The Impact of TikTok on Pronunciation Skills: A Study of Chinese EFL Learners in Universiti Malaya

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Abstract: The emergence of the information era has elevated the role of digital technologies in shaping human society. Especially within the educational sector, their vital role in boosting student involvement and educational results is noteworthy. While current research has delved into TikTok's effects on English language acquisition, the prolonged influence of TikTok on English pronunciation learning and its particular consequences remain largely unexplored. The aim of this study is to employ TikTok as a case study, utilizing a hybrid methodology encompassing Score Comparison, Statistical Testing, Thematic Analysis, and Error Analysis, with a group of non-native English-speaking students from the University of Malaya, to explore TikTok's effect on enhancing English pronunciation and their views of its improvement. The objective of this research is to shed light on the beneficial impact of digital technologies, like TikTok, in the realm of English language education.

1. Introduction

In the present world, incorporating digital technologies into education has revolutionized humans' learning processes, offering fresh pathways to improve students' involvement and educational outcomes. Within this array, social media such as TikTok have risen as promising instruments for language learning, especially in the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, in professional environments, the ability to articulate effectively frequently plays a crucial role.

EFL learners, possessing robust pronunciation abilities, are more adept at engaging in worldwide communication. This means that it is important that others can understand their pronunciation, because as a language, English is used for communication. However, many EFL learners suffer from poor pronunciation, and it affects their employability. According to a national survey in 2014 conducted by Aspiring Minds, an evaluation and employability consulting firm, over 51% of engineering graduates are unemployed due to their poor spoken English Shak et al., 2016[8]. It highlights the importance of proficient pronunciation instruction to improve prospects in both academia and the professional world.

To help these learners achieve better outcomes in pronunciation, TikTok can be used as a medium because it is audio and brief, usually within 1-2 minutes. The engaging nature of its format presents a rare chance to merge educational and entertainment elements, possibly revolutionizing conventional methods of language acquisition.

Therefore, this research aims to explore how TikTok can be used to enhance English articulation

among EFL students. The researchers will select non-English-majored EFL masters from China in Universiti Malaya as the participants. Moreover, a mixed method will be adopted, along with the constructivism learning theory. Additionally, TikTok's social and interactive features will be explored, potentially boosting learning via peer involvement and feedback. The research objectives are:

(1) To evaluate the effectiveness of TikTok in enhancing English pronunciation among Chinese non-English-majored EFL learners in Universiti Malaya.

(2) To investigate the perceptions of these EFL learners towards the use of TikTok for pronunciation practice.

Accordingly, this study will focus on the following research questions:

(1) How does the usage of TikTok in the teaching of English pronunciation benefit Chinese non-English-majored EFL learners in Universiti Malaya?

(2) What are the perceptions of these EFL learners towards using TikTok to improve their pronunciation?

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the use of social media like TikTok has gained considerable attention in language education, particularly for enhancing pronunciation skills. This literature review explores various studies investigating the impact of TikTok on improving English pronunciation among EFL learners.

Novitasari, L. 2023[3] examined TikTok as a pedagogical tool for improving English pronunciation abilities in EFL students. Using a semi-experimental framework that included pre-tests, mid-tests, and post-tests, their study showed notable enhancements in students' pronunciation skills after exposure to educational TikTok videos. However, the small sample size and potential self-reporting biases limited the wider relevance of these findings. They recommended using larger, more varied samples and different data gathering techniques to reduce biases. This research supports incorporating non-traditional digital platforms in language learning, highlighting the importance of creative methods in curriculum creation.

Other articles emphasize TikTok's appeal by utilizing brief, user-created videos for language learning. Paz-Dom ńguez et al 2023 [4] and Fitria 2023[1] highlighted TikTok's capacity to engage students with relatable content and its value in language acquisition. These studies demonstrated that TikTok's extensive array of easily understandable and relatable material helps in engaging students and improving their pronunciation skills. Pratiwi et al 2021[6] and Safila 2023[7] found TikTok videos effective in enhancing pronunciation, noting that interactive elements like commenting and sharing promote a cooperative educational atmosphere. Herlisya and Wiratno 2022[2] validated these results, emphasizing immediate feedback and peer interactions, which were essential for enhancing pronunciation. These research concur on the advantages of integrating TikTok into conventional language programs, suggesting it provides real-world scenarios for pronunciation practice. Such integration helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Despite these similarities, the studies differ in methodology, scope, and conclusions. For instance, Paz-Dom ńguez et al 2023 [4] focused on the viewpoints of A2 level students to comprehend TikTok's advantages in enhancing pronunciation. Conversely, Fitria 2023[1] examined diverse English educational materials on TikTok, considering their comprehensive effect on language learning beyond pronunciation. Moreover, Pratiwi et al 2021[6] explored TikTok's potential as an educational resource, focusing on its pronunciation-enhancing functionalities. They noted that TikTok's format, which included short, engaging videos, was particularly effective for retaining students' attention and providing concise pronunciation lessons. Safila 2023[7] quantified the impact of TikTok videos on students' pronunciation skills through empirical studies, providing numerical evidence to support her claims. Herlisya and Wiratno 2022[2] broadened the discussion by examining TikTok's contribution

to improving speaking abilities in a wider context, including pronunciation as a key element in proficient speech.

However, a major research void noted in these studies is the absence of long-term data regarding TikTok's enduring effect on pronunciation abilities. Although the immediate advantages are clear, additional studies are required to ascertain if these enhancements persist over time. Furthermore, the diverse scopes and target groups indicate the necessity for a uniform method to assess TikTok's efficiency. Some research focuses solely on pronunciation, while others adopt a comprehensive perspective on language acquisition, potentially resulting in varied results.

Challenges like content quality, potential distractions, and the digital gap between students require attention. The quality of user-generated content can vary widely, and not all videos are created with educational purposes in mind. Potential distractions from non-educational content on TikTok also pose a challenge. Moreover, the digital gap, which refers to the disparity in access to technology and the internet among students, can affect the effectiveness of TikTok as a learning tool. Subsequent studies should investigate these obstacles and suggest methods to mitigate them, ensuring the efficient and fair incorporation of TikTok and related platforms into language education programs.

In summary, existing studies underscore TikTok's potential as an enhancement tool for English pronunciation. Yet, more research is necessary to investigate its long-term impacts, rectify research discrepancies, and thoroughly evaluate the difficulties linked to its educational application. By understanding the potential and limitations of TikTok as an educational tool, educators can better integrate innovative strategies into language learning programs, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of language education.

3. Theoretical Background

This study selects Piaget's constructivism learning theory as the theoretical framework. Piaget 1972[5] presents that learners can adapt to the environment while promoting the development of cognitive structure, and he believes that the way that learners acquire knowledge is inseparable from the help of the appropriate situation. Learning is a process in which learners build their knowledge by themselves. Learning means that learners actively choose and process external information according to their academic background and personal experience.

Piaget's constructivism learning theory emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their own understanding and knowledge through experiences. TikTok, with its interactive and engaging content Syah et al., 2020[9], provides a platform where EFL students can actively participate in learning activities. By creating and interacting with videos, students can practice pronunciation in an engaging way, which corresponds to Piaget's idea of learning through active engagement.

Piaget also highlights the importance of social interaction in the process of learning. TikTok allows learners to collaborate, share, and receive feedback from peers and native speakers, which could create a social learning environment. This interaction can help learners improve their pronunciation through imitation and feedback.

4. Methodology

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of TikTok's impact on pronunciation learning, a mixed-method approach will be employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data.

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study are Chinese EFL postgraduate students who are between 23-25 years old and enrolled in non-English majors in Universiti Malaya. Their IELTS speaking score is among

5.0-5.5. The authors select this group of learners because non-English-majored students are usually weaker in English pronunciation, and the effect of using TikTok to enhance their pronunciation accuracy may be more obvious compared to English-majored students.

To ensure a representative sample, 60 volunteers will be recruited based on a preliminary screening questionnaire that assesses their TikTok usage and interest in learning English pronunciation. A pre-test will then be conducted to select the final 20 students based on their scores for further TikTok-based English pronunciation learning and testing. The specific version of it will be illustrated in the following section.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Instruments

(1) Pre-test, Mid-test, and Post-test:
Each test will include ten English words commonly mispronounced by non-native speakers: martyr /ˈmɑːtə(r)/, niche /niːʃ/, exaggerate /ɪgˈzædʒəreɪt/, deteriorate /dɪˈtɪəriəreɪt/, chore /tʃɔː(r)/, hierarchy /ˈhaɪərɑːki/, sovereignty /ˈsɒvrənti/, archive /ˈɑːkaɪv/, meme /miːm/, and word /wɜːd/. These words are chosen to cover various pronunciation challenges, such as different vowel sounds, consonant clusters, and word stress patterns. They are sourced from educational TikTok videos focused on pronunciation, from the user @englishlikeanative. This vlogger has been running her TikTok account since 2019 and has gained 184,000 fans.
(2) Pronunciation Assessment Tool:
A digital tool, Spell Check & Pronunciation Application will be used to evaluate the pronunciation accuracy of participants' recorded responses.
(3) Survey Questionnaire:
Two survey questionnaires will be conducted using Google Forms, which are designed referring to the study "Learning English Pronunciation through Social Media TikTok Account" Novitasari, L. 2023[3] from the Education and Human Development Journal.

A pre-study survey will initially screen students who regularly use TikTok and have an interest in improving their English pronunciation; A post-study survey aims to gather participants' feedback on their learning experience using TikTok for pronunciation practice. The questionnaire will include Likert scale items and open-ended questions.

4.2.2 Procedures

(1) Preliminary Screening:
The researchers will send emails and distribute flyers containing the initial screening questionnaire to a broad student population via the school's platform, and select 60 students who meet the criteria to participate in the pre-test.
(2) Pre-test:
Participants will record their pronunciation of the ten selected words by a recording software. These recordings will be assessed using the pronunciation tool (Spell Check & Pronunciation Application). Twenty students with the lowest scores (below 50) will be selected for the subsequent TikTok-based pronunciation learning sessions and tests. Ten of the selected students will be randomly assigned to the experimental group and the rest to the control group.
(3) Practice:
The experimental group will be provided with links to specific TikTok videos, published by the user @englishlikeanative, that teach the pronunciation of the ten selected words. They will be instructed to watch and practice with these videos for a week. While the control group will practice

the same words with traditional self-study methods without access to TikTok videos.

(4) Mid-test:

After the initial week of practice, participants from both groups will again record their pronunciation of the same ten words. These recordings will be evaluated to measure any improvement.

(5) Continued Practice:

The experimental group will continue to use the TikTok videos for another week, with encouragement to engage in interactive features such as duets or comments to enhance their learning experience. And the control group will persist with self-study.

(6) Post-test:

At the end of the second week, participants from both groups will record their pronunciation of the ten words one final time. These recordings will be assessed to determine the overall impact of the TikTok-based intervention compared to traditional self-study.

(7) Survey:

Participants will complete a survey to provide feedback on their learning experiences.

4.3 Data Analysis

In order to obtain more accurate experimental results, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will be adopted for data analysis.

4.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

(1) Score Comparison:

The scores of the two groups (experimental group and control group) from the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test will be compiled. Descriptive statistics will be used to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage improvements between tests.

(2) Statistical Testing:

A paired t-test will be conducted to compare the scores of the experimental group and the control group to measure whether the experimental group has statistically significant improvement in pronunciation scores due to TikTok learning. According to Shak, P., Lee, C. S., & Stephen, J. 2016[8], the paired t-test is a robust statistical method used to compare two related samples to determine whether there is a significant difference in their mean values. This will help evaluate the effectiveness of TikTok-based interventions.

(3) Error Analysis:

Detailed error analysis will be performed on common pronunciation mistakes identified in the tests. This involves identifying patterns of errors and categorizing them into specific types, such as vowel mispronunciations, consonant cluster errors, and stress pattern mistakes. Techniques such as phonetic transcription analysis and error frequency counting will be used.

4.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

(1) Thematic Analysis:

The open-ended responses from the post-study survey will be subjected to thematic analysis. This process involves coding the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of using TikTok for pronunciation practice. According to Syah, R. J., Nurjanah, S., & Mayu, V. P. A. 2020[9], thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data.

(2) Integration of Findings:

Finally, the quantitative and qualitative research results will be analyzed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research findings. This hybrid method can enhance TikTok's reliability in

pronunciation testing, while also making it easier for us to deal with complex situations and problems in the test.

5. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and data confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study to ensure the ethical integrity of the research. Participants will receive comprehensive information about the goals of the study and their freedom to opt out anytime without facing any repercussions. In an effort to reduce possible hazards, TikTok educational videos will undergo preliminary screening for relevant material, and attendees will receive guidance on secure online methods. Furthermore, assistance will be offered to those participants who may encounter discomfort or difficulties throughout the research.

6. Implications and Limitations

While the specific results will be based on the research conducted, it can be seen that the distinctive style of TikTok, merging brief and captivating videos with interactive elements, renders it a perfect resource for language acquisition. Furthermore, mastery of pronunciation is vital as it improves communication clarity, minimizes confusion, and elevates the quality of overall interactions, giving learners more opportunities to fit into the job market.

Optimistically, this research will provide insightful implications for the development of innovative teaching strategies for EFL learners with TikTok as an educational tool. However, the test period may be too short to specify some exceptional cases, and the results can be easily affected by the modes of the participants. Further improvements can be done according to these situations.

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Appendix.1 Preliminary Screening Questionnaire

Study Background

Greetings! We are postgraduate students majoring in English Language Studies in Universiti Malaya. We are conducting research on learning English pronunciation through TikTok. Your

participation in this questionnaire is highly appreciated, as it will help us select 60 volunteers for follow-up testing. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Basic Information

1) Your Name: _____

2) Your Age: _____

3) Your Gender: _____

4) Your Major: _____

5) Your IELTS Speaking score: _____

TikTok Usage

6) Do you have a TikTok account?
- Yes
- No

7) How much time do you spend on TikTok daily on average?
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- More than 3 hours

8) What types of videos do you primarily watch on TikTok? (Select all that apply)
- Entertainment
- Education
- Life skills
- Language learning
- Others (please specify): _____

9) Have you ever watched any English learning videos on TikTok?
- Yes
- No

Interest in Learning English Pronunciation

10) How would you rate your current English pronunciation skills?
- Very poor
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

11) Are you interested in learning English pronunciation through TikTok?
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Neutral
- Not very interested
- Not interested at all

12) What methods do you usually use to improve your English pronunciation? (Select all that apply)
- Watching videos
- Listening to recordings
- Imitating native speakers
- Taking courses
- Others (please specify): _____

13) Are you willing to use TikTok daily to learn English pronunciation over the next few weeks?

- Yes
- No
Contact Information
14) Your Email: _____
15) Your Phone Number: _____
Thank you for completing the questionnaire! We will notify the selected volunteers for the pre-test. Looking forward to your participation!

Appendix.2 Questionnaire for Analysis

The Survey of Students' experiences and attitudes towards learning pronunciation through TikTok. Below are some statements about the TikTok. In the first to third questions, regardless of whether you agree with each sentence, please add a "V" next to it: (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). In the fourth to fifth questions, please write down your answers.

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1.You think TikTok is very effective in learning English pronunciation					
2.After watching TikTok videos, you are very motivated to practice English pronunciation.					
3.You will recommend TikTok to learn English pronunciation with people around you.					
4.What are the characteristics of TikTok that you think are most helpful for learning pronunciation?					
5.Please provide a detailed description of the biggest challenge you encountered while learning English pronunciation using TikTok.					