

Teachers as TikTokers: A Multiple-case Study Exploring Practice and Perspectives of Vietnamese English Teachers on TikTok

Quyen Tran*

Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Influenced by the participatory culture of social media and supported by the advancement of tools allowing quick and easy digital content creation, language teachers have gradually made some attempts to craft and publish their teaching videos on social online platforms. However, there is still limited research thoroughly investigating this change in practice. Therefore, this multiple-case study aimed to fill in the gap by examining the practice and perspectives of six Vietnamese English teachers who have their own TikTok accounts and dedicate a majority of their posts to content related to English learning. To achieve the purpose of the study, an initial content analysis was employed to qualitatively analyze 180 videos on the teachers' accounts, and follow-up interviews were adopted to delve further into these teachers' practice and perspectives. Results showcased: (1) how the teachers ended up making English learning videos on TikTok, (2) how different strategies are employed in their videos to serve specific purposes, and (3) how they perceive the advantages and disadvantages of sharing educational content on TikTok. Findings are expected to highlight the teachers' agency in teaching and its implications for language teaching with technology.

Keywords: Social media, Informal language learning, Language teachers

*Corresponding Author E-mail: quyentran@akane.waseda.jp

Introduction

Teachers' Use of Videos and Social Media in Teaching: Some Observed Transitions

More and more English language teachers have started to craft and share their own teaching videos with students rather than using videos made by third parties on the internet (Cowie & Sakui, 2021). Noticeably, according to Zavyalova and Galvin (2022), the platforms where teachers prefer to share their content gradually move beyond their classroom contexts to social media which has been—the one that has been regarded as playground dominantly owned by their students (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021). The same phenomenon has been observed within the context of Vietnam as some recent studies have reported how Vietnamese English teachers have gradually participated in making and sharing their teaching videos with their students via social media platforms, such as YouTube, as asynchronous learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Dau, 2022). However, most studies have placed this transition in teachers' practice as an aspect of a broader research context. Hence, this study sought to fill in the gap by providing a more thorough investigation of six Vietnamese English teachers' practice of making videos targeting the acquisition and learning of English, and having them public on TikTok—a short-video-based social media platform introduced globally in 2018 and recently becoming increasingly popular in Vietnam (Vietnamnet, 2023).

Methodology

While undertaking a research project of a bigger scope, the researcher encountered six Vietnamese English teachers TikTokers, whose practice aligns with the purpose of this study, and they all volunteered to participate in the research. Two of them work as self-hired teachers while the others are full-time teachers at private English institutions. Upon reviewing the teachers' TikTok accounts, it was observed that all of them joined TikTok at different times, and their number of followers and posts varied. However, all teachers have dedicated most of their TikTok videos to English learning content, shown by the dominance of videos featuring this content type on their accounts. To serve the purpose of the study, firstly, content analysis (Schreier, 2012) was employed with 180 English learning videos published on the teachers' TikTok accounts (30 videos per teacher) to generate main themes regarding different aspects of the videos, including “length of the videos”, “content delivering methods”, “visibility”, and “clarity”. To come up with the data set of 180 videos, at first,

on the account of each teacher participant, the filtering function on TikTok was used to sort out the most popular videos. Then, to fit the scope of the study, the first 30 videos appearing on the feed were chosen for the analysis. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007), each lasting around one hour, were conducted via Zoom, in English (except for Teacher A who chose to be interviewed in Vietnamese) with those six teachers. Translated and transcribed data was then thematically analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to gain a better understanding of the teachers' practice and perspectives on making educational content on TikTok. Data gathered was then merged for further interpretation.

Findings and Discussion

Findings are discussed regarding three main categories: (1) how the teachers started making English learning videos on TikTok, (2) strategies adopted by the teachers using some built-in functions of TikTok, and (3) their perspectives toward this transition in practice.

Regarding the rationales behind the teachers' engagement with making English learning videos on TikTok, data analysis showed that two teachers, motivated by their positive experience with the app as an entertainment tool, decided to explore further the educational potential of the platform. Meanwhile, two other participants, despite having no prior experience with TikTok, proactively employed the app for pedagogical purposes upon their notice of its popularity among their students. However, all these four teachers agreed that their practice stemmed from their eagerness to use the platform to share knowledge as a free good deed to the community, which could be indicative of their intrinsic motivation, as teachers, to "educate people, to impart knowledge and values (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p. 161). By contrast, for the remaining two participants who work as self-hired teachers, publishing English learning videos on TikTok could assist them in seeking teaching opportunities and advertising their teaching business.

Concerning teachers' practice on the platform, several language learning affordances of TikTok (Lee, 2022), including short content, hashtags, multimedia aids, and transient video content, were creatively employed by the teachers in most videos as strategies to deliver the content, to keep viewers engaged, to enhance the visibility of their posts, and to ensure the clarity of the knowledge delivered. However, the teachers not only utilized those available features of TikTok but also added several other elements such as humor, fun acting, and exaggeration as the "hooks" of their videos. Noticeably, the frequency of usage of these additional elements varied among the teachers and it reflected

each teacher's personal preferences and goals as “prosumers”—producers and consumers—of new media (Wu & Wang, 2011).

In terms of the teachers' perspectives, all of them perceived the transition to being content creators on social media as a valuable experience to develop themselves professionally and engage with other learners of English besides those in their formal teaching contexts (Zavyalova & Galvin, 2022). The teachers, however, also expressed the pressure of juggling their formal professional teaching and their future directions as content creators on TikTok. Besides, choosing to expose themselves to an unfamiliar teaching context, the teachers sometimes had their credentials questioned and became subject to problems that they may have never experienced in their formal classrooms, such as cyber-bullying (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016).

Conclusion and Implications

This study's findings demonstrate the teachers' agency, which is their “consciousness in initiating actions for a certain purpose” (Huang & Benson, 2013, as cited in Teng, 2019, p. 191), to reach out to resources not initially designed for educational purposes. That agency has brought in two aspects of “transitions” in their practice. Firstly, “transition” is shown by how the teachers moved from merely consuming available online resources to proactively creating their teaching resources representing their styles and serving their professional purposes. Secondly, “transition” is also observed in how the teachers decided to move the target audience of their materials beyond their students in usual classrooms to an “imagined community” (Gradinaru, 2016) where members can be strangers outside the online border. These transitions show that there will always be teachers who, with enough willingness and creativity, are constantly trying to diversify language teaching and learning experiences with the help of emerging tools and platforms (Stockwell, 2022). These new endeavors should be better addressed as they show the transformation in the landscape of language teaching where teachers, while being surrounded by a wide variety of technologies, gradually take on new roles and challenge themselves in novel contexts (Kuure et al., 2016).

References

- Cowie, N., & Sakui, K. (2021). Teacher and student-created videos in English language teaching. *Elt Journal*, 75(1), 97–102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaa054>

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dau, T. T. L. (2021). Remote teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam: Primary school EFL teachers' practices and perceptions. *AsiaCALL Online Journal*, 13(1), 1–21. <https://asiacall.info/acoj/index.php/journal/article/view/101>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Routledge.
- Gradinaru, C. (2016). The technological expansion of sociability: Virtual communities as imagined communities. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 7(14), 181–190. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7336/academicus.2016.14.13>
- Kuure, L., Molin-Juustila, T., Keisanen, T., Riekkilä, M., Iivari, N., & Kinnula, M. (2016). Switching perspectives: From a language teacher to a designer of language learning with new technologies. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(5), 925–941. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2015.1068815>
- Kyriacou, C., & Zuin, A. (2016). Cyberbullying of teachers by students on YouTube: Challenging the image of teacher authority in the digital age. *Research Papers in Education*, 31(3), 255–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2015.1037337>
- Lambton-Howard, D., Kiaer, J., & Kharrufa, A. (2021). 'Social media is their space': Student and teacher use and perception of features of social media in language education. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 40(16), 1700–1715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2020.1774653>
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Stockwell, G. (2022). *Mobile assisted language learning: Concepts, contexts and challenges*. Cambridge University Press.
- Teng, F. (2019). Understanding teacher autonomy, agency, and identity: Voices from four EFL student teachers. *English Teaching & Learning*, 43(2), 189–212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-019-00024-3>
- Wu, J., & Wang, Y. M. (2011). Unpacking new media literacy. *Journal of Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics*, 9(2), 84–88. <https://www.iiisci.org/journal/sci/FullText.asp?var=&id=OL508KR>
- Vietnamnet. (2023, November 16). *Vietnam has nearly 50 million people using the social network TikTok*. <https://www.vietnam.vn/en/viet-nam-co-gan-50-trieu-nguoi-su-dung-mang-xa-hoi-tiktok/>

- Zavvalova, K., & Galvin, C. (2022). Teachers as media creators and prosumers: Exploring the reasons & values behind their YouTube pedagogical activity. *Irish Educational Studies*, 41(1), 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.2022523>