaining motivation will help maximise the benefits of such digital platforms in education.

Evaluating TikTok's impact could provide valuable insights for educational institutions, educators, and learners, helping to assess how well it supports English language teaching and whether it meets educational goals. TikTok might show how its interactive features affect student engagement and learning compared to traditional methods. Speaking practice will extend beyond the classroom, no longer limited to teacher supervision or interactions with classmates. Instead, it will include opportunities to engage with native English speakers outside of class, enhancing the quality of practice available to students. Additionally, using TikTok could benefit students by offering varied practice and assessment opportunities, such as creating and sharing language skill videos that can be reviewed by teachers or peers. Beyond delivering short videos, TikTok could serve as a platform for interactive learning, peer collaboration, and instant feedback, enhancing the overall educational experience.

Conclusion

The review of TikTok as a pedagogical tool for English language learning reveals its substantial potential for enhancing students' speaking and reading skills. TikTok is not merely an engaging

platform but also supports English grammar learning, as evidenced by Revesencio et al. (2022). This underscores the importance of integrating social media into educational frameworks, particularly in the context of Industry 4.0, where digital literacy is crucial. TikTok's interactive features, such as duets and unique hashtags, can be utilized to create content that aligns with textbook activities and supports a flipped classroom model, where students prepare speaking materials in advance.

However, despite these positive findings, several challenges must be addressed for effective integration. Problems like reluctance, low motivation, and large class sizes obstruct students' involvement and tailored learning experiences. Additionally, issues related to self-confidence, especially in situations where content is shared publicly, must be taken into account. The effects of COVID-19 have worsened the current challenges, making it increasingly important for teachers to implement creative strategies that effectively engage students.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of TikTok on language acquisition and assess its effectiveness across various educational settings. Investigating how TikTok's features—like its content creation capabilities and collaborative learning potential—can be optimized for different learning contexts will be essential. Addressing current limitations and unanswered questions will help in understanding how social media can be effectively leveraged to enhance language learning. These insights can drive more effective and innovative educational practices, ensuring that TikTok's educational benefits are fully realized in the evolving landscape of technology-based learning.

Co-Author Contribution

The first author, Nurain Jantan Anua Jah conceived and designed the study, conducted analysis, drafted manuscript and coordinated contributions from co-authors. Nurus Syahidah Tahreb contributed to the design of the study and data analysis as well as coordinated communication with all co-authors. Qistina Ibrahim, Intan Fitri Aisyah and Nurhazwani Abdul Halim participated in data interpretation, reviewed and provided input on manuscript structure and content.

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