

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR PRACTICING TOEIC THROUGH TIKTOK VIDEOS: STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	04/6/2024	TikTok has recently been known as a popular social media platform that appeals to a lot of teenagers due to its user-friendly and creative content. Many teachers, therefore, take advantage of TikTok to provide more learning opportunities for students. However, using TikTok as a tool to study English poses different challenges. For that reason, this article aims to explore the challenges and solutions of practicing TOEIC through TikTok based on the teachers' and learners' perspectives. The authors conducted the research on teachers and students at the Posts and Telecommunications Institution of Technology at HCMC campus (PTIT). Two instruments employed in the study were questionnaires (on 112 students) and interviews (with 4 random students and 3 teachers). The findings from the research revealed the students' troubles in practicing TOEIC through TikTok regarding 3 main themes: technical, psychological and pedagogical issues. Based on the given challenges, some solutions were also suggested by both teachers and students to improve the effectiveness of practicing TOEIC on TikTok.
Revised:	25/9/2024	
Published:	25/9/2024	
KEYWORDS		
TOEIC		
Tertiary level		
Challenges		
Teachers' perceptions		
Students' perceptions		

THÁCH THỨC VÀ GIẢI PHÁP KHI LUYỆN TẬP TOEIC QUA TIKTOK: QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN VÀ GIẢNG VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	04/6/2024	Gần đây, TikTok, một nền tảng mạng xã hội nổi tiếng, đã thu hút được giới trẻ với nội dung sáng tạo và thân thiện với người dùng. Vì vậy, nhiều giáo viên đã tận dụng TikTok như một phương tiện học tập cho người học. Tuy nhiên, việc học tiếng Anh qua TikTok có thể gặp phải nhiều trở ngại. Vì lý do đó, bài nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu những thách thức và giải pháp khi luyện tập TOEIC qua TikTok, thông qua góc nhìn của giảng viên và sinh viên. Nhóm tác giả đã tiến hành nghiên cứu với giảng viên và sinh viên tại Học viện Công nghệ Bưu chính Viễn thông, cơ sở TP.HCM (PTIT). Hai công cụ nghiên cứu được sử dụng bao gồm khảo sát (trên 112 sinh viên) và phỏng vấn (với 4 sinh viên lựa chọn ngẫu nhiên và 3 giảng viên). Kết quả từ nghiên cứu cho thấy sinh viên gặp 3 vấn đề chính: các khía cạnh kỹ thuật, tâm lý và giáo dục khi luyện tập TOEIC qua TikTok. Với những thách thức được nêu, giảng viên và sinh viên đã đưa ra những đề xuất để nâng cao hiệu quả của việc luyện tập TOEIC qua TikTok.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	25/9/2024	
Ngày đăng:	25/9/2024	
TỪ KHÓA		
TOEIC		
Trình độ đại học		
Thách thức		
Quan điểm của giảng viên		
Quan điểm của sinh viên		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.10540>

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1. Introduction

In this day and age, the advancement of new social media platforms not only creates more tools for entertainment and communication, but also provides people with further pedagogical opportunities. Of all the popular platforms, TikTok is currently emerging as the most appealing app due to its engaging contents, user-friendly interface and viral trends. People can easily find information on a wide range of topics including entertainment, lifestyle, technology, business, art, and social issues, among others. These videos are designed in short format with attractive features, so they can easily captivate people's interest and attention in today's fast-paced world.

In teaching and learning, the use of TikTok can promote learners' motivation, create an attractive learning environment, develop creativity and enhance learners' confidence. Students who have learned through TikTok feel more motivated and demonstrate greater commitment to the content than those who did not [1]. Besides, with various engaging contents and appealing platforms, TikTok can easily capture learners' attention in the learning process. It also provides some interactive features such as likes, shares and comments which allow the users to create an interactive learning community. On this platform, learners are not only able to watch videos created by native speakers, but also create their own videos to express their own ideas or show their understanding of a particular topic [2]. The process of practicing English by making videos can obviously foster the learners' confidence in language learning.

However, that is not to say that the use of TikTok in teaching and learning poses no risks or obstacles. Regarding technical problems, learners may find it difficult to learn on TikTok because of the small-screen size, poor Internet connection and fast speed of TikTok videos. It can be observed that TikTok videos are typically designed to suit the small size of mobile devices. This may cause trouble to the users because they have to struggle with the small fonts of the input data on that platform [3]. Along with that, due to the limited length of TikTok videos, the information is usually delivered quickly and lacks detail [4]. Consequently, language learners may find it hard to follow the instructions and acquire the knowledge effectively. Moreover, through TikTok, the complex information may become oversimplified, which prevents learners from having deep understanding about particular content. In other words, TikTok can be seen as inadequate for effectively conveying complex information. Another technical problem that learners encounter when learning on TikTok is unstable Internet connection. It is suggested that Internet connection is one of the disadvantages of learning online [5]. With poor Internet connection, students' learning process can be disrupted and their motivation in self study can also be diminished.

Concerning psychological problems, learners have to face challenges such as getting distracted by other entertaining content or losing focus due to disruptive sound effects. They may lose concentration on learning on TikTok due to being attracted to other interesting videos [6]. TikTok's platform was originally designed for entertainment purposes, so learners would be likely to spend more time scrolling through TikTok rather than paying attention to their video lessons. This distraction can lead to a delay in learning or energy depletion when it comes to study time. Besides, in order to make interesting videos on TikTok, the creators can utilize sound effects to engage learners in the lessons. However, the overuse of these effects may cause confusion and negatively affect the learning process.

In addition to the technical and psychological issues mentioned above, English learners also have to confront other pedagogical issues. First of all, they may have limited opportunities for pedagogical interactions of a meaningful educational context. Learning on TikTok videos means learners miss the atmosphere of traditional teaching and learning process [7]. They will obviously lack meaningful feedback from teachers and peers, and struggle to receive immediate clarification or assistance from content creators when encountering difficulties. Second, the brevity and rapid pace of TikTok videos can hinder independent thinking among learners. Due to the short-form characteristic of TikTok's platform, the video lessons on TikTok are usually very

short and fast-paced. Learners are accustomed to receiving direct answers for the questions without having sufficient time to engage in critical thinking and reflection. For a long period of time, this reliance on quick answers can lead to a decrease in motivation and a tendency to avoid tackling challenging questions independently. Third, learners can hardly familiarize themselves with the time constraints of an actual test when they study on TikTok. For example, in a real TOEIC test, the test takers are required to answer 200 questions in 120 minutes. That is truly a significant time pressure. In order to achieve high scores, apart from equipping themselves with knowledge of language skills, learners should also obtain effective time management skills. However, learning on TikTok may diminish this ability as its platform only allows learners to practice specific questions of the test at a particular time. The final obstacle to mention when learning on TikTok is the possibility of lacking accuracy. Like other kinds of social media, every user can freely create and upload their own videos showing their understanding of particular topics, but not many of them are professional instructors or teachers. There will be a wide variation in terms of quality and accuracy of the videos and learners may have trouble choosing reliable channels for their language learning on TikTok. Therefore, learners should be careful with public content and should ensure the credibility and reliability of the materials when learning on social media [8].

Overall, the review of previous studies has shown that, despite several benefits, using TikTok as an instructional tool in teaching and learning should be carefully considered due to its potential challenges. Therefore, this study aims to explore the difficulties of practicing for the TOEIC test (a popular standardized English assessment for students at the tertiary level) on this kind of social media platform. Based on the acknowledged problems, some solutions are given to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process and improve the TOEIC scores. In other words, this study sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. *What are the challenges of practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos?*
2. *What are solutions to improve the effectiveness of practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos?*

2. Methods

In this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to explore the challenges of practicing TOEIC through TikTok. Firstly, a questionnaire was used to collect students' responses on their perceived challenges of practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos. After that, a semi-structured interview was conducted to triangulate with the results from the questionnaire, and further investigate the teachers and students' suggested solutions to improve the effectiveness of practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos.

The questionnaires were distributed to 164 non-English majored students at PTIT through Google Forms but only 112 answers were collected from the respondents. The responses from questionnaires provided information about the difficulties faced by learners when practicing the TOEIC test on TikTok. Meanwhile, the interviews conducted with 3 English lecturers and 4 randomly chosen students aim to discover in-depth information about the challenges and solutions of practicing the TOEIC test on TikTok. During the interview, the researchers got permission to record the responses. The participants were given chances to freely express their thoughts and provide suggestions for the use of TikTok as a pedagogical tool.

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by the use of descriptive method to explore the general tendencies of the phenomenon. At the same time, the data from the interview were collected and transcribed for analysis.

3. Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings of the research. Based on the review of literature, the responses were coded and categorized in three themes, namely physical, psychological, and pedagogical challenges.

3.1. Students' perceptions of practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos

3.1.1. Physical challenges

Students' perceptions towards physical challenges when learning for the TOEIC test through TikTok are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of physical challenges

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I don't feel comfortable because the video sizes on Tiktok is only suitable for studying on smartphones	17.5%	21.4%	34.8%	25.2%	10.7%
I find it inconvenient because of internet connection errors when studying on Tiktok	13.4%	27.7%	19.6%	20.5%	18.8%
I find it difficult studying efficiently because the speed of the videos on Tiktok is too short and too fast	17%	22.3%	25.9%	21.4%	13.4%

Regarding the first statement of the questionnaire "I do not feel comfortable because the video size on Tiktok is suitable only for studying on smartphones", the percentage of participants who agreed (39.3%) is slightly higher than those who disagreed (35.9%). This result is consistent with Shudong and Higgins's finding [3] in indicating that TikTok video size can pose a problem for learners who practice the TOEIC test through it.

Similarly, there were a greater number of students having a negative perception toward the speed of TikTok videos. In particular, the percentage of the surveyed students showing their agreement with the statement "I find it difficult studying efficiently because the speed of the videos on Tiktok is too short and too fast" was higher, at 39.3%, compared with 34.8% of the students who disagreed or totally disagreed. This corroboration with Afreliyanna's conclusion [4] reinforces the fact that the speed of the Tiktok videos can hinder the students from practicing the TOEIC test effectively.

On the other hand, the second statement of the questionnaire "I find it inconvenient because of internet connection errors when practicing with Tiktok" records a more balanced view from the students (41.1% agreed and 39.3% disagreed). Although there was no significant difference between those who agreed and disagreed with this item, the proportion of students who felt uncomfortable with the internet connection errors was the highest in comparison with the other physical challenges. This aligns with the discussion of Hoang et. al [5] on internet connection as the disadvantage of learning online.

3.1.2. Psychological challenges

The psychological challenges addressed in this study include the distractions of studying with TikTok videos and the limitation of interaction with TikTok. Table 2 demonstrates the students' perceptions towards these psychological challenges.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of psychological challenges

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am easily attracted by other entertainment videos on Tiktok	47.3%	30.4%	12.5%	6.3%	3.6%
I am distracted by sound effects when studying with Tiktok videos	19.6%	26.8%	23.2%	18.8%	11.6%
I find Tiktok videos unsuitable for delivering information at a complex level	21%	22%	25%	20%	12%
I don't have opportunities to interact with others when studying on Tiktok	32.1%	16.1%	20.5%	14.3%	17%

The majority of the students reported that they are easily distracted by other entertaining videos on the platform (87%), while more than half of the students are distracted by sound effects from TikTok videos (52%). As stated by Hongsa et al. [6], this distraction leads to procrastination in learning or dissipates their energy, affecting their concentration on academic tasks.

Interaction is considered as one major factor in the students' learning, however, the students surveyed did not experience good interaction when learning on TikTok videos, with 54% of the students agreeing with the statement "I do not have the chance to interact with others when studying on Tiktok". This lack of interaction becomes one of the critical barriers when students are studying online [9].

In contrast, the students expressed a more neutral view on the delivering capability of TikTok videos. While 43% of the students agreed with the statement that TikTok is not capable of delivering complex information, 44% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. In this regard, the factor to the success of studying through Tiktok videos might fall back on the design of the videos [10].

3.1.3. Pedagogical challenges

The students were asked to give their perceptions about the pedagogical challenges when studying on Tiktok, including their perceptions on time issues, the content of Tiktok videos and the feedback students receive when studying on Tiktok (Table 3).

Table 3. *Students' perceptions on pedagogical challenges*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I don't have enough time to comprehend and answer the practice questions on Tiktok	13.5%	27.7%	21.4%	20.5%	17%
I'm not sure about the accuracy of the practice questions on Tiktok	20.5%	30.4%	25%	16.1%	8%
I can't receive feedbacks on my answers when studying for TOEIC on Tiktok	22.5%	26.1%	27%	17.1%	7.2%
I'm dependent on answers on Tiktok instead of spending time thinking about my own answers	29.5%	20.5%	26.8%	10.7%	12.5%
I can't familiarize myself with time pressure when studying on Tiktok	37.5%	28.6%	17%	8.9%	8%
The practice questions on Tiktok can't cover all question types on the TOEIC test	28.6%	28.6%	24.1%	11.6%	7.1%

In respect to time issues, students held negative perceptions, with the majority of the students are (74 out of 112 students) concerned about the time limits when doing the exercise on Tiktok compared with the real test. Aligning with the findings from Lin et al. [7], the short-form feature of TikTok videos affects the students' comprehension of the questions. Despite the disagreement from 16.9% of the students, 66.1% agreed that it is more difficult for them to familiarize themselves with the real time pressure of the TOEIC test. Part of the reason is that students must answer 200 questions in 120 minutes, but the size of the TikTok videos allows them to answer specific questions in a duration of time. This diminishes their ability to manage their time effectively when having to deal with a bigger set of questions from the real TOEIC test.

Moreover, the nature of the TikTok videos is giving fixed contents; therefore, students only know whether they have chosen the right or wrong answers, but the videos cannot give them reflections on why their answers are incorrect. Even though this provides them with prompt answers, the videos do not have washback values. Brown [11] stated that the challenges of classroom tests is how the students' incorrect responses can provide them an insight into their further study process. The weakness of TikTok videos is its lack of prompt feedback. While there is a comment section where students can ask questions and receive relevant answers, it takes a longer time for the students to receive an answer.

On the other hand, the content of TikTok videos is not verified. Over 50% of the students in the survey reported their concern towards the accuracy of the contents posted on TikTok. The contents available on TikTok are uploaded by any content creators, who might not be teachers. Therefore, the validity of the contents are not ensured. The students responded that there could be mistakes in either the questions or the answers. If students do not receive suitable guidance, it is more difficult for them to filter useful contents for their study. Furthermore, it is more damaging for students if they acquire the wrong knowledge.

3.2. Teachers' perceptions towards practicing TOEIC through TikTok videos

Through the in-depth interviews, three teachers have provided their insights towards the use of TikTok videos for studying for the TOEIC test.

3.2.1. Benefits

All of the participant teachers have agreed upon the engagement of TikTok videos. Teacher A reported the attraction that TikTok has on students:

The videos are engaging and attract the students' attention.

She emphasized how TikTok videos can give students a sense of entertainment while studying. This aligns with the findings from Rendón et al. [1] when they stated that the students are more motivated when using TikTok videos for studying than those who do not.

Teacher B added that the videos help the students to have constant exposure to English.

Apart from their time in class, students can also expose themselves to more English materials, such as new vocabulary or grammar structures, available on the platform.

When students do not use TikTok for studying, the amount of exposure they have to English depends only on the classes they have at school. As they are used to using their devices for studying, they can also study whenever or wherever they are.

3.2.2. Challenges and solutions

On the other hand, the teachers also reported their concern towards the use of TikTok videos for students' self-studying. One notable challenge is the distraction students may have to deal with. Similar to the students' response, the teachers are also worried about students being distracted by other entertainment videos. To deal with this challenge, one of the teachers suggested:

I think they should set specific goals and learning plans before studying. Furthermore, after each study session, they need to assess how well they have grasped the knowledge and how they can avoid being distracted by external factors.

This is similar to the findings in Hongsa et al. [6] about the students' concern towards the distraction coming from other entertainment videos on the platform. The solution might be effective in controlling the study contents. However, this will require a high degree of student autonomy. Even though this cannot be ensured by the teachers, this use of TikTok videos for studying is a process of self-studying. According to Neiterman and Zaza [12], university students reported they are the ones who decide whether they are willing to give up on the use of electronic devices for off-task purposes or not for the sake of their learning quality.

Yet another challenge students may face is the content of the videos. Different from the students' concern, the teachers mention the systematization of the knowledge.

As the platform works in a way that videos pop up randomly, the students may find it difficult to arrange the knowledge in a systematic order. Therefore, not only is it unstructured, but it is also hard for the students to memorize the information.

It can be seen that the TikTok videos deliver the lessons in an engaging way, yet they lack the organization in what they deliver, affecting the students' memorization. This is an interesting finding regarding the organization of TikTok videos. Though the students and teachers expressed their concerns towards the randomness of TikTok videos showing up on their feeds, there has

been little research on this and how it can affect the students' learning of English with TikTok videos. The teachers suggested taking notes of the knowledge after finishing watching the videos. Regarding the memorization of vocabulary, the application of semantic mapping or rote memorization can be of help for the students' learning of new words and phrases. However, with the fast pace of the TikTok videos, it will be more difficult for students to take notes or map out the words. This was also reported in Afreliyanna [4] when the students in the study reported that the explanations were too fast and ill-defined. Therefore, the application of these two methods, semantic mapping and rote memorization, on the study through TikTok videos will need to be studied further.

The content validity of these TikTok videos is also of concern for the teachers. Mukhter [8] also suggested that students should be aware of the credibility and reliability of the content posted on TikTok. Though it might help students with analytical skills during the process, the teachers might need to give them clear guidance. They stated that the students may face the difficulty of finding reliable content on the platform. Thus, it is advised that they should do more research on the information through other sources, such as dictionaries, news articles, or Youtube videos. Furthermore, the number of likes, shares and reviews from other users to find a reliable source for themselves on TikTok. They can also search for videos from their favorite teachers or from their favorite channels on TikTok to practice, increasing their motivation while studying.

It is also worth noting that the teachers perceive TikTok videos as supplementary material.

I think learners should only consider Tiktok videos as supplementary material, apart from the learning materials in class. (Teacher A)

They shouldn't take it as the main source for studying since the knowledge is not verified. (Teacher B)

It is definitely worth encouraging that the students are willing to study by themselves outside of the classroom. However, they should know how to use the application effectively. For example, they should set their own time limits when answering the practice questions on the videos to get themselves used to completing the real TOEIC test. (Teacher C)

Teachers perceive the use of TikTok videos as supplementary material for students' learning for the TOEIC test. However, the use of these videos should be managed carefully to avoid the distraction that can be caused by other videos on the platform. Furthermore, if students want to use the TikTok videos for their practice at home, teachers should also provide them enough guidance on which source they should select.

4. Conclusion

The use of TikTok videos as a tool for self-studying requires more in-depth research. The participant students and teachers consider TikTok videos as a useful tool for practising TOEIC; however, there are physical, psychological, and pedagogical challenges for the students upon using TikTok videos. While the participants have suggested possible solutions to minimize these challenges, the issues of interaction and time have not had adequate research on. Therefore, it is suggested that there could be further research on the effect of the time and interaction issues on students when using TikTok videos for their study. This research only focuses on one small sample, which is suitable for a case study. Though it meets the needs for the development of English learning and teaching at a specific institute, it does not have a large enough sample for generalization. Therefore, more research is needed for conclusion on the application of TikTok videos for practicing for the TOEIC test.

Lời cảm ơn

“Bài báo này nhằm phục vụ đề tài nghiên cứu khoa học của Học viện Công nghệ Bưu chính Viễn thông, TP.HCM. Mã số: 13-2024-HV-CB2”.

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