



Exploring the Use of TikTok Application to Motivate Sri Lankan Adult ESL Learners to Speak

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ABSTRACT

Prominent researchers in the field of ELT such as Stephen Krashen and R.C. Gardner have emphasized the importance of motivation in learning a second language. Speaking is an essential yet difficult skill to teach as many learners are less motivated to speak in English. This study explored the use of the TikTok application to motivate Sri Lankan adult ESL learners to speak. Quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire given to a sample of 50 first-year undergraduates enrolled at the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya who belonged to the basic competency level. Qualitative data were collected from focus group discussions with these students and interviews were held with 10 instructors who taught English to students who had the basic competency level. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive methods while thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data. The study indicated that the students held positive perceptions about utilizing TikTok in the ESL classroom. The results of the study revealed that incorporating TikTok into the English language teaching process motivated the students to speak, developed their speaking skills, reduced their anxiety, increased their confidence, improved student attendance, and broke the monotony of lessons. These results were also corroborated by the interviews held

with instructors. Moreover, this study shed light on the fact that students can use TikTok to develop speaking skills even outside the classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to theories that were brought forth by Stephen Krashen and R.C. Gardner motivation plays a key role in the process of acquiring/learning English as a second language. Of the four language skills, speaking is regarded as the most essential yet the most difficult skill to teach in the ESL classroom as many learners are less motivated to speak in English. In order to transform these passive learners to become active participants in the classroom, many teachers incorporate technology into the language teaching process. The development of Web 2.0 technology has created various social media platforms, giving users endless possibilities to share information and engage in interactive communication.

TikTok is an application that was launched in 2016 by a Chinese company that allows users to create and share short videos. It is a flexible social media platform that enables users to include filters, stickers, and background music in their short videos. Despite the videos being short, this social media platform offers amusing content to users of all ages. Over time, it gained popularity among learners all over the world due to its accessibility, ease of use, and simplicity. Moreover, this application can be customized to teach/learn specific language skills. Hence, several studies have been undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of using TikTok videos to enhance students' language skills. Xiuwen & Raszali (2021) examined the utilization of the TikTok application to improve the speaking skills of Chinese EFL undergraduates. They reported that utilizing Tiktok in teaching and learning activities developed the students' interest in learning English and improved their listening and speaking competence by enabling them to

watch and post short videos. Using a sample of 16 students who learned English as a foreign language Cagas (2022) assessed the effectiveness of using TikTok videos in enhancing the speaking and grammar skills of higher education students. The study revealed that students preferred using the TikTok application due to its novelty and intriguing aspects and it improved their attitudes toward learning English. Bsharat & Hamarsha (2023) investigated the effectiveness of using Tiktok as a platform to enhance the speaking skills of students in a foreign language classroom. They found that Tiktok enabled the students to learn English in a fun way and improved their speaking and listening skills. Even though many studies have examined the use of TikTok application in developing the speaking skills of students in the EFL setting no such study has been undertaken to investigate the usefulness of TikTok application in the ESL setting. EFL students learn English mainly for academic purposes. However, English is not limited to a classroom subject for ESL students as they are exposed to real-life situations where they have to apply the linguistic knowledge learned in the classroom to suit those situations. English is taught as a second language in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, by exploring whether the Tiktok application motivates Sri Lankan adult ESL learners to speak, this present study aims to fill the existing research gap. The main objective of this research is to explore the usefulness of the TikTok application to motivate Sri Lankan adult ESL learners to speak.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since the study was exploratory in nature both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this study. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya during the second semester of the academic year where the students were following a compulsory oral English course. The students were grouped according to

their competency levels for English classes using a placement test and many students in the basic competency level were very reluctant to speak in class. Hence, purposive sampling was used, and 50 first-year undergraduates who belonged to the basic competency level were selected as the sample for this study. The instructors conducted classes for these students three days per week with each class lasting for two hours. During the 15-week long semester, they were able to complete five lessons which primarily focused on developing the speaking skills of students. At the end of each lesson, these instructors assigned mini tasks to students which they had to accomplish using the TikTok application. The first four mini tasks were individual activities whereas the final task was a pair activity.

1. At the end of the first lesson titled "Meeting People" the students were assigned the task of introducing themselves creatively using the Tiktok application.
2. The second lesson was titled "Directions" where the students were asked to give directions to different places surrounding the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya.
3. After completing the third lesson titled "Storytelling" the students were assigned the task of narrating a mini story using the Tiktok application.
4. The fourth lesson, "Stereotypes" challenged the students to create dialogues and debunk various stereotypes (stereotypes about religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc.) using the TikTok application.
5. After the completion of the Final lesson titled "Humour and Sarcasm in Conversations" the students were paired

up and asked to create a conversation for a scenario where a person with less power resists those with more power through humour and sarcasm.

Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire given to the sample of 50 first year undergraduates who belonged to the basic competency level. The questionnaire adopted the Guttman Scale, which includes a list of statements to which the respondents must agree or disagree. The entire list included positive statements about using the TikTok application to develop English-speaking skills. If the respondent agreed with the statements, it meant that the respondent had a positive perspective towards using TikTok in the ESL classroom. If the respondent disagreed with the statements, it meant that the respondent had a negative perspective towards using TikTok in the ESL classroom. After the result was collected focus group discussions were conducted with these students. Qualitative data were collected from focus group discussions conducted with these students and the interviews conducted with 10 instructors who taught English to students belonging to the basic competency level. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive methods while thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' preference to utilize TikTok in the ESL classroom.

A vast majority of students preferred to utilize the TikTok application in the ESL classroom. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the table below.

Statement	Answer		Total
	Agree	Dis-agree	
TikTok is a suitable application to be utilized in an ESL classroom.	45	5	50
	90%	10%	100%
TikTok is a useful application to accomplish the tasks assigned by instructors.	50	0	50
	100%	0%	100%
TikTok is a social media platform that allows me to express my opinions freely and creatively.	39	11	50
	78%	22%	100%
The TikTok application breaks the monotony of the ESL classroom.	50	0	50
	100%	0%	100%

3.2 Students' attitudes as to whether the TikTok application motivates them to speak.

Many respondents stated that TikTok motivates them to speak and that it is a useful application to develop their speaking skills. Moreover, many respondents stated that learning oral English through TikTok reduces their anxiety and increases their confidence. The table below presents the results of the questionnaire.

Statement	Answer		Total
	Agree	Dis-agree	
The TikTok application motivates me to speak in English.	42	8	50
	84%	16%	100%
TikTok is a useful application to develop my speaking skills.	40	10	50
	80%	20%	100%
Learning oral English through TikTok reduces my anxiety.	40	10	50
	80%	20%	100%
Learning oral English through TikTok increases my confidence.	43	7	50
	86%	14%	100%

3.3 Students' perception of incorporating the TikTok application into the process of learning English

During the focus group discussions with the students, they revealed that incorporating the TikTok application into the English language learning process motivated them to speak, made their lessons interesting, reduced their anxiety, and increased their confidence. They reported that "It was fun to accomplish the tasks assigned by our instructors through the TikTok application. If this application wasn't introduced, it would have been boring to do these tasks."

"We usually feel very nervous to speak in front of others. But when we engaged in speaking activities using the TikTok application we didn't feel nervous at all."

"Not only this application motivated us to speak, but it also made our lessons more interesting. Every week we would look forward to our ESL class"

"We enjoyed making and posting short videos through the TikTok application. It enabled us to be creative with the content and we received good feedback from our instructors for the videos we made."

3.4 TikTok as a strategy to develop speaking skills outside the ESL classroom.

Based on the information gathered from the focus group discussions with the students, TikTok was revealed to be a social media application that assists the students to develop their speaking skills outside the ESL classroom. They reported that "TikTok is a great application that helps us develop the speaking skills needed for real-life situations."

"We can use the TikTok application to practice speaking in English even outside the classroom."

3.5 Instructors' perception of utilizing TikTok videos to motivate adult ESL learners to speak.

The interviews with the instructors revealed that the TikTok application boosted the students' confidence and motivated them to speak. Many instructors reported that "Even the students who were very reluctant to speak in the class created impressive Tiktok videos where I saw them speaking confidently."

Another significant result of utilizing Tiktok videos to teach English was the significant improvement in student attendance. During the interviews with the instructors, they reported that "The student attendance during this semester rapidly increased with the introduction of Tiktok application to assist classroom activities."

"Most of my students attended ESL classes regularly as they were curious to find out the upcoming tasks that they would have to complete using the TikTok application.

Some instructors reported that poor internet connectivity was a limitation when utilizing the TikTok application in the classroom and that some students get distracted while using it to accomplish the assigned tasks. They reported that "Some students experienced difficulties in accomplishing the tasks assigned to them because of poor internet connectivity" and, "I noticed that some of my students get distracted while using Tiktok"

4. CONCLUSION

Learning to speak in English is not limited to a mere subject but is considered a useful life skill as the learners are exposed to various real-life situations where they have to use the linguistic knowledge learned in class. This study explored the usefulness of the TikTok application to motivate Sri Lankan adult ESL learners to speak. The results

of the study indicated that by incorporating TikTok into the English language teaching process, the instructors were able to motivate their students to speak. Moreover, it broke the monotony of lessons, reduced the anxiety of students, and increased their confidence to speak in English. Therefore, TikTok was revealed to be a useful application to develop the speaking skills of students. The study also showed that after introducing the TikTok application to the oral English course there was a significant improvement in student attendance. The study also shed light on the fact that the students can use TikTok not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom to develop their speaking skills.

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