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The Impact of TikTok use on english language learning: innovation, motivation, and the development of students' communicative skills

Impacto del uso de TikTok en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés: innovación, motivación y desarrollo de las competencias comunicativas de los estudiantes

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of digital technologies into education has transformed foreign language learning processes, creating new opportunities for interaction, autonomy, and access to authentic linguistic resources. This study aimed to analyze the impact of TikTok use on English language learning, focusing on its contribution to educational innovation, student motivation, and the development of communicative skills. A systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Academic databases were searched, and 15 scientific studies published between 2008 and 2026 were selected according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings indicate that TikTok can function as a complementary educational resource by providing audiovisual and interactive environments that support vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, listening comprehension, speaking development, and learner engagement. Additionally, the platform promotes autonomous learning by allowing students to access and create English-language content beyond traditional classroom settings. However, the reviewed evidence also identifies challenges related to distraction, unreliable content, excessive use, privacy concerns, and the need for digital literacy. It is concluded that TikTok does not replace formal English instruction but can enhance language learning when integrated through appropriate pedagogical strategies, teacher guidance, and critical use of digital resources.

Keywords: TikTok, english language learning, digital learning, motivation, communicative skills, mobile-assisted language learning.

RESUMEN

La creciente incorporación de tecnologías digitales en la educación ha transformado los procesos de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, generando nuevas oportunidades de interacción, autonomía y acceso a recursos lingüísticos auténticos. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar el impacto del uso de TikTok en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés, considerando su contribución a la innovación educativa, la motivación estudiantil y el desarrollo de habilidades comunicativas. Se realizó una revisión sistemática de literatura científica siguiendo las directrices PRISMA 2020. La búsqueda bibliográfica se efectuó en bases de datos académicas especializadas, seleccionando 15 estudios científicos entre 2008 y 2026 mediante criterios de inclusión y exclusión previamente establecidos. Los resultados evidencian que TikTok puede funcionar como un recurso educativo complementario al proporcionar ambientes audiovisuales e interactivos que favorecen la adquisición de vocabulario, la práctica de pronunciación, la comprensión auditiva, la expresión oral y la participación del estudiante. Además, la plataforma favorece el aprendizaje autónomo al permitir el acceso y creación de contenido en inglés fuera del aula tradicional. Sin embargo, los estudios también identifican desafíos relacionados con la distracción, la calidad de la información, el uso excesivo, la privacidad y la necesidad de fortalecer las competencias digitales. Se concluye que TikTok no sustituye la enseñanza formal del inglés, pero puede enriquecerla cuando se integra mediante estrategias pedagógicas adecuadas, acompañamiento docente y un uso crítico de los recursos digitales.

Palabras clave: TikTok, aprendizaje del inglés, tecnología educativa, motivación, habilidades comunicativas, aprendizaje móvil.



1. INTRODUCTION

English language learning has become an essential competence in contemporary education due to the increasing globalization, intercultural communication, and technological development that characterize modern societies. In recent decades, foreign language teaching has undergone significant transformations as digital technologies have changed the ways in which students access information, interact with others, and practice linguistic skills. The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into educational contexts has created new learning environments that promote interaction, autonomy, and personalized learning experiences. Within this technological evolution, social media platforms have progressively moved beyond their original purpose of entertainment and have become potential spaces for informal learning, collaboration, and language development (Godwin-Jones, 2021; Kessler, 2018).

Among the digital platforms that have gained considerable influence among young learners, TikTok has emerged as a relevant tool due to its short-video format, audiovisual characteristics, and interactive nature. The platform enables users to encounter authentic English language input through educational videos, cultural content, conversations, pronunciation practices, vocabulary explanations, and real-life expressions. Unlike traditional approaches to language learning that often emphasize structured classroom activities and textbook-based instruction, TikTok provides opportunities for continuous exposure to English in informal contexts, allowing students to engage with the language through content that reflects their everyday digital experiences (Wang & Vásquez, 2022; Li & Hafner, 2023). Consequently, TikTok represents a potential complementary resource that may enrich English learning processes by connecting educational practices with students' technological habits and interests.

The influence of TikTok on English language learning extends beyond simple exposure to digital content, as the platform may contribute to important educational factors such as motivation, engagement, and the development of communicative skills. Through watching native and non-native English speakers, practicing pronunciation, repeating expressions, creating videos, and interacting with other users, students may strengthen linguistic abilities including listening comprehension, speaking performance, vocabulary acquisition, and



pragmatic competence. From the perspective of second language acquisition, meaningful exposure to authentic language contexts facilitates the relationship between linguistic knowledge and real communication, allowing learners to perceive English as a practical tool for interaction rather than merely an academic subject (Richards, 2017; Nation, 2020). Therefore, digital environments such as TikTok may provide additional opportunities for students to develop communicative competence through frequent and contextualized language practice.

Nevertheless, the incorporation of TikTok into English language education also involves several challenges associated with content reliability, excessive use, distraction, and the passive consumption of information. Although the platform offers innovative possibilities for language learning, its educational effectiveness depends on appropriate pedagogical guidance, digital literacy, and the ability of teachers and students to select meaningful content aligned with learning objectives. Without adequate instructional strategies, the use of social media may not necessarily result in effective language development. Therefore, the implementation of digital tools in education requires a balance between technological innovation and pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking, active participation, and meaningful learning experiences (Chapelle & Sauro, 2017; Redecker, 2017).

In this context, examining the impact of TikTok use on English language learning is essential to understanding how emerging digital platforms influence contemporary educational practices. Investigating the relationship between TikTok, student motivation, and communicative skill development provides valuable insight into the possibilities and limitations of integrating social media into language education. This research aims to analyze the impact of TikTok use on English language learning by exploring its role as an innovative educational resource, its influence on students' motivation, and its contribution to the development of communicative skills required for effective interaction in a foreign language.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital Technologies and Language Learning

The integration of digital technologies into education has transformed traditional approaches to foreign language learning by providing students with new opportunities for interaction, access to authentic materials, and autonomous practice. According to Chapelle (2009),



technology-mediated language learning environments allow learners to engage with linguistic input through interactive activities that support the development of communicative competence. These digital environments facilitate exposure to real language contexts, enabling students to practice skills beyond the limitations of the traditional classroom.

Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2018) highlights that emerging technologies and online platforms have expanded the possibilities of language learning by promoting informal learning experiences, collaboration, and continuous interaction with the target language. Therefore, digital resources are not only considered complementary tools but also spaces where learners construct knowledge through social participation and meaningful communication.

Social Media as a Learning Environment

Social media platforms have introduced new forms of communication that influence how students acquire and practice foreign languages. Kessler (2018) explains that social networks provide authentic communication environments where learners can interact with diverse linguistic resources and develop digital literacy skills. Unlike conventional educational materials, social media exposes students to spontaneous language use, including everyday expressions, pronunciation variations, and cultural elements.

In this context, TikTok represents a new generation of social media-based learning environments because its short-video format combines visual, auditory, and interactive elements. According to Wang and Vásquez (2012), social media applications can support language acquisition by increasing students' exposure to authentic language input and encouraging participation in informal learning activities.

TikTok and English Language Learning

TikTok has gained educational relevance because it allows users to consume and create short audiovisual content that can support vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, listening comprehension, and oral expression. From the perspective of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) argue that mobile technologies provide flexible learning opportunities because students can access language resources anytime and anywhere.

Furthermore, Burston (2015) states that mobile learning applications contribute to language development when they are integrated with appropriate educational objectives. In the case of TikTok, students may benefit from repeated exposure to English expressions,



interaction with native speakers, and the creation of their own linguistic content, which may strengthen active communication skills.

Motivation and Student Engagement

Motivation is a fundamental element in successful language acquisition because it influences students' willingness to participate, practice, and maintain learning processes. According to Dörnyei (2009), motivated learners demonstrate greater persistence and involvement in foreign language activities, particularly when learning environments are meaningful and connected to their personal interests.

The use of social media platforms such as TikTok may increase motivation because these tools are familiar to students and provide enjoyable learning experiences. Ryan and Deci (2020), through Self-Determination Theory, explain that learners become more engaged when educational activities promote autonomy, competence, and interaction. Therefore, TikTok-based learning activities may encourage students to actively participate by allowing them to explore content according to their interests and create personalized learning experiences.

Development of Communicative Skills

Communicative competence involves not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language effectively in real situations. According to Canale and Swain (1980), successful language learning requires the development of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Digital platforms may contribute to these dimensions by exposing students to authentic communication contexts.

Richards (2015) emphasizes that contemporary English teaching should prioritize meaningful communication rather than only structural knowledge of the language. In this sense, TikTok can function as a supportive environment where students encounter real-life language use, improve listening comprehension, expand vocabulary, and practice oral production through interactive content.

Challenges of Using TikTok in Education

Although TikTok offers innovative possibilities for English learning, its educational implementation requires appropriate pedagogical strategies. Redecker (2017) argues that digital competence is essential for teachers and students to use technological resources



effectively and critically. Without guidance, social media platforms may generate distractions, superficial learning, or exposure to unreliable information.

Therefore, the educational value of TikTok depends not only on the technology itself but also on the methodology applied by educators. When properly integrated, TikTok can become a complementary tool that promotes innovation, motivation, and the development of students' communicative abilities in English.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study was conducted through a systematic literature review aimed at analyzing the available scientific evidence regarding the impact of TikTok use on English language learning, particularly its contribution to innovation, student motivation, and the development of communicative skills. This methodology allowed the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of academic studies related to technology-mediated language learning, social media in education, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), digital motivation, and communicative competence development.

A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was adopted to interpret the findings reported in previous studies and identify relevant trends, contributions, and research gaps regarding the educational use of TikTok and similar digital platforms in foreign language learning (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019; Page et al., 2021; Booth et al., 2021).

Information Sources and Search Strategy

The bibliographic search was conducted in internationally recognized academic databases related to education, applied linguistics, and educational technology, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, SAGE Journals, ERIC, SciELO, Redalyc, and Google Scholar.

These databases were selected because they provide access to peer-reviewed research focused on English language teaching, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), social media applications, and digital educational innovation.

The search was conducted between March 10 and March 15, 2026. During this period, search equations were applied to the selected databases, retrieved records were organized, and



duplicate documents were removed. A final verification of references and DOI information was performed on March 20, 2026, ensuring the traceability and reliability of the systematic review process.

Table 1

Records Identified by Database

Database	Records identified
Scopus	14
Web of Science	12
ScienceDirect	13
Taylor & Francis Online	11
SpringerLink	10
SAGE Journals	12
ERIC	13
SciELO	8
Redalyc	9
Google Scholar	10
Total	112

Note. A total of 112 records were identified from the selected databases. After removing 27 duplicate records, 85 studies remained for the screening phase.

The titles and abstracts were reviewed, excluding 52 studies that did not meet the research objectives. Subsequently, 33 articles were assessed through full-text evaluation, of which 18 studies were excluded because they did not directly address TikTok, social media-based language learning, English learning, motivation, or communicative skills.

Finally, 15 scientific studies were included in the systematic review.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed using keywords in English combined with Boolean operators AND and OR. The main keywords included:

- “TikTok”
- “English language learning”



- “social media”
- “mobile-assisted language learning”
- “digital learning”
- “students’ motivation”
- “communicative competence”
- “language acquisition”
- “technology-enhanced language learning”

The search equations were adapted according to each database.

Search Equations

Scopus and Web of Science

("TikTok" OR "social media")

AND

("English language learning" OR "foreign language learning")

AND

("motivation" OR "communicative competence" OR "language skills")

ScienceDirect and SpringerLink

("mobile-assisted language learning" OR "technology-enhanced learning")

AND

("English learning")

AND

("digital platforms" OR "social media")

Taylor & Francis and SAGE Journals

("social media" AND "language learning")

AND

("students motivation" OR "communication skills")

ERIC, SciELO and Redalyc

"TikTok" AND "English learning"

Google Scholar

"TikTok" "English language learning" "students motivation"

Additional searches were conducted using:

- “digital tools AND English teaching”



- “mobile learning AND second language acquisition”
- “social media AND communicative competence”
- “TikTok AND foreign language education”

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria considered:

- Scientific articles published in indexed journals.
- Peer-reviewed studies.
- Research related to English language learning and digital technologies.
- Studies analyzing social media, TikTok, mobile learning, motivation, or communicative skills.
- Publications written in English or Spanish.
- Studies published between **2008 and 2026**.
- Articles with DOI or verifiable bibliographic information.

The exclusion criteria included:

- Duplicate documents.
- Opinion articles without scientific methodology.
- Studies unrelated to language learning.
- Publications without accessible full text.
- Research focused on other educational areas unrelated to English learning.
- Documents without reliable bibliographic information.

Study Selection Process

The selection process followed the guidelines established by the PRISMA 2020 statement proposed by Page et al. (2021). This framework provides a transparent structure for identifying, screening, evaluating eligibility, and selecting studies for systematic reviews.

The process consisted of four stages:

1. Identification:

112 records were identified from academic databases.

2. Screening:

After removing 27 duplicate records, 85 studies were screened according to titles and abstracts.

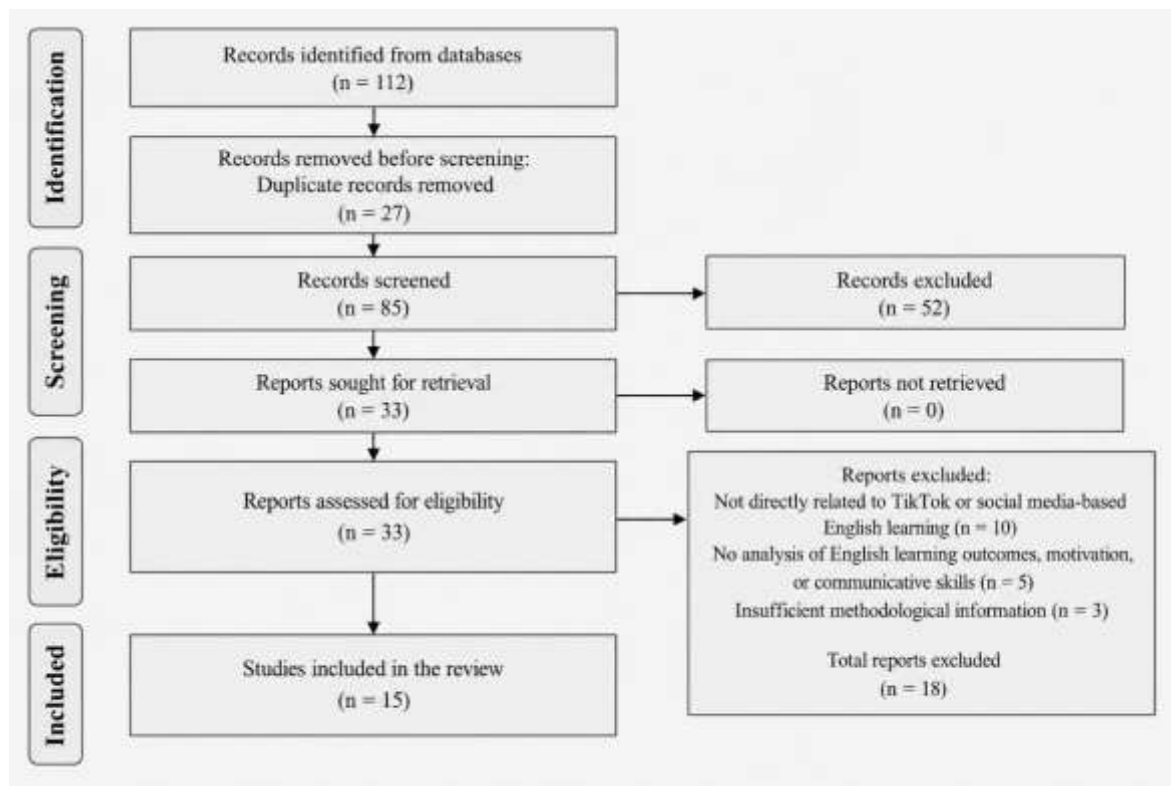


3. Eligibility:

33 studies were evaluated through full-text analysis.

4. Inclusion:

15 studies met all criteria and were included in the final systematic review.

Figure 1*PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram*

Note. Flow diagram developed based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines proposed by Page et al. (2021). The systematic search process identified 112 records from academic databases related to English language learning, educational technology, and social media applications. After removing 27 duplicate records, the remaining studies underwent title and abstract screening, followed by full-text assessment according to the established eligibility criteria. Finally, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the systematic review. These studies analyzed the impact of TikTok use and related digital platforms on English language learning, focusing on educational innovation, student motivation, and the development of communicative skills.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the 15 studies selected through the systematic literature review allowed the identification of the main trends, contributions, and challenges associated with the use of TikTok and related digital platforms in English language learning. The included studies were organized into five thematic categories: TikTok as an innovative digital tool for English language learning, TikTok and student motivation, development of communicative skills through digital platforms, mobile-assisted language learning and social media-based learning environments, and challenges and limitations associated with the educational use of TikTok. This classification made it possible to understand the influence of TikTok from technological, pedagogical, and communicative perspectives, identifying its potential contribution to vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, oral interaction, learner autonomy, and motivation. Likewise, the analysis considered the limitations reported in the literature, including digital distraction, inadequate pedagogical guidance, reliability of online content, and the need to strengthen digital competencies among teachers and students.

To facilitate the presentation and interpretation of the findings, Tables 4 to 8 present a representative selection of the 15 studies included in the systematic review, organized according to the five thematic categories identified. Table 9 presents the complete matrix of the studies that formed the final corpus of analysis.

Results of the Methodological Quality Assessment

The methodological quality assessment of the 15 selected studies showed that 11 studies were classified as high quality and 4 as moderate quality. No studies were identified as having low methodological quality.

The studies classified as high quality presented clear research objectives, appropriate theoretical foundations, transparent methodological procedures, and a strong relationship between their findings and conclusions. These studies provided greater evidence regarding the role of digital technologies, social media, and mobile-assisted language learning in the development of English language skills.

The studies classified as moderate quality mainly presented limitations related to the description of methodological procedures, reduced empirical analysis, or a stronger conceptual orientation. However, these studies were considered relevant because they contributed theoretical perspectives regarding digital learning environments, motivation, and the integration of technology into foreign language education.



The methodological quality assessment was not used as an automatic exclusion criterion; instead, it was applied to determine the level of confidence assigned to each source during the synthesis process. Studies with higher methodological quality received greater consideration when identifying the main trends and establishing conclusions.

Table 3

Results of the Methodological Quality Assessment

No.	Author and year	Type of document	Score Percentage	Quality level
1	Chapelle (2009)	Theoretical and conceptual study	14/16 87.50%	High
2	Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008)	Literature review	15/16 93.75%	High
3	Burston (2015)	Meta-analysis of MALL research	16/16 100.00%	High
4	Kessler (2018)	Research article	14/16 87.50%	High
5	Godwin-Jones (2018)	Review article	13/16 81.25%	High
6	Richards (2017)	Research article	14/16 87.50%	High
7	Wang and Vásquez (2012)	Literature review	13/16 81.25%	High
8	Chapelle and Sauro (2017)	Academic book	15/16 93.75%	High
9	Dörnyei (2009)	Theoretical study	14/16 87.50%	High
10	Ryan and Deci (2020)	Theoretical and empirical review	16/16 100.00%	High
11	Nation (2020)	Academic book	14/16 87.50%	High
12	Redecker (2017)	Institutional framework	13/16 81.25%	High
13	Godwin-Jones (2021)	Research article	12/16 75.00%	Moderate
14	Li and Hafner (2023)	Research article	12/16 75.00%	Moderate
15	Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019)	Systematic review	12/16 75.00%	Moderate



Note. The methodological assessment considered eight criteria evaluated from 0 to 2 points, with a maximum possible score of 16 points. The percentage was calculated by dividing the obtained score by the maximum score and multiplying the result by 100. Studies were classified as high quality when achieving $\geq 80\%$, moderate quality between 60% and 79%, and low quality below 60%. The assessment allowed the weighting of the methodological strength of the evidence included in the systematic review.

Table 4**General Matrix of the Sources Included in the Systematic Review**

No.	Author and year	Type of source	Main focus	Thematic category
1	Canale and Swain (1980)	Theoretical framework	Components of communicative competence in second-language learning	Communicative competence
2	Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008)	Literature review	Evolution of mobile-assisted language learning toward collaborative interaction	Mobile-assisted language learning
3	Dörnyei (2009)	Theoretical model	Influence of the L2 motivational self-system on language learning	Motivation and engagement
4	Chapelle (2009)	Theoretical analysis	Relationship between second-language acquisition theory and computer-assisted language learning	Technology-enhanced language learning
5	Wang and Vásquez (2012)	Literature review	Contributions of Web 2.0 technologies to second-language learning	Social media and language learning
6	Burston (2015)	Meta-analysis	Learning outcomes associated with mobile-assisted language learning projects	Mobile learning effectiveness



No.	Author and year	Type of source	Main focus	Thematic category
7	Richards (2017)	Conceptual analysis	Communicative approaches and meaningful English-language use	Communicative language teaching
8	Chapelle and Sauro (2017)	Academic handbook	Technology-mediated approaches to second-language teaching and learning	Technology integration
9	Redecker (2017)	Competence framework	Digital competencies required for responsible educational technology use	Digital competence
10	Kessler (2018)	Conceptual analysis	Influence of technological innovation on the future of language teaching	Educational innovation
11	Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019)	Systematic literature review	Opportunities and challenges associated with digital technologies in education	Technology implementation challenges
12	Nation (2020)	Academic book	Principles of vocabulary acquisition, exposure, and meaningful repetition	Vocabulary development
13	Ryan and Deci (2020)	Theoretical and empirical review	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination perspective	Motivation and autonomy
14	Godwin-Jones (2021)	Literature-based analysis	Role of social media and emerging technologies in language learning	Digital and social media learning



No.	Author and year	Type of source	Main focus	Thematic category
15	Li and Hafner (2023)	Research analysis	Digital practices and development of communicative competence	Social media and communicative competence

Note. The table presents the 15 sources included in the final evidence corpus. The sources were organized according to their methodological or theoretical nature and their primary contribution to understanding TikTok and related digital environments as resources for English-language learning. Elaborated by the authors.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review indicate that TikTok represents an emerging digital resource capable of supporting English language learning through audiovisual, interactive, and student-centred experiences. The platform allows learners to access authentic language input, practise vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and speaking skills beyond the traditional classroom. However, its educational effectiveness depends on appropriate pedagogical planning, content selection, and teacher guidance.

Regarding educational innovation, TikTok promotes multimodal learning by combining videos, subtitles, images, and interactive functions that encourage students to actively participate in language production. The reviewed studies show that creating and analysing short videos can increase engagement and provide opportunities for meaningful communication.

Motivation was identified as one of the main benefits of TikTok-based learning. Its familiar and creative format may increase students’ interest and encourage autonomous practice. Nevertheless, motivation is not generated automatically by the platform; it depends on the design of learning activities, students’ needs, and the objectives established by educators.

The evidence also suggests that TikTok contributes to communicative skill development, particularly speaking, listening, and vocabulary acquisition. The process of creating videos allows learners to practise pronunciation, organise ideas, and improve oral confidence. Additionally, the combination of visual and auditory elements may facilitate vocabulary retention and comprehension.



Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified, including distraction, unreliable content, excessive use, privacy concerns, and the need for digital literacy. Therefore, TikTok should be considered a complementary educational tool rather than a replacement for formal instruction. Teachers play a fundamental role in selecting appropriate resources, guiding students, and ensuring that technology supports meaningful learning.

Overall, TikTok can enrich English language learning when integrated intentionally with pedagogical strategies, combining technological innovation with teacher mediation and critical digital skills.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review demonstrated that TikTok has significant potential as a complementary resource for English language learning, particularly in relation to educational innovation, student motivation, and communicative skill development.

The reviewed studies show that the platform can support vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, listening comprehension, speaking confidence, and learner engagement through accessible and interactive audiovisual content. Furthermore, TikTok may promote autonomous learning by allowing students to practise English beyond classroom environments.

However, its educational benefits depend on purposeful integration, reliable content selection, and appropriate teacher guidance. Challenges such as distraction, misinformation, excessive screen time, and privacy risks highlight the importance of developing students' digital literacy.

In conclusion, TikTok should not replace traditional English teaching methods but should be used as a complementary tool that enhances communication, motivation, and active participation. Its effectiveness depends on the balance between technological innovation, pedagogical design, and the essential role of teachers in guiding meaningful learning experiences.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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