



doi <https://doi.org/10.58256/kwyhq16>



Research Article

Section: Literature, Linguistics & Criticism



Published in Nairobi, Kenya
by Royallite Global.

Volume 5, Issue 1, 2024



Article Information

Submitted: 8th November 2023

Accepted: 9th December 2023

Published: 9th January 2024

Additional information is
available at the end of the
article

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ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

To read the paper online,
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How to Cite:

hasawneh, M. (2024). A critical
look at the influence of TikTok
videos on the reading and speaking
proficiency of FL undergraduates.
*Research Journal in Advanced
Humanities*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.58256/kwyhq16>

A critical look at the influence of TikTok videos on the reading and speaking proficiency of FL undergraduates

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Abstract

Currently, the immersion of technology into language education has surpassed the mere provision and utilization of digital tools in language pedagogy to reshape the fundamental nature of language acquisition and instruction. While technological tools have facilitated the production and consumption of diverse and engaging multimedia content, these multimedia materials, such as videos, podcasts, and interactive simulations, have the potential to augment language learning resources significantly. This study provides a critical analysis of the influence of TikTok videos on the reading and speaking abilities of undergraduate students studying foreign languages. Meanwhile, emphasis is also placed on relevant features found on the TikTok platform that serve to enhance reading and speaking proficiency. Additionally, the study aims to identify any possible positive or harmful effects that may arise from the use of TikTok videos in language education. A quantitative methodology was used to execute the main objective of this study. This method includes the use of questionnaires as data collection techniques to get large quantities of data. On the other, the 50 respondents who took part in this study are currently foreign language students, purposively selected from different locales. However, based on insights shared by the research participants, relevant data was extracted to form the basis of this research. The results demonstrate a significant correlation between language learners' proficiency and the use of the novel technical features on the TikTok platform. Additionally, the use of TikTok has a substantial impact on the improvement and engagement of language students in the acquisition of language skills due to its enjoyable and captivating features.

Keywords: Foreign Language Acquisition, Reading and Speaking Proficiency, Technology, TikTok Videos.



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Public Interest Statement

This research suggested that many features found in the TikTok application can aid in improving the reading and speaking proficiency of foreign language undergraduates. This study provides a critical analysis of the influence of TikTok videos on the reading and speaking abilities of undergraduate students studying foreign languages. Meanwhile, emphasis is also placed on relevant features found on the TikTok platform that serve to enhance reading and speaking proficiency.

1. Introduction

The field of language teaching and learning has seen significant transformations with the widespread use of new technologies worldwide. However, the influence of technology on language acquisition and instruction goes beyond the simple distribution and use of digital tools, indicating a fundamental change in the approach to acquiring and teaching languages.

The progression demonstrates the transition of technology from being an aide to becoming an integral part of the language learning process. Beyond the mere availability of digital resources and their utilization, immersion is a holistic shift that rethinks the nature of language instruction and broadens the limits of language teaching.

The print educational materials and physical classroom environments that were once the sole approach for individuals to learn are no longer viable in the present-day context. The use of technology provides a wide range of opportunities; therefore, active engagement, interactive experiences, and easy access are critical. Now, learners are able to partake in interactions with actual foreign language material, establish connections with people around the globe who speak the target language, and engage in activities that are similar to language use in real life. For instance, language learners can quickly learn the target language by watching videos from different technological platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, among others, Hanim (2021).

TikTok, as a social media application, enables users to upload videos that can be edited with a variety of tools to achieve the desired results. According to Yang (2020), TikTok emerged as a prominent platform for language-learning videos, reaching second position among the most widely seen knowledge-sharing videos in 2019. Nevertheless, Hidayati (2022) maintained that the relevant features that are found in this technological platform, such as duet, provide language learners with the opportunity to engage in hands-on language-related activities, hence, promoting language proficiency development.

2. Literature Review

Beyond the usage of TikTok as an entertaining technological platform, it prominently presents itself as an effective instructional instrument for language acquisition. However, based on its distinctive attributes and user-centric dynamics, which provide a unique opportunity for promoting language skills, a proper examination of the existing literature becomes paramount to understanding how TikTok videos facilitate improving the reading and speaking proficiency of foreign language undergraduates.

2.1. Evolution of Social Media in Language Learning

The incorporation of social media platforms into the domain of language acquisition reflects a captivating development that reflects the broader technological progress in the field of language education. Nevertheless, Perez (2023) maintained that the inception of the process of development might be retraced to the initial years of the 21st century, during which the internet played a pivotal role in enabling the establishment of virtual platforms, such as online forums and discussion boards; that was specifically designed for language acquisition. These platforms supplied learners with a venue to participate in written discourse, get guidance, and establish connections with those proficient in the desired language.

Exploring the development of social media in language learning, Hu & Du claimed (2022) that the latter part of the 2000s had a significant transition in the shape of multimedia platforms such as YouTube, which marked the beginning of the Web 2.0 era. Web 2.0 facilitates the convenient expression and sharing of users' thoughts, enabling them to engage in written discourse, seek input from others, and establish connections with other users. In light of this, Mondahl and Razmerita (2014) highlighted collaboration as an essential feature of Web 2.0.

Additionally, the mid-2010s recorded the emergence of visual content platforms, with Instagram being one of the prominent players in this case. Zourou (2012) indicated that accounts of language learning that tend to be dedicated to gaining another language present visually attractive information, resulting in the integration of the learning process with the discovery of other cultures. To add to this point, Al Arif (2019) said that during this stage, the need to include visuals and short films to provide teaching led to the emergence of TikTok in 2016. To add to this perception, Adnan et al. (2016) and Fata et al. (2023) state that the use of video materials is now considered a core asset for those aspiring to be proficient in a foreign language since it combines the visual and the auditory to enrich the traditional teaching methods. It was a turning point for the language learning process as it marked the transition from static, text-based interactions towards dynamic, interactive multimedia, which eventually allowed for emerging opportunities for both language instructors and learners, Syamsiani & Munfangati (2023). Meanwhile, the present decade has been characterized by the rise of TikTok as a prominent influence in the domain of language acquisition. However, Vázquez-Calvo et al. (2022) recorded that TikTok emerged as a prominent social media network among the youth in 2020, with over 2 billion downloads, and the platform offers immersive, engaging, and amusing content.

2.2. Exploring the Basic Features of TikTok and Their Roles in Language Acquisition

TikTok is a mobile application that functions as a social networking platform and video music platform. It enables users to generate, modify, and distribute short video clips ranging from 15 seconds to 5 minutes in duration that are enhanced with filters and accompanied by music. This characteristic aligns with the current trend of swift knowledge accretion. The TikTok application, which was introduced in early September 2016, originated in China and was developed by Zhang Yiming, an entrepreneur and the founder of ByteDance, a technology-based corporation.

According to Zaitun et al. (2021), the TikTok application is among the digital platforms that offer both language learners and teachers the opportunity to teach and learn language effortlessly. Afidah and Hanifah (2021) posited that when the TikTok application is used in conjunction with appropriate techniques, it has the potential to serve as a captivating, interactive, and groundbreaking educational medium. Studies (Hung, 2009; Wang & Chen, 2020; Castrillo et al., 2016; Sultan Alshraideh, 2021) have shown that learners enjoy language learning with video. Hence, the use of diverse media by educators has the potential to inspire student motivation and provide a sense of comfort throughout the

instructional process inside the classroom, Rismawati et al. (2023)

On the other hand, Simanullang (2018) maintained that the repetitive nature of videos allows language learners to learn faster. TikTok videos can be played repeatedly by learners, and this offers them the opportunity to acquire language via the processes of absorption and imitation.

There are essential features of TikTok videos that make learning easier. As claimed by Xiuwen and Razali (2021), the brevity nature of TikTok videos makes it the best platform for language acquisition. Apart from the brevity nature of TikTok videos, another prominent feature that enables easy language acquisition is the ‘duet’ element, which is also similar to the ‘stitch’ element. The ‘duet’ element is a collaborative tool that allows TikTok users to effectively participate in discussions, online challenges, and experiential educational activities by juxtaposing their films with pre-existing information. According to Syamsiani and Munfangati (2023), the inclusion of collaboration features inside TikTok serves to enhance the interactive nature of the platform, therefore providing language learners with an opportunity to engage in their educational activities actively. Nevertheless, with the interactive nature of the duet element, language learners have the opportunity to engage in various tasks that include vocabulary tests, pronunciation exercises, and language-related prompts, therefore actively participating in their language acquisition process.

The multimodal content feature of TikTok videos facilitates the integration of diverse multimedia components, including textual content, visual imagery, auditory elements, and video content. This approach accommodates a wide range of learning styles, hence creating a dynamic and immersive learning environment. Many enjoyable channels on TikTok are dedicated to teaching languages, thereby giving learners access to learning language outside the classroom. Also, language learners get to choose their preferred channel to learn. This is typically the opposite of the conventional classroom.

Another essential feature is text-to-speech, live sessions and captioning and subtitling features. The text-to-speech feature enables the conversion of written text into audible speech, including a range of accents. Nevertheless, one advantage of this feature to learners is that their pronunciation skills are improved by listening to the accurate articulation of words and phrases. Also, it facilitates the detection of different accents. While TikTok Live is a feature that enables users to conduct live video sessions, it facilitates interactive engagement with their audience synchronously. One of the advantages of this feature is that language instructors or learners have the opportunity to engage in live language courses, question-and-answer sessions, or language practice sessions. Interpersonal engagements in real-time provide a valuable avenue for prompt feedback and foster a communal atmosphere among those engaged in the learning process, Adhani et al. (2023). Additionally, TikTok provides users with the ability to include captions or subtitles in their videos. With this, learners have the opportunity to engage in reading activities while simultaneously listening to spoken information, so strengthening the integration between written and spoken language skills.

2.3. Exploring TikTok Application as a Tool for Language Proficiency Development

TikTok has gained popularity, especially among young people. What began as a platform mainly for short-form entertainment has transformed into a vibrant area where people may participate in interactive language learning adventures. According to Ariantini et al. (2021), it is undeniable that TikTok videos aid language learners in acquiring specific language proficiency. Although Alghameeti (2022) claimed that there needs to be a more comprehensive study on the particular impact of TikTok on the development of listening skills, it is evident that TikTok has the potential to serve as a valuable teaching tool. It is recommended that students be provided with a diverse range of alternatives to choose the activity that aligns with their interests and learning styles, Iswahyuni (2021).

In regards to improvement of speaking skills using TikTok videos, Fitria (2023) acknowledged that the multimodal feature of TikTok application could help English language learners develop not only speaking proficiency at a macro-level but also proficiency in the use of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and communication strategies at a micro-level. Similarly, research by Rahamawati & Prasetyanto (2023) and Pratiwi & Sopiah (2021) moved beyond the general picture that TikTok usage facilitates EFL students' global speaking proficiency, pointing to subtler findings, which include improvement of sub-skills and knowledge (e.g. fluency, pronunciation, content, nonverbal communication, creativity) required in communication.

According to Fitria (2023), TikTok facilitates the process of discovering and comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary. The scholarly work also noted that in some instances, the TikTok films exhibited confusion in their language usage. This implies that the act of using the TikTok program has a more significant favourable influence on the grammatical proficiency of language students compared to its minimal shortcomings. Research conducted by Biray et al. (2022) found that TikTok enhances the users' ability to learn and understand new English vocabulary. Nevertheless, there were occasions in which the TikTok movies caused confusion among users over the proper usage of grammar. Another study conducted by Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) discovered that a significant proportion of the students who participated in the research expressed their inclination to generate educational content in the future, citing TikTok as a convenient and efficient platform for creating their verbal films.

As submitted by Biray et al. (2022), TikTok videos help to improve learners' pronunciation. Since the content on TikTok frequently incorporates terminology that is employed within cultural contexts, learners are not just exposed to auditory input of pronunciation, but also to visual input that demonstrates its alignment with distinct cultural expressions.

2.4. Gap in the Literature

The presence of technology in the field of language education has continued to garner further exploration of the field by different scholars. The majority of these scholars have focused on identifying and exploring the utilization of technological platforms and tools used in language learning. Emphasis has been placed on both the advantages and disadvantages of these technological innovations. Specifically, TikTok as an entertainment technological platform has been explored regarding its impact on language learning. More so, arrears of works in this regard have a less comprehensive investigation of how features found in the TikTok platform enhance the reading and speaking proficiencies of foreign undergraduates. Nonetheless, it is based on this premise that the aim of this research is hinged on.

2.5. Research Questions

- A. How do features found in TikTok videos contribute to the development of reading and speaking skills?
- B. What are the advantages and drawbacks foreign language undergraduates encounter when using TikTok to improve their reading and speaking skills?

3. Research Procedure and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a quantitative survey methodology, with an online survey as the primary data collection instrument. The surveys were used to evaluate and analyze students' perspectives on how the features found in the TikTok application contribute to the development of reading and speaking skills of foreign language students. The study findings will be used to provide pedagogical implications and suggestions for FL instructors.

3.2. Instrument

A closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather data for this investigation. The 50 (Fifty) research participants were administered a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions that aimed to assess students' views about the use of TikTok as a means to enhance their reading and speaking proficiency. Subsequently, the questionnaire was sent using Google Forms. More so, the survey consists of two parts. While the first part discussed about the demographic information of the research participants, the second part of the survey included a Likert-type scale with 10 questions.

3.3. Participants

Using a purposive sample approach, the study's participants were chosen. The current study used a technique to recruit individuals who met specific requirements, such as being between the ages of 18 and 35, using TikTok daily, and providing their informed consent by completing a consent form. A total of 50 undergraduate students in foreign language education participated in the study. Twenty-three people (or 46% of the sample) identified as male, while twenty-seven people (or 54% of the overall sample) identified as female. The participants' ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-five. In the meantime, the participants' demographic information is laid forth in Table 1.

Table 1; *Participants Demographic Information*

Total Number Of Participants		
Gender		
a. Male Students	23 (46%)	
b. Female students	27 (54%)	
Average Age	18-35 years	

3.4. Data Collection

Online platforms provide a certain level of anonymity, rendering them well-suited for the purpose of obtaining potentially sensitive information. On the other hand, the survey was disseminated via the use of Google Forms, ensuring that every participant provided positive consent. A set of 10 questions was presented to the participants. The survey had a response rate of 100%, suggesting a significant level of engagement and willingness to participate in the scientific undertaking. The participants were sent a personalized email to encourage them to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, relevant information on the research and its aims was shared via various social media platforms.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and analyzes the data provided by the research participants. However, these data would be presented and discussed based on the two developed research questions.

A. How do features found in TikTok videos contribute to the development of reading and speaking skills?

There are 5 survey items contained in this research question; the first item is discussed using a pie chart while the remaining items are presented in a table.

1. How frequent do you use features in TikTok application for language learning?

The data generated from the first survey item above are presented as thus;

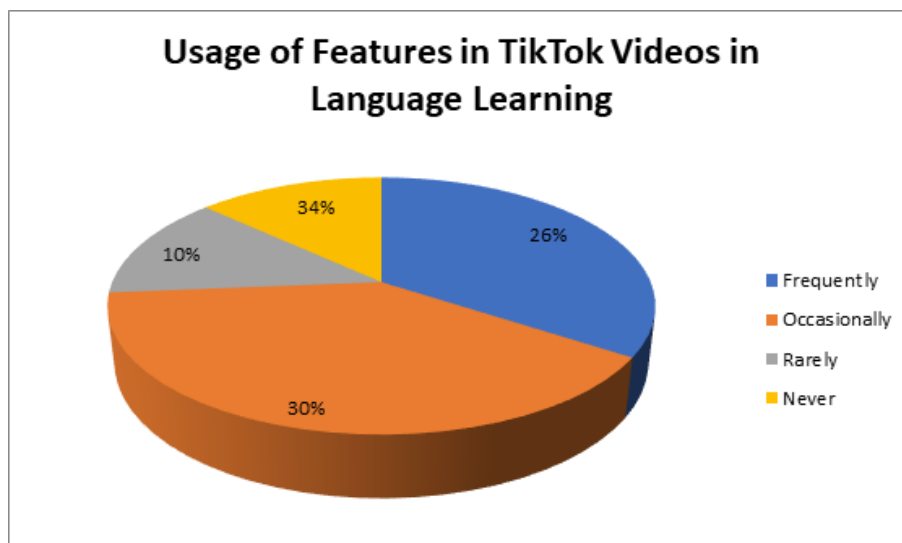


Fig.1: result of first question

The above chart represents the responses of the participants on the utilization of features found in the TikTok application in language learning. From the result, it can be seen that 26% of the participants admitted that they frequently utilize TikTok features for language acquisition. This finding indicates that a significant proportion of participants actively participate in language learning activities on TikTok. On the other hand, 30% of the research participants affirmed that they occasionally have these features. This suggests the existence of a substantial group that utilizes the features, albeit with less regularity compared to the “frequent” group. Also, in the study, a small minority of participants (10%) indicated infrequent utilization of TikTok features for language acquisition. This implies a subset of individuals that interact with these characteristics less frequently. Lastly, 34% of the participants reported that they have yet to utilize the features of TikTok for language learning. The group above represents the largest group, signifying a substantial proportion of participants who do not utilize TikTok as a means of language acquisition. The implication of these findings suggests that the utilization of TikTok for language learning may be influenced by several factors such as individual preferences, perceptions of effectiveness, ease of use, language learning goals, access to technology and language proficiency level.

Table 2: Usage of features found in TikTok videos for language learning

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
2	Do you agree that features found in the platform aid in improving language proficiency?	29 (58%)	19 (38%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3	Based on experience, does involvement in duet and challenges improve language learners' speaking and reading skill?	25 (50%)	15 (30%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)

4	Has reading TikTok subtitles helped in improving your reading skill?	27 (54%)	15 (30%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
5	To what extent do you agree that live features and voice dubbing can enhance learners' speaking skill?	31 (62%)	15 (30%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

**Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, strongly disagree=1*

The table above represents the responses of the research participants in regard to the features found in the TikTok platform. Based on the data presented above, the participants acknowledged the usefulness of features found in the TikTok platform for language proficiency improvement. However, the majority of the participants, which constitute 58% (strongly agree) and 38% (agree), affirmed this proposition. Additionally, a total of 80% (both strongly agree and agree) of the respondents confirmed the functionalities of the 'duet' and 'challenge' features of TikTok videos. While 16% of them were uncertain about this proposition, the remaining minor participants refuted this claim. As per the respondents' experience, the majority of them attested that reading TikTok subtitles helped improve their reading skills. Even though a substantial number of respondents (84%) affirmed the functionality of TikTok subtitles, 10% of them maintained a neutral stand on the matter, while the remaining 6% refuted this claim. Another essential feature of TikTok that was identified was the voice dubbing and live feature. The participants were asked whether these features aid in improving language learners' speaking skills. However, from their responses, it can be seen that a significant number of them (more than 80%) affirmed that live features and voice dubbing can enhance learners' speaking skills. On the other hand, a few of the participants, consisting of 2% of the participants did not accept that these features are capable of enhancing learners' speaking skills.

B. What are the advantages and drawbacks foreign language undergraduates encounter in using TikTok to improve their reading and speaking skills?

The survey items that are contained in the above research question are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Advantages and drawbacks of the use of TikTok videos in improving reading and speaking skills

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
1.	Do TikTok videos enhance the acquisition and improvement of reading and speaking skills?	30 (60%)	14 (28%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
2.	Do features in TikTok videos provide platform for reading and speaking practice?	29 (58%)	14 (28%)	7 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3.	Do you prefer using TikTok Videos to traditional learning method in regards to the improvement of your speaking and reading skills?	10 (20%)	15 (30%)	1 (24%)	2 (16%)	8 (10%)
4.	Do you face the challenge of selecting appropriate TikTok channel for effective learning?	32 (64%)	11 (22%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
5.	Do TikTok videos distract you from learning language appropriately?	3 (6%)	8 (16%)	1 (30%)	5 (36%)	8 (12%)

**Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, strongly disagree=1*

Table 3 presents the responses of the research participants on the advantages and challenges foreign language students encounter during the utilization of TikTok videos for the enhancement of reading and speaking skills. However, the majority of the respondents (88%) affirmed that TikTok videos enhance the acquisition and improvement of reading and speaking skills. While 8% of the participants maintained a neutral stand, the remaining 4% refuted this claim. Additionally, more than 50% of the respondents confirmed that features found in TikTok videos provide a platform for reading and speaking practice. In other words, language learners are provided with the opportunity to practice their speaking and writing skills using some of the relevant features found in the TikTok application. Although a considerable proportion of the research participants (50%) exhibit a preference for TikTok as opposed to conventional learning approaches, there exists a substantial group (24%) that maintains a neutral perspective or exhibits a preference (18%) for traditional learning methods.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of participants (more than 80%) recognize the challenges associated with selecting suitable TikTok channels to facilitate successful learning. While fewer participants (2%) did not acknowledge this challenge, 12% of the participants needed more certainty regarding this issue. In the fifth item, the matter of distraction surrounding TikTok is subject to varying perspectives since a significant portion of individuals (30%) maintain a neutral stance, suggesting that not all individuals regard TikTok as a hindrance to language acquisition.

4.1. Discussion

The survey results suggest that students are favourable toward using TikTok to enhance their reading and speaking proficiency. However, features found in TikTok play a substantial role in enhancing learners' reading and speaking skills.

The 'duet' feature was identified as one of the features in the TikTok application that aids in improving language learners' speaking skills. The duet feature on TikTok is a tool that enables users to generate collaborative videos by merging their video with that of another user. The duet feature is frequently employed for a multitude of objectives, encompassing the act of singing in tandem with other users, engaging in challenges, delivering commentary, presenting educational material, and further applications. The feature strengthens the social and interactive dimensions of TikTok, enabling users to actively and artistically participate with the material produced by others. The function of dialogue empowers language learners to participate in active practice and communicate with the correct materials in a community or dynamic environment. According to Alghameeti (2022), this feature aids the students by playing the audio of correct pronunciation, the words shown, and even miming the content. This technique also simplifies the process of remembering unfamiliar words and further extends their knowledge by introducing these new words to learners. On the one hand, the research results of Fata et al. (2023) demonstrate an increase in speaking ability with the use of this function.

One other primary 'challenge' dimension was identified in the research. The 'challenge' feature on TikTok stands out in all of the systems, with users uploading content that is related to a given theme, topic, or several sets of instructions. This element presents them with a variety of scenarios or situations that enable learners to apply what they know and improve their language proficiency (Afidah et al., 2021). The researchers found that the speaking and reading skills of students can be more refined when they take part in the language-related challenges happening on the TikTok platform.

The outcomes of the first research question are that putting captions and subtitles on TikTok videos also helps to grow the readers' skills. As explained by Bernard (2021), there are a number of factors TikTok facilitates the learning of new words through the use of captions and subtitles in video content for learners. The live features and voice dubbing are some of the multimodal elements found

in the TikTok application. The multimodal elements in TikTok encompass a fusion of visual, aural, and textual features. While these elements in TikTok facilitate the dissemination of educational content, they aid in improving learners' speaking skills. The use of multimodal features enables learners to replicate the pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm patterns exhibited by individuals who are native speakers of a particular language. Observing and replicating the manner in which words are articulated facilitates the enhancement of pronouncing abilities.

Meanwhile, the second research question focuses on the advantages and challenges encountered by language learners while using TikTok as a tool in language learning. Nevertheless, despite the positive acknowledgement of how this platform enhances reading and speaking proficiency, there is a neutral stance among the participants on the preference of this tool to the traditional method of language learning. According to the study conducted by Biray et al. (2022), it was observed that young language learners may exhibit a greater inclination towards alternative video content in the TikTok application, as their age and developmental stage may hinder their ability to engage in self-regulated academic learning effectively.

The primary role TikTok videos play in language proficiency development is a clear indication that these tools should be leveraged adequately by language learners and students. Language teachers can incorporate the TikTok app in teaching language in order to harness the effectiveness of its features. However, since students nowadays quickly learn through this platform, this tool can be a way of helping teachers to engage students, thus making the language learning experience fun and easy for students. On the other hand, Yang (2020) also maintained that students should be urged to maximize their use of TikTok for language acquisition both inside and outside of the traditional classroom setting. In the classroom setting, it is recommended that students actively participate in carefully planned in-class exercises that use TikTok video aids. These activities will enable them to immerse themselves in the target language, enhancing their reading and speaking proficiencies.

5. Conclusion

TikTok, as a technology tool, has a substantial influence across several domains, including language education. The use of TikTok in language acquisition fosters learners' motivation to engage in the learning process while also proving to be an efficacious tool for acquiring relevant language skills. The findings of this research suggest that many features found in the TikTok application can aid in improving the reading and speaking proficiency of foreign language undergraduates. These features, as identified by this research, include duets, subtitles and captions, challenges, live features, and multimodal features. The use of TikTok has a substantial impact on the improvement and engagement of language students in language skills due to its enjoyable and captivating nature, making the learning process more appealing. Notwithstanding the restricted sample size and preliminary nature of the study, this research provides some insights into the possibilities of integrating the utilization of TikTok videos with face-to-face or conventional language instruction. Additional research is required to evaluate the extent to which this technique effectively integrates with other language-related abilities, such as listening, writing, and vocabulary development. Based on the outcomes of the research, it can be inferred that the application has the potential to serve as an interactive educational tool for enhancing students' reading and speaking skills, provided that appropriate methodologies and protocols are used.

Funding

This research was funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Large Research Groups under grant number (RGP.2 / 108 /45).

Acknowledgments

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Large Research Groups under grant number (RGP.2 / 108 /45).

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The paper is single-authored.

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