

The background of the cover is a photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a male student with glasses and a blue surgical mask is looking towards the right. Next to him, a female teacher or older student with a blue surgical mask is looking at him and gesturing with her right hand. In the background, another student wearing a mask is visible, slightly out of focus. The lighting is bright, suggesting a window in the background.

the apppi *e-journal*

Year 3 | 18 | Autumn 2020



ASSOCIAÇÃO PORTUGUESA
DE PROFESSORES DE INGLÊS

ISSN 2184-7525

Using TikTok to engage speaking skills

"What we learn with pleasure we never forget."
— Alfred Mercier

Carlos Lindade

During the Covid-19 confinement period, teachers were forced to rethink their teaching practice as they coped with ongoing changes in every aspect of their lives. Throughout this period, they brought the 4Cs of 21st Century Education to life: critically (re)thinking their teaching practice, collaborating and communicating with learners and colleagues in new contexts, while dealing with every obstacle creatively. The truth is that the quarantine allowed teachers to create and share fantastic approaches to ELT and this article is a result.

1. Introduction

During the Covid-19 confinement, teachers tapped into an extraordinary source of creativity. In fact, regardless of their academic background, experience or workplace, educators stopped, took a very deep breath and rethought their teaching practice, outlined new goals and endeavoured in a new context in record time. Prior to this, some would believe impossible to implement such a radical shift in such a short notice. Those voices are silent now. I couldn't be prouder to be part of such an innovative and determined community.



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Considering the above, one must reckon that school educators from every corner of the globe have utilised social media platforms as tools to facilitate classroom learning in and in particular in this new setting. In my previous article I highlighted the potential of WhatsApp to augment learning opportunities outside the physical walls of the English classroom (Lindade, 2020). This article aims to be another contribution in that direction.

2. TikTok

Like Instagram and Snapchat, TikTok has increasingly become popular with teens and tweens across the world. In fact, as of late 2019, the userbase of TikTok users had reached 800 million and it is estimated to reach over a billion users in 2020. Another important fact to consider is that approximately half of TikTok's global audience is young, under the age of 34. If you are not familiar with TikTok, it primarily features video content that is 15 seconds in length. While there is an option to share videos up to one minute long, the biggest draw of TikTok is the ability to post about anything. Humour, hobbies, fitness, travel, music, dance, photography; every category is open and gaining huge attention, which is particularly engaging because each area

is offering exposure to content in short-form video that can easily be linked to major topics covered in our lessons.

3. TikTok and ELT

First, TikTok has the potential to keep the students engaged. Apart from learning English, research in this field has pointed out that TikTok has actively assisted students in becoming innovative and creative at the same time. For most teachers, the platform has remained an alternative to many video platforms that do not engage students in learning. For older students, this platform has helped make assignments given in class manageable, especially for foreign students who have to familiarise themselves with the English Language (Klein, 2019). Consequently, they have used the platform to create scripted and short English videos, which goes a long way in helping them learn the language. In the long run, it is without a doubt that TikTok has become a perfect way to liven classrooms with students looking forward to interacting with new content in classrooms. Today, educators assert that learning in classes has become much more comfortable even as students appreciate technology has impacted learning. However, if you work in a context that has banned using smartphones in the classroom, or if you feel uncomfortable dedicating in-class time for this end, you could always consider this as the perfect homework.

It is worth noting some examples of fully embracing TikTok in teaching contexts. Well, India is a perfect example of a nation where students have managed to learn English through TikTok. Since the launch of Edutok in India, there are at least 200 million users who actively depend on it to learn English (Silva, 2019). While there are over 10 million education videos meant to assist international students, it is without a doubt that TikTok can be fully implemented in classrooms to help learn English and other disciplines as well. As TikTok moves to partner with other tutoring

platforms such as Toppr, GradeUp, and Vedantu, it is high time educators worked on ways to sensitise learners to fully embrace TikTok as a tool to help them improve their learning.

4. Possible TikTok ideas to augment English lessons

The following suggestions are simply that... suggestions! Most of these ideas could work in class or as homework. They could be scripted or not, depending on the learning outcomes set for the task. Personally, I would recommend creating (or adapting) a rubric, so learners clearly understand that TikTok tasks are part of the course and part of their continuous assessment. Here's a link for one that could easily be adapted:

https://juarezdp.weebly.com/uploads/5/9/3/5/59351771/_tok_presentation_rubric_1.pdf (08-10-2020)

Among many, many others these are my current Top10 suggestions.

Ask your students to:

1. Share their pet, favourite toy or possession with the class
2. Practise **wh**-question words by interviewing a TikTok user, a friend...
3. Complete a role-play from the coursebook through TikTok
4. Present a short tutorial or a DIY
5. Share a summary of the lexis and/or grammar studied throughout the unit
6. Highlight the dangers of mobile addiction
7. Create an environmentally friendly message
8. Share what they are grateful for (or scared of)
9. Present what one should not do in public (in a canteen, a restaurant, in a bus...)
10. Recap what they did last Summer or what they will do next Summer.

Some of these ideas have the potential of being cross curricular tasks, such as the tutorial. A tutorial could be a dance tutorial done with the collaboration of the PE teacher; the environmentally friendly message could be done with the help of the Science teacher. The sky is the limit!

5. Some concerns

While TikTok has proven to be a potential platform to aid learners, it comes with its own set of problems that educators have realized. One such issue is the platform being used by several students as a means to bully others (Klein, 2019). There have often been cases of individuals making fun of others when they attempt to learn the English language. This kind of ridicule has become a considerable challenge.

Another massive concern with TikTok is student privacy, in which most parents and teachers continue to express their worry. For a long time, individuals' security and privacy have become common problems experienced by social media users (Silva, 2019). While most students might use TikTok with pure intentions, it should be realised that some users have malicious purposes. Further, it becomes troubling knowing that content from other TikTok users is usually not censored. In such a case, it becomes quite difficult for students to concentrate and complete their assigned homework.

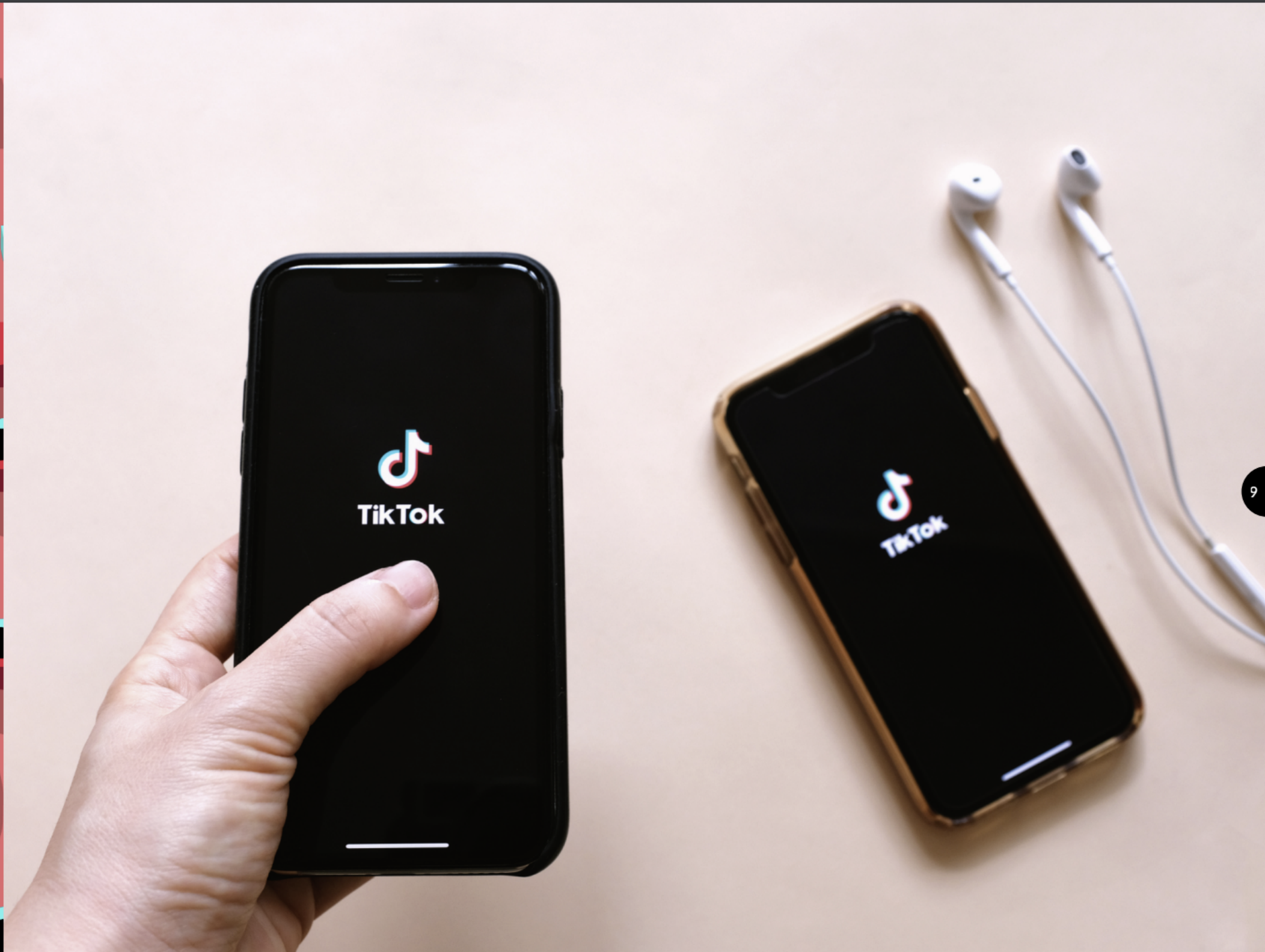
6. Final thoughts

In summary, we are in a digital era where change is inevitable. With TikTok, it is without a doubt that it holds massive potential, especially for students learning English and developing 21st century skills. Students using the app are better positioned to develop creativity, speaking, and even editing skills when sharing learning videos. Further, we have cases like India, where the app has proven to be a useful tool for learning. However, it is worth noting that much needs to be done if TikTok is fully embraced in

teaching contexts. For instance, students must be willing to seek supervision from their educators when using the platform. If there are bullying issues, it is essential to inform educators, parents, or any responsible adult to address the matter amicably. Overall, it is high time society acknowledged that technology is severely transforming everything, and with the introduction of 5G we might slowly be moving towards the age of holograms in the English classroom.

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ISSN 2184-7525

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