

# A Review of TikTok as a Teaching Tool in Applied Writing Courses in China

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## Abstract

According to China Youth Net, the social media platform TikTok integrates entertainment, cultural dissemination, and knowledge integration, and has been called a moveable classroom. The course of application writing is a public basic course in Chinese higher vocational colleges and universities, and the problems of boring learning content, single teaching method, and students' low interest in learning have become bottlenecks restricting the development of teaching reform. At present, there are few empirical studies on how to effectively integrate TikTok into the curriculum, and the existing literature has not been fully explored. The purpose of this paper is to review and analyze the literature related to the topics of social media, TikTok, application writing course in order to provide a reference for decision-making on how to effectively use TikTok in education and teaching and explore the theoretical system of teaching educational technology and new media, and how to carry out the pedagogical reform for educators.

**Keywords:** TikTok; social media integration, teaching and learning; Applied Writing Courses

## 1. Introduction

Globally, the rapid rise and development of online social media such as Facebook, YouTube, WeChat, and TikTok along with the rapid rise and development of the technological and industrial revolution, and the widespread use of smartphones, tablets, computers, and other devices for learning, working, and living have led to changes in the way that knowledge is produced and disseminated, forcing a change in the way that young students are taught and learn. Transcending the possibilities of the limitations of the physical environment, social media and mobile devices provide students with digital learning opportunities and resources to access courses, maintain academic collaborations, and engage in learning anytime, anywhere (Gikas & Grant, 2022).

TikTok, a short-form video platform, has shown potential for use in education due to its entertaining and interactive nature. Although studies have shown that TikTok can be used as a pedagogical tool for language learning (Wang & Lin, 2021) and video teaching in English classrooms (Yang, 2020), its specific applications in applied writing courses, especially its effects on students' cognitive load and engagement, remain under-explored. According to (Li et al., 2023), while TikTok as a teaching tool is effective in enhancing learning resources and supporting personalized instruction, it requires students to invest more cognitive resources, which may affect students' learning outcomes and satisfaction.

In terms of theoretical significance, with the development of new information technology, mobile short video applications have gradually become one of the main tools for people's mental entertainment, socialization and shopping, and have triggered a research boom among scholars at home and abroad. However, at the specific level, there are few studies on the introduction of short videos into teaching, usage behaviors and students' user willingness. Given that TikTok integrates media, technology, socialization and other attributes, this paper combines cognitive load theory and multimedia learning theory and applies them to the instructional design of emerging media, such as TikTok, to provide a useful exploration for enriching the theoretical system of educational technology and new media teaching.

Regarding practical implications, the TikTok short video platform continues to grow in interest and has become one of the most important social software for university students' academic life. This study examines the advantages and disadvantages of TikTok as an instructional material, describes college students' willingness to use it and their perceptions of further understanding of young students' desired learning styles and instructional modes, and proposes key indicators to aid in the development of TikTok-based instructional materials in order to provide educators with key indicators for the development of TikTok-based instructional materials and to evaluate instructional materials to guide the educational innovation and development of technology applications.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1. Traditional learning and teaching of Applied Writing Course**

In China, the course is mainly offered in secondary vocational schools, higher vocational schools and applied universities as a public foundation course covering theoretical learning and practical training, aiming to meet students' writing and language expression needs in the workplace and to improve their comprehensive literacy. According to Zhang (2014), applied writing skills are essential skills for people working or pursuing higher education. Unlike other university language courses, applied writing courses do not have a fixed content but can be customized according to institutional preferences, but in any case, these courses must develop students' ability to publish information, handle public affairs, and solve problems (Fan, 2020).

Such courses are usually conducted in China through traditional teaching methods, such as explaining where a certain style or format might be used and providing model essays and writing exercises. Hong (2018) demonstrated that applied writing courses in most vocational colleges in China follow a teacher-centered instructional model that often incorporates article or sample readings followed by homework writing tasks designed to pave the way for students to acquire the necessary writing skills and relevant text formats or genres. Fan (2020) also found that teachers in the course were more concerned with demonstrating the concepts, characteristics, functions, structures, and requirements of a particular genre and less concerned with instructing students in actual writing. The instructor relied on the textbook in teaching the course, usually teaching mechanically by chapter and using a traditional final exam format to assess student learning. The course is usually characterized by the presentation of written materials, with the instructor modeling writing methods through PowerPoint presentations combined with step-by-step lectures and case studies.

### **2.2 Problems with the traditional learning and teaching of Applied Writing Course**

Applied writing courses focus too much on theory at the expense of practice and seem to be far from the professional needs of students. This further leads to these courses being viewed as boring and offensive

by students (Hu, 2016). Traditional teaching methods are usually based on lectures by the teacher and lack interaction, requiring student participation and motivation. In such classes, students are often passive learners, which seriously affects the efficiency and quality of their learning (Hong, 2018).

Zhang (2024) analyzed the shortcomings in the implementation of applied writing courses in schools, and the study showed that in addition to the insufficient number of students, teaching resources, and teachers, there was also a lack of practical application and technological innovation in a single teaching method; many senior teachers did not know how to use new media technologies, while young teachers overly relied on PowerPoint presentations and videos. Chen (2021) also points out that most applied writing courses remain traditional and often stick to traditional methods, limiting classroom practice and preventing students from seeing the relevance of the course outside the classroom, which leads to shallow levels of learning .

### **2.3 Use of social media platforms in learning and teaching of Applied Writing Course**

The immediacy, sharing, interactivity and popularity of social media have profoundly influenced the learning and living habits of contemporary college students and accelerated the pace of reform of applied writing courses. Through platforms like WeChat, teachers can form groups in the classroom, provide a preview of the course content before class, and ask students to collect and organize materials, share pictures and videos in advance. Teachers can also set up class QQ groups to save classroom teaching time and guide students to write online (Xue, 2021). With the help of social media, teachers can also obtain rich teaching information, introduce it into classroom teaching, and use multimedia tools to show and explain this information to students to help them understand and master what they have learned (Wu, 2022).

Recurring problems in applied writing courses, such as students getting bored, activities becoming routine and filled with templates, lack of novelty in explanations, and students “knowing what to do when they hear it, but not being able to do it when they do the writing themselves.” Pan (2019) proposes a solution based on the WeChat platform and WeChat Public Number. The platform is supported by the 365 Online Learning Client, where teachers and their students can form so-called mobile learning communities where learning can take place both “online” and “offline” through interactive communication. The same study also found differences in students' levels of information retention and motivation to complete tasks.

Through social media, students can learn at their own pace, publish their work, communicate and interact with each other, gain confidence and receive instant feedback. This way of learning is more in line with the habits of modern students and helps develop their creative expression and independent learning skills. In a study on an applied writing course, Li and Chen (2019) encouraged teachers to use WeChat public accounts in different course modules to enable students to practice their writing skills immediately, displaying and rewarding students for their excellent work, while the number of articles posted, read and retweeted was used as an indicator of additional incentives .

### **2.4. Perceptions of students on the use of social media in learning and teaching**

According to Pan (2020), with the advent of the Internet age and the rapid development of digital technology, young people born in the 21st century are referred to as “millennials” or “digital natives”. This group has grown up in an era where computers and gadgets are used to search for information, learn, socialize and even play games, which makes them more inclined to multimedia learning such as through videos, images, animations, and other digital materials. Euis (2024) mentions that, compared to other social media apps, TikTok has the ability to add music, use a variety of filters, change the voice,

and use facial filters, measuring time, collaborating, and live streaming, which are important reasons for its popularity among many users.

Social media platforms are favored and widely used by students and faculty in higher education because of their convenience and their ability to promote collaboration and interaction. A study conducted by Li (2024) in a university in Xi'an, Shanxi Province, China, revealed that the main motivations for students to use social media in these universities were study, socialization, leisure and entertainment; the findings showed that 60.87% of students believed that social media helped them to obtain information, learn knowledge and be able to openly discuss problems in their studies with their teachers. Yang (2022) specifically used TikTok as a teaching tool and integrated it into the blended teaching model of the “Audiovisual Language” course. Through questionnaires and interviews, the majority of students expressed high satisfaction with the blended learning model of integrating TikTok into the course, and were satisfied with the learning resources, learning experiences, and instructional format used.

Although most of the studies indicate that students have positive attitudes toward the integration of social media into teaching and learning, there are many challenges to this integration. According to Chen and Lee (2024), student autonomy and diversity in learning styles have increased significantly in the new media era. The interviewed students indicated that their learning initiative, self-learning ability and self-management ability have been greatly enhanced from relying on traditional classroom teaching to being able to learn anytime, anywhere through online educational resources, such as video textbooks, interactive question banks, and e-books. However, at the same time, they also face deficiencies or regressions in areas such as attention duration and information screening ability.

### 3. Conclusion

TikTok has the potential to increase student motivation, promote creativity and curiosity, and support personalized instruction. However, there are also difficulties and challenges such as student distraction and information screening difficulties. The traditional teaching of higher vocational applied writing courses has problems such as focusing on theory rather than practice, and being boring, etc. Integrating TikTok as a teaching tool into higher vocational applied writing courses will help optimize college students' creative expression and learning outcomes in courses such as applied writing. Future research can explore in depth the specific application effect of TikTok in applied writing courses through experimental methods, further explore the theoretical system of educational technology and new media teaching, and provide decision-making reference for educators to carry out teaching reform.

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