

TikTok y los estudiantes de inglés a través de los diferentes grupos etarios: una revisión bibliográfica

TikTok and English Language Learners Across age groups: A Bibliographic review

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Resumen

La expansión de las tecnologías digitales, particularmente de plataformas como TikTok, ha transformado la manera en que los estudiantes interactúan con el idioma inglés, generando nuevas oportunidades de aprendizaje más allá de los entornos tradicionales de aula. La plataforma TikTok cada año adquiere más relevancia, no obstante, aún existen dudas sobre sus aportes en el aprendizaje de idiomas. Por ello, este estudio analiza el uso de TikTok como apoyo en el aprendizaje del inglés, tomando en cuenta ventajas,



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limitaciones y diferencias según la edad de los estudiantes. Para ello, se realizó una revisión de literatura de los últimos 5 años utilizando estudios donde los participantes fueron niños, adolescentes y adultos. Este proceso permitió reconocer patrones en los estudios, así como vacíos en lo teórico y metodológico. Los resultados determinaron que TikTok si mejora la motivación, el interés y el desarrollo de habilidades como el habla, la escucha y aprendizaje de vocabulario, sobre todo en cortos periodos de tiempo, pero lo interesante es que es acorde a la edad pues no es igual entre niños, adolescentes ni adultos. En los niños, funciona como apoyo visual y requiere acompañamiento del docente, mientras en los adolescentes se observan los beneficios más claros, especialmente en la comunicación, aunque la mayoría de los estudios se centra en resultados de corto plazo. En los adultos, su uso es más autónomo, siempre y cuando se use con una buena planificación educativa. A pesar de estos hallazgos, la mayoría de las investigaciones fueron basadas en percepciones y en lapsos cortos de tiempo, lo que no permite entender con claridad el impacto a largo plazo. Se concluye que, aunque TikTok tiene potencial como herramienta complementaria, su efectividad depende de una integración pedagógica estructurada. Por ello, se requieren investigaciones longitudinales que permitan evaluar su impacto educativo a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: TikTok, aprendizaje del inglés, EFL, habilidades lingüísticas, aprendizaje digital.

Abstract

The expansion of digital technologies, particularly platforms such as TikTok, has transformed the way students interact with the English language, creating new learning opportunities beyond traditional classroom environments. However, despite its growing presence in educational contexts, questions remain regarding the depth and sustainability of its contributions to language learning. Therefore, this study examines the use of TikTok as a support tool for English learning, taking into account its advantages, limitations, and differences according to students' age. A literature review covering the last five years was carried out, focusing on studies with children, adolescents, and adults. This process made it possible to identify patterns across studies as well as theoretical and methodological gaps. The results show that TikTok does improve motivation, interest, and the development of skills such as

speaking, listening, and vocabulary learning, especially over short periods of time, but importantly its effects vary by age. For children, it works as a visual aid and requires teacher guidance; for adolescents, clearer benefits are observed particularly in communication although most studies examine short-term outcomes. Among adults, use tends to be more autonomous, provided it is integrated into well-planned instruction. Despite these findings, most investigations rely on perceptions and short time frames, which prevents a clear understanding of long-term impact. The study concludes that, while TikTok has potential as a complementary tool, its effectiveness depends on structured pedagogical integration. Therefore, longitudinal research is needed to evaluate its long-term educational impact.

Keywords: TikTok, English language learning, EFL, language skills, digital learning.

Introduction

The exponential growth of digital technologies at the time has increasingly shaped foreign language learning through interactive, learner-centered digital environments (Azadov, 2025; Uddin et al., 2022; Garrigos-Simón et al., 2023). Social media platforms allow students to interact daily with new and authentic content, communicate with global audiences, and use language beyond traditional classroom boundaries; virtuality enables them to explore the outside world without leaving home (Karsenti et al., 2020). This evolution is redefining how educators and researchers approach language teaching and learning. (Al-Azawei & Alowayr, 2025) TikTok stands out for its popularity among young users and its immersive short-form video format, which enables a unique blend of audio, text, visuals, and storytelling. (Hanansi et al., 2025) This makes it a distinct source of authentic, diverse language input. Thus, the central argument of this review is that TikTok offers a novel opportunity to improve the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), making it important to analyze its educational usefulness (Yang et al., 2025; Alvarez et al., 2024).

Recent research indicates that TikTok can support the development of various English-language skills. In particular, by watching short videos learners can pick up new vocabulary more naturally, since they are repeatedly exposed to words used

real-life contexts (Alghameeti, 2022; Erwani et al., 2022). Likewise, the platform's interactive features also encourage students to produce their own content, which can help improve pronunciation and speaking fluency through practice, repetition, and imitation of real-life language use (Hongsa et al., 2023; Nasrudin et al., 2024). TikTok may also support listening comprehension since learners are exposed to authentic accents, speaking styles, and everyday conversations that help them better understand spoken English in different situations (Alolayan, 2025).

TikTok can be used in different educational levels and in various ways depending on the students' age and learning needs. In primary education, it is mainly used to teach vocabulary and simple grammar through attractive visual content (Erwani et al., 2022). In secondary education, the platform helps students improve pronunciation and listening skills because they are exposed to authentic audiovisual material and everyday language use (Alvarez et al., 2024). At the university level, TikTok encourages activities based on collaboration, content creation, and real communication, which can strengthen language skills and increase student participation in the learning process (Nasrudin et al., 2024).

Although several studies show positive outcomes, using TikTok in education also brings certain challenges. Researchers point out issues such as distractions caused by entertainment-focused content, variations in the quality and reliability of information, and the absence of clear instructional structure when it is not properly guided by teachers (Alshreef & Khadawardi, 2023; Yang et al., 2025). These results indicate that, although TikTok can support language learning, its effectiveness depends greatly on how it is integrated into teaching practices and classroom activities.

Although studies about TikTok in language education have increased in recent years, the existing research is still limited and scattered. Most studies only examine certain language skills or specific educational contexts, which makes it difficult to obtain a broader understanding of how the platform affects different groups of learners and learning environments (Espiritu, 2025)

This review critically examines how TikTok affects English language learners across age groups. The main argument advanced in this review is that the platform's capacity for immersive, interactive, and authentic communication offers unique

opportunities and challenges for language skill development, pedagogical integration, and learner engagement. The aim is to synthesize current findings to clarify key benefits and limitations of TikTok in English language education.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employs a narrative literature review design to synthesize and critically analyze existing research and provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular academic topic. Narrative reviews are particularly useful for integrating findings from studies that employ diverse methodological approaches and for identifying emerging trends, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps within a field.

This review brings together findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies published between 2020 and 2026, a period marked by the rapid growth of platforms like tik tok.

Combining findings from various educational contexts and learner groups, this study aims to identify recurring trends in the literature concerning TikTok's effects on language learning outcomes, instructional practices, and student engagement.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases and scientific journal repositories commonly used in educational and linguistic research. These included: ScienceDirect, Scopus, Google Scholar, Academic journal platforms such as *System*, *MEXTESOL Journal*, and other peer-reviewed journals in applied linguistics and educational technology.

To ensure a comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies, a set of keywords and descriptors in English and Spanish was employed. These terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) in order to refine the search and identify studies directly related to the topic.

The following search strings were used:

“TikTok AND EFL AND Ecuador AND ("high school" OR "higher education")”;

“TikTok AND students AND high school AND English teaching NOT advertising”;

“TikTok AND high school AND SLA AND EFL AND learning”; “TikTok AND English

as a foreign language AND (language skills OR vocabulary acquisition OR pronunciation OR speaking skills OR listening comprehension).”

The initial search yielded a broad set of publications, which were subsequently screened for relevance to the study's objectives.

Study Selection Process

The selection process followed a three-stage screening procedure designed to ensure the relevance and academic quality of the sources included in the review:

First, relevant studies were identified through database searches using the predefined keywords; next, titles and abstracts were examined to determine whether the studies addressed the use of TikTok or similar social media platforms within English language learning contexts; as third step, full-text articles were reviewed to evaluate their methodological rigor, relevance to language learning outcomes, and alignment with the objectives of this review.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles, empirical studies, and research conducted within educational contexts involving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the literature included in the review, the following criteria were applied.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles published between 2020 and 2026	Studies published before 2020
Empirical research related to English language learning	Studies unrelated to language learning
Research focusing on speaking, vocabulary, grammar, or listening skills	Studies addressing social media only for entertainment purposes
Studies involving educational contexts (primary, secondary, or higher education)	Opinion articles without academic support
Research examining the pedagogical use of social media or digital technologies	Non-academic sources or irrelevant reports
Articles published in English or Spanish	Non-scholarly literature

Data Analysis

Once the relevant studies were selected, the information was analyzed through a qualitative thematic synthesis. Each article was examined to identify the language skills addressed (speaking, vocabulary, grammar, listening), the research design used in the study, the educational context and participant characteristics, The main findings related to TikTok and language learning, and the pedagogical implications and limitations identified by the authors

The findings were subsequently organized into thematic categories, which guided the development of the analytical sections of this review, including the impact of TikTok on language skills, pedagogical frameworks, psycho-affective factors, and implementation challenges.

Ethical Considerations and Use of Artificial Intelligence

In accordance with principles of academic integrity and transparency in research, the authors declare that generative Artificial Intelligence tools (Gemini and ChatGPT) were used solely during the editing and language refinement stages of the manuscript.

These tools were used to improve the organization and clarity of the text, support language revision and writing coherence, and help summarize academic sources that had already been selected by the authors. Artificial Intelligence was not used to create data, invent references, or generate original research results. The authors of this study were fully responsible for checking the accuracy of the references, verifying the APA 7th edition citations, and interpreting the information found in the literature review.

Results

Social Media and Digital Channels in Language Learning

The expansion of digital technologies has changed how languages are learned and practiced. Social media has become a relevant informal learning environment where learners interact with authentic language input and engage in collaborative communication. Unlike traditional classrooms, digital platforms offer constant access through multimedia content, giving learners the opportunity to study the language in a more flexible and independent way (Ahen et al., 2025) Studies show

that social media can help language learning because it promotes interaction, gives students access to authentic materials, and allows them to communicate and express their ideas in creative ways (Uddin et al., 2022).

From an educational point of view, social media allows students to do more than just receive information, since they can also participate actively in the learning process and build knowledge through interaction. These digital spaces encourage communication, collaboration, and interaction among peers, which are important elements in modern language learning. According to Garrigos-Simón et al. (2023), social media has become a space where teaching and everyday online communication come together, creating opportunities for informal language learning outside the classroom. This reflects the growing use of technology in education, where students learn not only through textbooks but also through digital media and online interaction (Bobkina et al., 2025).

Video-based platforms are especially important in language learning because they combine images, audio, and text, which can make understanding easier and capture the attention of younger students who are more familiar with digital technology (Tiyana et al., 2023). In addition, Yang et al. (2025) explain that short-video platforms such as TikTok have attracted the interest of educators due to their educational potential, particularly in higher education. Their findings suggest that TikTok can increase student participation, encourage collaboration, and support creative communication during learning activities.

The increasing interest in TikTok as a learning tool is closely connected to its interactive design. Unlike traditional educational technologies, TikTok allows users not only to watch content but also to create and share videos, comment on posts, and participate in trends that involve imitation and creativity. These characteristics give learners opportunities to practice language in a more dynamic and realistic way, similar to everyday communication contexts (Rosa & Suhartatik, 2025). In addition, Fitria (2023) explains that many educators are beginning to use TikTok as a complementary teaching resource, since students can practice English through short videos, storytelling activities, and interactive challenges. In this way, the platform becomes more than just a source of information because it also allows learners to actively use and produce the language.

Different studies point out that TikTok can be useful in education because it makes learning more attractive and enjoyable for students. The platform combines videos, subtitles, music, body language, and visual explanations, which can help learners better understand and use the language in a more natural way. Thorvik (2023) explains that TikTok also gives students the chance to watch real forms of communication and later apply or adapt them in their own interactions. As a result, students often feel more interested and involved in learning activities, especially those who regularly use social media and digital content in their daily lives.

One important advantage of learning through social media is that students can access language content from different places and in different situations, even when educational resources are limited (Ahen et al., 2025, pp. 889–904). In addition, Vargas-Saritama and Espinoza-Celi (2026) explain that social media can broaden learning opportunities by allowing students to practice in a flexible and accessible way. However, they also point out that using these platforms in formal education can create difficulties related to distractions, the quality of online content, and the need for proper teacher guidance.

Although there are still some challenges, research shows that social media platforms are becoming more important in language education (Tan & Yunus, 2023). Digital applications such as TikTok can expose learners to authentic language, encourage interaction, and create opportunities for creative communication. However, their effectiveness in education depends on how well they are incorporated into learning activities and on the way students engage with the online content.

The literature suggests that social media has gradually become a space where language learning can take place in both formal and informal ways (Guamán Condoy, 2024). Among these platforms, TikTok has gained special attention because it is widely used by people of different ages and combines entertainment with communication. To better understand its contribution to English language learning, it is important to analyze TikTok within the wider context of learning through social media and explore how its different features can support language development in diverse groups of learners.

Although the studies reviewed in this section suggest that TikTok can help improve different language skills, such as speaking, vocabulary learning, and listening

comprehension, it is also important to understand the theories that explain learning in digital environments. Educational approaches like constructivism, connectivism, and informal digital learning provide useful perspectives for understanding how social media platforms can encourage interaction, collaboration, and learner independence in language learning contexts. For this reason, the following section examines the main pedagogical theories that support the use of TikTok as a possible tool for teaching and learning English.

Conceptual Basis of TikTok in Language Learning

The growing use of social media in education has led researchers to explore the theories that explain how digital tools can support language learning. In the case of TikTok, its value should therefore be understood not only from a technological perspective but also through learning theories that emphasize interaction, participation, and informal ways of building knowledge (Nguyen & Diederich, 2023). It is important to mention that students develop language skills not only by receiving information, but also by participating in activities where they interpret ideas, create content, and share meanings with other people. Studies on language learning through social media show that platforms such as TikTok encourage students to use language in a more active and participatory way, especially through the creation and sharing of audiovisual content (Tan & Yunus, 2023).

Apoko and Waluyo (2025) point out that platforms like this support networked learning because users can share ideas, respond to each other, and build knowledge together. In short, in language teaching these online interactions can create genuine chances to communicate that go beyond the usual classroom walls.

Another important framework for understanding the educational role of TikTok is online informal language learning (OILL). Unlike formal classroom learning, informal language learning happens when people use and experience language naturally in everyday situations, often outside school settings.

Fitria (2023) suggests that TikTok provides an informal environment for English learning, where students engage with short videos, interactive challenges, and storytelling, enabling them to practice the language more naturally and with less anxiety than in conventional classroom activities.

Research on TikTok-based activities indicates that many learners find the platform accessible and enjoyable for practicing English (Laili, 2023; Nasrudin et al., 2024), and because it blends entertainment with communication, students tend to feel more confident trying out the language and expressing themselves creatively, a level of active engagement that aligns with constructivist views that learning is more meaningful when learners participate directly rather than passively receive information.

The structure of TikTok also fits with ideas from microlearning and multimedia learning, which focus on short, focused learning moments supported by both visual and audio input. Its short-video format presents information in small, easy-to-digest segments that users can quickly access and often revisit through recommendation algorithms. Yang et al. (2025) explain that this type of format can boost learner engagement and increase repeated exposure to language, which helps improve vocabulary learning and listening skills.

Another aspect that supports the educational relevance of TikTok is its role in promoting social interaction and participatory culture in digital spaces. The platform encourages users to interact with existing content through comments, duets, and collaborative trends, which turns communication into an active and interactive process rather than a passive one. Garrigos-Simón et al. (2023) point out that these forms of participation can help develop communicative skills because learners are exposed to real patterns of language use and are also able to express themselves creatively in different contexts.

Moreover, motivation in social media use has been linked to language learning progress. Positive factors such as enjoyment, confidence, and persistence can affect learners' willingness to speak in a second language. Studies in second language acquisition show that aspects like foreign language enjoyment, the ideal L2 self, and perseverance can significantly contribute to the development of speaking skills (Fathi & Behzadpoor, 2025). Platforms such as TikTok may support these motivational processes by offering a more relaxed environment where learners feel less pressure and are more willing to try out the language and share their ideas publicly.

Despite these theoretical benefits, it is also necessary to consider some limitations related to the educational use of TikTok. Although TikTok can promote interaction

and informal learning, its algorithm-driven design also affects the type of content users see. While TikTok often promotes highly engaging videos, these are not always designed with educational goals in mind (Wang, 2022). Consequently, the platform's usefulness for learning hinges not just on its features but on how teachers and students intentionally incorporate it into structured, meaningful activities.

Overall, existing theoretical approaches suggest that TikTok can support language learning by bringing together social interaction, informal learning, and multimedia-based communication (Nguyen & Diederich, 2023). Constructivist and connectivist theories help explain how learners develop knowledge through participation in digital networks, while informal learning perspectives emphasize the value of authentic communication in everyday contexts (Tham et al., 2021). Taken together, these frameworks help explain why TikTok has gained increasing attention in language education research and why it may create new learning opportunities for English learners in different educational settings.

Although these pedagogical frameworks support the inclusion of social media in education, the effectiveness of these tools also depends largely on learners' psychological and emotional involvement. Elements such as motivation, confidence in one's abilities, and perceived usefulness can strongly affect students' willingness to use digital learning resources (Zin & Osman, 2026). For this reason, it is important to also consider the emotional and psychological factors that influence how students experience and engage with platforms like TikTok in language learning.

Empirical Evidence of TikTok in English Language Learning

Although the platform was originally designed for entertainment and social interaction, several studies suggest that its multimedia and participatory features can support language learning. The empirical literature shows that TikTok has been used to support a range of linguistic competencies, including speaking, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and grammar learning. (Gao et al., 2023) However, the findings also reveal differences in how the platform is used and evaluated across educational contexts.

TikTok and the Development of Speaking Skills

One of the most frequently examined areas in the literature is the role of TikTok in improving learners' speaking abilities. The platform's video-based format allows

students to produce short oral presentations, respond to prompts, or participate in interactive challenges that require verbal communication. These activities can help learners practice pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in speaking English. (Inggris et al., 2025, pp. 1-10)

Several empirical studies report positive outcomes in this area. For example, research conducted with EFL students indicates that integrating TikTok-based tasks into classroom activities can enhance learners' speaking performance and participation (Hongsa et al., 2023; Basri & Wahyuni, 2024). Similarly, Annapis (2024) found that using TikTok videos in speaking activities encouraged students to practice oral communication more frequently, particularly when tasks involved creative storytelling or short presentations.

Other studies emphasize the role of video creation as a key factor in speaking development. When learners produce their own content, they must organize ideas, rehearse pronunciation, and convey meaning concisely. (Chen and Kang, 2023) Note that recording and reviewing videos can promote self-reflection and help students monitor their language performance. Likewise, Amer (2025) reports that synchronous TikTok-based activities in workplace English courses can improve speaking skills by providing opportunities for repeated practice and peer interaction. Research focusing on learners' perceptions also highlights the motivational benefits of using TikTok for speaking practice. Undergraduate students often say that TikTok creates a better space for communication, which helps reduce their fear of making mistakes (Nasrudin et al., 2024; Yulita & Hertiki, 2023). This aspect is particularly relevant because speaking anxiety is widely recognized as a major barrier to oral communication in a foreign language (Septiawan et al., 2025). Letting students practice and refine their videos before they publish them may help them gradually become more confident speaking the language.

Despite these positive findings, some scholars caution that improvements in speaking skills depend largely on how the platform is integrated into learning activities. (Villalva Reinoso et al., 2024) argue that social media alone does not guarantee language development; rather, pedagogically structured tasks are necessary to ensure that students engage in meaningful communication.

Another area widely explored in the literature is TikTok's potential to support vocabulary development. The platform's short-video format often includes subtitles, visual cues, and contextual examples, which can facilitate comprehension and retention of new words. Several studies suggest that repeated exposure to vocabulary through multimedia content may support incidental language learning. (Bisson et al., 2014, pp. 855-877)

Alghameeti (2022), for instance, showed that TikTok helps expand vocabulary when videos introduce new words in meaningful situations. In line with this, Alshreef and Khadawardi (2023) found that learners who practiced vocabulary via TikTok activities demonstrated improved memory retention and higher engagement compared with traditional instruction. Studies with younger learners also back up these findings. Erwani et al. (2022) observed that elementary school students showed measurable improvement in vocabulary knowledge after participating in TikTok-assisted learning activities. In a similar vein, Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) found that using TikTok videos helped primary school learners better understand and practice regular verb forms.

TikTok has also been explored as a tool for teaching grammatical structures. (May & Wright, 2025) For example, research with junior high school students shows that the platform can support learning verb tenses through short explanatory videos and contextualized examples (Muhammad, 2023). Because TikTok content often combines visual explanations, narration, and real-life examples, learners may find grammatical concepts easier to understand and remember. (Rosa & Suhartatik, 2025)

Overall, these studies suggest that TikTok may support both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning, particularly when content is designed to highlight lexical items within meaningful contexts. (Sely & Priyatmojo, 2025)

Listening Comprehension and Exposure to Authentic Input

Another important contribution of TikTok to language learning is its support for listening comprehension. Social media platforms expose learners to authentic language use from speakers with different accents, speech patterns, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity of input may support listening development by familiarizing learners with natural spoken language (Duha et al., 2026)

According to Alolayan (2025), first-year undergraduates who used TikTok for listening practice showed greater gains in listening comprehension than those using only traditional resources. The researchers attribute this to the combination of visual cues and spoken input in short clips, which helps learners understand meaning more effectively—especially with subtitles.

However, the effectiveness of such exposure depends on the type of content learners encounter (Vargas-Saritama, 2026). Wang (2022) explains that TikTok's recommendation algorithm prioritizes engagement over educational value, meaning not all content contributes equally to language learning. As a result, some scholars emphasize the need for guided use of the platform, where educators help students identify relevant and pedagogically useful content (Vargas-Saritama & Espinoza-Celi, 2026).

Learner Perceptions and Informal Learning Experiences

Beyond measurable linguistic outcomes, many studies also focus on learners' perceptions and experiences when using TikTok for language learning. Understanding how students perceive the platform is important because attitudes toward learning technologies often influence engagement and learning outcomes. (Rotar, 2025)

Several studies report generally positive perceptions among learners. For instance, Laili (2023) found that students viewed TikTok as an enjoyable and accessible medium for learning English, particularly because it combines entertainment with educational content. Similarly, Thorvik (2023) suggests that TikTok can foster informal language learning by exposing students to authentic communication outside the classroom. Other studies highlight social media's role in supporting learner autonomy. Ramadhani et al. (2025), Tasisa & Teshome (2024) argue that social platforms let students practice independently by engaging with content that reflects their interests and preferences. This kind of engagement matches trends in Web 2.0 learning environments, where learners take an active role in creating and sharing knowledge (Uddin et al., 2022).

Research across different educational settings also shows the platform's potential. For example, Álvarez et al. (2024) found that adding TikTok activities in secondary schools can support second-language acquisition when used alongside classroom

teaching. Likewise, Nu'man et al. (2022) observed that TikTok-based activities can promote verbal language development even in early childhood.

Still, researchers note that learners' experiences vary by demographic and social factors (Salazar et al., 2023, pp. 24–35). Burgaleta-Pérez et al. (2024) point out that TikTok content often reflects cultural, generational, and social dynamics, which can affect how people use the platform.

Despite the motivational and affective benefits reported in prior studies, using social media in education brings challenges (Urlanda et al., 2025). Scholars identify several limitations for TikTok's academic use, such as distractions, unequal access to technology, and a lack of clear pedagogical guidance. These issues highlight the need to examine carefully the barriers that can hinder effective implementation of TikTok in language-learning contexts.

Table 2: Comparative table

Stage	Short-term Benefits	Long-term Benefits	Short-term Challenges	Long-term Challenges
Children (early and primary education)	- Improvement of basic vocabulary through repetition and visual content (Anumanthan & Hashim, 2022; Erwani et al., 2022). - Development of early language skills and verbal expression (Nu'man et al., 2022). - High motivation and attention due to audiovisual format (Agustina & Dharmawan, 2024).	- Possible progressive strengthening of vocabulary through multimodal exposure (Bisson et al., 2014). - Initial development of communicative skills if guided use is implemented.	- Distraction caused by non-educational content due to the entertainment format (Wang, 2022). - Difficulty maintaining attention on pedagogical objectives without teacher guidance.	- Risk of negative effects on language development and social skills if use is excessive or unregulated (Gath et al., 2026). - Fragmented learning due to unstructured content.
Young learners (secondary education)	- Improvement in speaking, listening, and vocabulary (Alvarez et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2023; Maria & Sujarwati, 2025). - Significant increase	- Development of autonomy in informal learning (Nguyen & Diederich, 2023). - Consolidation	- Superficial use of content (passive consumption) instead of active learning (Nasrudin et al., 2024).	- Lack of strong evidence on sustained effects on linguistic competence (Ahen et al., 2025). - Possible inconsistent

	in motivation and engagement (Agustina & Dharmawan, 2024; Mat Zin & Md Osman, 2026). - Greater active participation through videos and interactive tasks (Chen & Kang, 2023).	of communicative competence when combined with formal instruction (Duha et al., 2026). - Improvement of digital literacy and critical thinking (Bobkina et al., 2025).	- Dependence on entertainment as the main motivator.	learning due to algorithm-driven content (Baumann et al., 2025).
Adults (higher education)	- Improvement in speaking and listening in academic and professional contexts (Amer, 2025; Alolayan, 2025). - Autonomous and flexible learning (Ramadhani et al., 2025). - Positive perception of usefulness and ease of use (Al-Azawei & Alowayr, 2025).	- Strengthening of continuous autonomous learning (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025). - Integration with pedagogical approaches such as constructivism and connectivism. - Development of digital competencies applied to learning (Azadov, 2025).	- Use focused more on perceptions than measurable results (Laili, 2023). - Need for structured instructional design to be effective (Vargas-Saritama & Espinoza-Celi, 2026).	- Lack of longitudinal studies confirming sustained real impact (Yang et al., 2025). - Risk of distraction and non-systematic learning due to algorithmic content (Wang, 2022).

Within the table, the use of TikTok is analyzed across three key age groups in the learning process. The evidence shows that its use with children works best as visual support, but it also presents the greatest risks if not properly regulated; that is, although it has been used, it is not recommended without a clear pedagogical strategy.

On the other hand, young learners are the group with the strongest positive empirical evidence, particularly in skills such as speaking and motivation. However, most studies are short-term.

In contrast, adults demonstrate a more autonomous and strategic use, aligned with theories such as constructivism, but with a strong dependence on pedagogical integration.

Nevertheless, research over recent years has primarily focused on short-term benefits, leaving a gap in understanding the long-term impact of using this platform in education.

Discussion

TikTok offers multiple benefits as a complementary tool for English language learning, particularly by increasing students' motivation and engagement, which are key factors for successful language acquisition. Its dynamic, visually rich format promotes active participation and frequent interaction with authentic content, facilitating the development of essential skills such as speaking, vocabulary, and listening in more engaging, contextualized ways (Agustina & Dharmawan, 2024; Gao et al., 2023; Maria & Sujarwati, 2025).

In addition, because the platform is easy to access and more entertaining for students, many learners feel more motivated to practice English frequently, which can help improve their confidence and communication skills (Laili, 2023). Research generally describes TikTok as a complementary tool for education rather than a replacement for traditional teaching. Its main value is in supporting and enriching classroom learning through informal, independent, and socially interactive learning experiences (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Nguyen & Diederich, 2023). This idea is connected to current educational approaches that understand learning as something developed through interaction, exposure, and digital communication. For this reason, TikTok tends to be more effective when it is used to reinforce organized instruction instead of replacing formal teaching methods (Duha et al., 2026; Vargas & Espinoza, 2026).

In classroom settings, TikTok can be used through activities such as creating short videos, completing interactive tasks, and developing collaborative projects that encourage meaningful learning. These strategies help create student-centered environments where learners use the language in creative and authentic ways (Benitez-Correa & Gonzalez-Torres, 2025; Basri & Wahyuni, 2024). They can also

help students improve digital skills and critical thinking, making learning feel more connected to their daily digital experiences (Bobkina et al., 2025).

However, several limitations should be noted. Findings across studies are mixed, underscoring the need for more rigorous, longitudinal research to clarify TikTok's educational impact (Ahen et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). Moreover, because the platform is driven by algorithms and entertainment, it can become a source of distraction unless its pedagogical use is carefully organized (Baumann et al., 2025; Wang, 2022). These issues reinforce the need to incorporate TikTok within a thoughtfully designed instructional framework rather than treating it as a standalone remedy (Gath et al., 2026).

Although research on TikTok in language learning has shown promising results, the existing literature still has several limitations. Most studies have concentrated on short-term effects, such as gains in speaking ability, vocabulary learning, or listening skills after specific classroom interventions (Maria & Sujarwati, 2025). However, these results are limited because they do not fully explain how continuous and long-term use of social media platforms may affect the language learning process over time (Çelik & Baturay, 2024)

A considerable number of studies report positive outcomes when TikTok is used as a pedagogical tool. (Vargas-Saritama, 2026) Research across contexts indicates that the platform can support vocabulary learning (Alghameeti, 2022; Alshreef & Khadawardi, 2023), improve listening comprehension (Alolayan, 2025), and enhance speaking performance among EFL learners (Hongsa et al., 2023; Basri & Wahyuni, 2024; Annapis, 2024). Similarly, other investigations suggest that short videos can increase learner engagement and create opportunities for more interactive language practice (Chen & Kang, 2023; Tasisa & Teshome, 2024). These findings are consistent with broader studies on digital learning environments, which highlight how Web 2.0 technologies can encourage collaborative and participatory learning experiences (Uddin et al., 2022). However, a deeper review of the literature shows that many studies are based on short-term interventions or surveys focused on students' opinions and perceptions (Agustina & Dharmawan, 2024). For example, several researchers analyze how learners feel about using TikTok as a learning tool

instead of examining its long-term effects on language development (Laili, 2023; Nasrudin et al., 2024; Yulita & Hertiki, 2023).

While learner perceptions provide useful insights into motivation and engagement, they do not necessarily demonstrate whether sustained use of the platform leads to lasting improvements in linguistic competence.

Another limitation is the lack of longitudinal research examining how social media exposure may influence language acquisition over extended periods. (Gath et al., 2026, pp. 638-652) Long-term studies in language learning are particularly important because linguistic development typically occurs gradually and requires consistent exposure and practice (Wei, 2022) Research outside the specific context of TikTok has shown that long-term learning trajectories can significantly influence foreign language acquisition, particularly during early stages of education (Koşulu-Sancar et al., 2026). However, similar longitudinal evidence remains scarce in studies focusing on social media-mediated language learning.

Furthermore, existing research has primarily focused on specific educational settings, such as secondary schools and university classrooms, leaving other learner populations relatively unexplored. (Vargas-Saritama, 2026) Although some studies have investigated younger learners (Anumanthan & Hashim, 2022; Nu'man et al., 2022) or higher-education contexts (Benitez-Correa & Gonzalez-Torres, 2025), there remains limited research on how learners of diverse ages interact with TikTok as a language-learning environment. Considering that social media platforms are widely used by individuals across different age groups, understanding these variations could provide valuable insights into how informal digital environments support language learning throughout the lifespan. (Zulkepli et al., 2025, pp. 4729-4738)

In addition, TikTok's algorithmic structure raises important questions for future research. The platform's recommendation system plays a crucial role in determining the content users encounter, prioritizing material that generates engagement over educational value (Wang, 2022). While this mechanism can increase exposure to language input, it may also lead to fragmented learning experiences if the content lacks pedagogical coherence. As a result, scholars have emphasized the importance of examining how algorithm-driven content distribution shapes learning opportunities and influences learners' exposure to authentic language use (Yang et al., 2025). 63

Another area that deserves further exploration is the pedagogical integration of TikTok into formal education. Studies indicate that TikTok can support classroom teaching, but its success depends on careful instructional design and well-defined learning goals (Vargas-Saritama & Espinoza-Celi, 2026); without proper guidance, students may focus on entertainment content and miss the platform's educational potential (Vargas-Saritama & Espinoza-Celi, 2026)

Beyond immediate learning outcomes, understanding the long-term implications of TikTok-mediated language learning is essential. If integrated effectively, social media platforms could foster learner autonomy by encouraging individuals to engage with language beyond classroom boundaries. Informal exposure to authentic communication may strengthen learners' confidence and willingness to use the language in real-world contexts (Fathi & Behzadpoor, 2025). Moreover, the combination of visual storytelling, music, and social interaction may create memorable learning experiences that support sustained motivation over time. (Hanansi et al., 2024, p. 1096)

However, the long-term impact of these platforms may also present challenges. Continuous exposure to highly dynamic, algorithm-driven content could affect learners' attention patterns or lead to superficial engagement with linguistic material. (Baumann et al., 2025). Therefore, future research should examine how educators can balance the motivational benefits of social media with the need for structured, meaningful learning experiences.

In this context, conducting comprehensive bibliographic reviews becomes particularly important. By synthesizing findings from diverse studies and educational contexts, such reviews can help identify patterns, methodological limitations, and emerging research directions in the field. As digital technologies continue to transform how learners interact with language, understanding the pedagogical potential and limitations of platforms like TikTok is crucial for developing innovative and sustainable approaches to language education.

Ultimately, examining TikTok within the broader framework of digital language learning not only contributes to academic discussions but also offers practical insights for educators seeking to connect formal instruction with learners' everyday digital experiences. Future research that integrates longitudinal perspectives, diverse

learner populations, and interdisciplinary approaches will be essential for determining whether social media platforms can play a lasting and meaningful role in language education. (Denojean-Mairet et al., 2024)

The literature reviewed in this section highlights the growing interest in TikTok as a potential tool for English language learning. While previous studies have explored its impact on language skills, theoretical foundations, and affective factors influencing learner engagement, important gaps remain regarding the platform's broader educational implications, particularly for learners of diverse ages and learning contexts. To address these gaps, the present study conducts a bibliographic review to identify current research trends, theoretical perspectives, and limitations in the existing literature on TikTok and English language learners.

Conclusions

This study, based on a literature review from the last five years, examined the role of TikTok as a complementary tool for learning English as a foreign language. Overall, the findings suggest that the platform can support important aspects of language learning; in particular, it appears to boost motivation and engagement and to help develop skills such as speaking, listening, and vocabulary. However, these positive effects are mostly short-term and, moreover, depend on how the platform is used in educational settings.

The impact also varies by age group: for example, children mainly use it as visual support when guided by a teacher; meanwhile, adolescents show stronger benefits in participation and communication skills; and adults tend to use it more independently, although they still need structured teaching to achieve better results. Therefore, TikTok should be seen as a support tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods, since its effectiveness increases when it is integrated with clear learning objectives and proper instructional design. At the same time, the literature shows several limitations: for instance, many studies focus on short-term results and rely heavily on students' perceptions, and additionally there are challenges such as distraction and algorithm-driven content that prioritizes entertainment over learning. For these reasons, further research is needed especially

long-term studies, to better understand its real impact and to explore effective ways of using it in formal education.

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