

TeachTokerists in the Philippines: A Husserlian Phenomenology

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Abstract

The usage of TikTok in the educational environment appears to be sparse, in contrast to previous studies that assess methods of integrating various social media platforms. As a result, this study aimed to clarify this issue by exploring the experiences and viewpoints of teacher-Tiktokerists or TeachTokerists in the Philippines to comprehend Tiktok's function in the field of education. Using Edmund Husserl's (descriptive) phenomenology, the findings revealed that TeachTokerists are from all over the Philippines, handling various courses in primary education. Most were aware of the app before the pandemic but only started using it during the pandemic-related lockdowns. The acronym "EDU", which refers to E - Entertainment Purposes, D - Development of Content, and U - understanding oneself and others, is an example of why teachers in the Philippines are on Tiktok. The acronym "TOK" was developed by the researchers based on the themes they identified regarding the roles TikTok has made in Philippine education: T for Tools for Teachers and Students, O for Optimization of Students' Confidence, Video Editing Skills, and Talents (CVT), and K for Knowledge Resource for Teachers. In the arena of Philippine education, TikTok may be advantageous. With the help of its easy-to-use interface, teachers may better convey key ideas to students and help them create videos as part of their learning output or performance. Furthermore, teachers can include educational materials that are freely available online in their lessons. Regrettably, the TeachTokerists listed the dangers that TikTok poses to students, including, but not limited to, vulgar language, excessive app use, incorrect information, and criticisms from other users. In the future, a quantitative version of this study may be carried out to include more TeachTokerists, and the room to learn more about the experiences of TeachTokerists who produce educational content also remains open.

Keywords: TikTok, Husserlian phenomenology, TeachTokerists, EduTok, Short-video platform

Introduction

Short videos on social media platforms alter the experience of acquiring skills by providing aesthetically appealing materials and communication capabilities that allow users to connect with others (Qiyang & Jung, 2019). This kind of video is provided by TikTok, a short-form mobile video platform that allows users to do lip-synching or other creative videos (Eghtesadi & Florea, 2020). The app guides users through the process of becoming a video producer so that they may share videos on various topics for archiving, escapism, self-expression, social interaction, and social activism, particularly among young people (Hautea et al., 2021; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vhatkar & Mali, 2021). On another note, Zhu (2020) opined that TikTok is a technology company that offers similar services to Facebook, Twitter, and Line, but it is clear that none of them have faced the same prejudice as TikTok.

According to Ahlse et al. (2020), entertainment is the major reason for using TikTok. In addition, the most commonly referenced theme in the research of Henneman (2020) on TikTok assignments was developing creativity. Another research explained that the vast reach of videos via TikTok provides users with immediate satisfaction because of the rise in “self-identity” (Kumar & Prabha, 2019). Overall, TikTok “makes everyone feel like they belong”, according to one participant in Solomon (2021).

To add more, TikTok has been found advantageous in various disciplines. According to Zaitun et al. (2021); Aranego, (2020), utilizing TikTok as a medium increased students’ confidence and motivation in speaking English while also providing fresh experiences to express themselves freely. Nabilah et al. (2021) recommends that students and instructors be encouraged to use TikTok to create a contextual, relevant, and engaging learning experience, mainly when writing descriptive texts. Torres (2020) expressed that participants in her study made TikTok cooking videos to display their nutrition knowledge and culinary abilities to encourage healthy eating. The curriculum assessment findings indicate that the materials and activities are acceptable for teenagers. In chemistry, viewers of TikTok videos agreed that they had learned something new and had a greater interest in the subject (Hayes et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok has also been found useful. The findings of Sachs et al. (2021) imply that many TikTok users have publicly exposed private elements of their identities, which are related to people getting more enmeshed in pleasant online environments while socially isolating or quarantining themselves. Similarly, Ostrovsky and Chen (2020) surmised that TikTok is a valuable tool for practitioners to teach and refute COVID-19 misconceptions across a varied teenage audience.

Despite TikTok’s proven track record, it is also peppered with cons. TikTok is viewed as a distraction, a bad influence, and a stumbling barrier in students’ path to self-improvement (Liang, 2021; Wright, 2021). The study of Vijay and Gekker (2021) has raised concerns about controversial materials, hate speeches, and a lack of platform responsibility. Child pornography, cyberbullying, and parental disengagement have all been linked to this application’s use (Jaffar et al., 2019). Regarding data security and privacy, TikTok has already shown to be more concerned than others (Anderson, 2020).

Unlike existing research that evaluates ways of integrating various social media platforms, there seems to be a paucity in the use of TikTok in the education landscape. Hence, this study strives to shed light on this matter by delving into the experiences and insights of teacher-Tiktokerists or TeachTokerists in the Philippines to understand TikTok's role in education better. In particular, the study sought to answer the following research queries:

- RQ1: What are the profiles of TeachTokerists in the Philippines?
- RQ2: Why are teachers in the Philippines on TikTok?
- RQ3: What are the roles of TikTok in the field of Philippine education?

Materials and methods

Research design

This study adopted Edmund Husserl's (descriptive) phenomenology because it conveyed a vivid and detailed depiction of TeachTokerists' actual experiences and insights about TikTok in the Philippines, which finally led to a better understanding of TikTok's role in the realm of education (Heotis, 2020; Reiners, 2012).

Site and participants

Twenty-one TeachTokerists were recruited to participate in the study via a Facebook page and a Facebook group chat room of TeachTokerists across the major islands in the Philippines. There were representatives from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Purposive sampling was employed via the following inclusion criteria: (1) a member of the TeachTokerist Group in the Philippines; (2) at least 20 uploaded videos on TikTok before the in-depth interviews; (3) a license in teaching in the Philippines; and (4) a willingness to participate in the study.

Instrumentations

To answer the study questions, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide using the framework of Kallio et al. (2016). The phases included identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews, retrieving and using previous knowledge, formulating the preliminary interview guide, pilot testing the guide, and presenting the complete semi-structured interview guide. Before presenting the complete interview protocol, it underwent pilot -testing with the founder of the group of TeachTokerists in the Philippines. It was done via Zoom video conferencing with a consent letter before the interview, which lasted for about 40 minutes. On the other hand, the content of the interview protocol was validated by a language expert. Changes were incorporated as a result.

Data gathering procedure

Consent letters were distributed in the group chat room of the TeachTokerists in the Philippines, and willing participants heeded the call. For the recruited informants, due to the nature of their work, after work hours, or on weekends, they are given a schedule at their most convenient time. Because the research required learning how TeachTokerists perceived their

circumstances and experiences related to the research issue under consideration, a one-on-one in-depth interview was conducted (Morris, 2015).

Each session was recorded via Zoom video conferencing, which lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and was transcribed afterward. The researchers utilized Widodo's (2014) methodological considerations in data transcription, composed of listening to talking data, shaping talking data, communicating talking data with an interpretative intent, reproducing or (re)constructing talking data, and building data credibility. To establish credibility, the recordings and transcripts of the one-on-one interviews were sent to the participants for feedback or member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Data analysis

The researchers followed Braun and Clarke's Phases of Thematic Analysis (2006), which included getting familiar with the data, generalizing initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. On the other hand, the researchers were recursive in the phases to ensure that the themes were carefully generated.

Results and discussion

The first research query explored the background of teachers in the Philippines who are on TikTok. The profile of TeachTokerists in the Philippines is identified in the figure below.

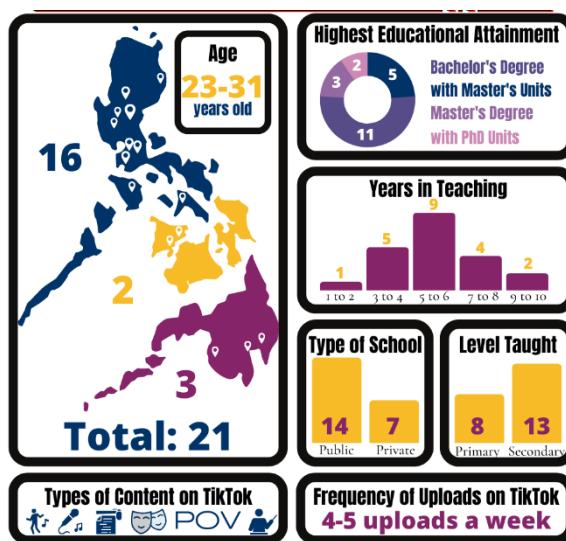


Figure 1 TeachTokerists in the Philippines

A total of 21 TeachTokerists participated in this study. They are distributed from all over the Philippines, with 16 from Luzon, 2 from the Visayas, and 3 from Mindanao. Despite being active on TikTok, TeachTokerists in the Philippines advance their studies, with most enrolled in a graduate program. Most (9) of them have been teaching for 5 to 6 years, 6 teachers have less than 5 years of teaching experience, and another 6 teachers have been in the service

for more than six years. More TeachTokerists teach in public schools (14) compared to private schools (7), while more TeachTokerists handle secondary education (13) compared to primary education (8). Corresponding to the number of years in teaching, most of them are 27- year-olds, the youngest participant being 23 years old while the oldest at 31 years old.

TeachTokerists handling elementary pupils are generalists, while those in secondary education handle diverse courses like Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH), English, Humanities, Science, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood courses. Being an entertainment platform, TeachTokerists mainly create content in singing and dancing. These contents have led some of them to be featured in the news, invited to perform on TV shows, and discovered for TV singing contests. Other than singing and dancing, TeachTokerists also do tutorial videos, skits, travel videos, lip-synchronization, dubbing, POVs (point-of-view), and educational content. TeachTokerists also ride on whatever is trending on the social media app. Most of them discovered the app before the pandemic but admittedly only became active during the lockdowns because of the pandemic. Most are active app users with 2 to 4 video uploads in a week, thousands of followers, and thousands to millions of cumulative likes.

The second research query highlighted why teachers in the Philippines are on Tiktok. The findings included three primary reasons exemplified in 'EDU,' which stands for E - Entertainment Purposes, D - Development of Content, and U - understanding oneself and others. All these are found in figure 2.

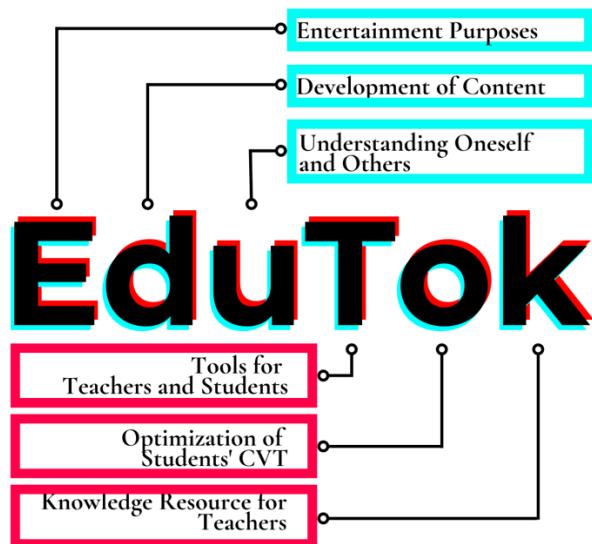


Figure 2 EduTok Simulacrum

E – entertainment purposes

TeachTokerists inevitably resonated with TikTok in the wake of the pandemic due to the lockdowns circulating in the country, and Filipinos, including teachers, were required to

stay in the confines of their homes. As the days went by, the teachers started being in a state of ennui. Consequently, TeachTokerist 4 shared:

“T4: I joined TikTok last year because of boredom, and the application became my pastime”.

Amidst the global pandemic and piles of paperwork, TeachTokerists found glee in watching funny videos in the application; it has become an outlet to relieve their stress on a positive note. In fact, TeachTokerists 11 and 16 averred:

“T11: I have watched many videos on TikTok, so it has become a source of my happiness and entertainment”.

“T16: To relieve my stress because of my paperwork, I watched videos on TikTok”.

Finally, TikTok has become a form of escape from hullabaloo since the start of the pandemic until this day. TeachTokerist 8 supports this statement saying:

“T8: TikTok has been an escape for me as a teacher to release my stress until now”.

According to Ahlse et al. (2020), entertainment is the primary motivation for utilizing TikTok. This is fathomable since Filipinos have been compelled not to leave their houses. With most people remaining at home due to the COVID-19 outbreak, TikTok has exploded in popularity (Su et al., 2020). It is worth noting, though, that the TeachTokerists found out what TikTok was through the influence of other people like their own students, fellow teachers, and friends. Due to the limits imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, teenagers are spending more time on social media (Nilsson et al., 2022). This may be the same case with the TeachTokerists because many discovered TikTok via Facebook amid the pandemic.

D – development of content

Many of the TeachTokerists started being on TikTok as recipients of entertainment only. Little did they realize that the application would pique their interest in creating their content just like what teachers did in the four-walled classroom pre-pandemic. This time, their content would be done on a digital platform. TeachTokerist 20 explained:

“T20: It is a great way to educate the audience and share ideas or thoughts on TikTok”. The TeachTokerists may have to put their educational content to fruition, but they were able to showcase their talents. TeachTokerists 1 and 9 reasoned:

“T1: One reason I joined TikTok is that I have something to share like dancing, dubbing, song covers, and the like”.

“T9: I may continue my talent in dancing or acting, which is why I installed TikTok”.

In the future, it will not just be talents that educators on TikTok will dip their fingers into but also clarifying or questioning the veracity of information presented on the platform. TeachTokerist 19 explicated:

“T19: Involvement of teachers on TikTok is also a good thing, for we can examine how information may be presented to our learners and make clarifications or confirmations about it”.

Montag et al. (2021) stated that TikTok users could not just passively consume material, but also actively produce it. That is why Nabilah et al. (2021) recommend that instructors be

encouraged to use TikTok to create a contextual, relevant, and engaging learning experience. As a result, imaginative and creative educators may emerge (Azman et al., 2021). In the future, TeachTokerists can utilize TikTok to create and deliver creative learning content to aid in pedagogical approaches, making it easier to create high-quality e-learning content (Khlaif & Salha, 2021).

Notwithstanding, the TeachTokerists suggested that TikTok videos be created during teachers' vacant periods such as morning, lunch, or noon breaks, or time of the day and days of the week in which teachers have much more available time. TeachTokerist 8 succinctly explained:

“T8: TikTok does not interfere with my schedule. After work, I have my ‘Me’ time for entertainment and relaxation. These are the moments I create TikTok videos also”.

More importantly, the TeachTokerists cautioned that teachers must be responsible for creating content. TeachTokerist 17 warned:

“T17: Since we are licensed professional teachers, we have certain limits. We must be aware that students and other people follow and possibly know us, so we must be careful with what we post on TikTok”.

It appears that limits bind teachers because of their profession. In support, former Philippine Education Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones advised teachers and non-teaching staff to always uphold the highest ethical and professional standards in their words and deeds in her statement released on ABS-CBN News (“Potential child abuse action”, 2021).

U - understanding oneself and others

The TeachTokerists confirmed that TikTok became a platform to show their genuine ‘selves’ - that these teachers are more than what they do, as stated by TeachTokerist 9. As a matter of fact, TeachTokerist 20 complemented that it is a way to communicate deep-seated feelings.

“T9: TikTok provides an opportunity for teachers to show their talents and become genuine about themselves by showing who they are and what their talents are. This shows students that teachers are not only meant to teach. They are also humans who do other things besides teaching”.

“T20: It is also a way for the generation to express ourselves. It is your freedom of expression. It is a tool to communicate your feelings”.

TeachTokerist 2 added that TikTok became a capsule to show vulnerability. Furthermore, it became a confidant whereby he/she could express himself/herself more on the platform than with others.

“T2: Teachers also deserve to show their other sides. For some reason, TikTok eases stress and anxiety, and in this platform, they can freely express themselves better than directly expressing themselves with people”.

Understanding oneself includes the discovery of other skills, which was, in part, made possible by TikTok. TeachTokerists 20 and 21 construed that these skills are enveloped in creativity and technology skills necessary for the 21st century.

“T20: You could also develop skills like video editing and being creative.”

“T21: TikTok increases the versatility of a teacher. Since 21st century students should be equipped with communication and technology skills, teachers should do too. Short video platforms, blogging/vlogging, and podcasts are emerging educational trends in response to Education 4.0. Therefore, these applications and social media platforms are avenues for teachers and students to enhance their skills”.

Understanding oneself also means having mental health equilibrium, and TeachTokerists claim that TikTok serves this purpose. TeachTokerist 18 expressly affirmed that it can assuage stress, anxiety, sadness, and even depression.

“T18: TikTok can be a remedy for our stress, anxiety, and sadness. It can also be a tool or a medium to ease our depression in life”.

Compared to other social media platforms teeming with professional production quality and preening influencers, TikTok presents self-image in a less polished manner, mainly by amateur performers, making it more personable and authentic (Su et al., 2020) even on the side of TeachTokerists. Another research explained that the vast reach of videos via TikTok provides users with immediate satisfaction because of the rise in “self-identity” (Kumar & Prabha, 2019). Overall, TikTok “makes everyone feel like they belong”, according to one participant in Solomon (2021).

As regards understanding others, TikTok built bridges of connection with people generally and with teachers specifically as stated by nine TeachTokerists. TikTok has millions of subscribers from various walks of life, varying age groups, diverse religious beliefs, and from many parts of the world. However, they congregate on this social media platform. The TeachTokerists met strangers and connected with them, which, in the fullness of time, forged friendships. TeachTokerist 11 postulated that:

“T11: Because of the pandemic, there had been nights when I felt sad, so I just used TikTok. And then, I met people, and it felt good because I could share my feelings with strangers. Eventually, some of these people have become my friends”.

Indeed, using the app brings amusement to teachers through difficult moments and builds a community outside their usual classroom environment (Peña, 2021). Similarly, Barta and Andalibi (2021) suggest that TikTok's feasibility as a location for social support exchange and the usefulness of the comments area makes it a helpful communication platform.

The third research query delved into the roles of TikTok in the field of Philippine education. Based on the themes generated in the study, the researchers arrived at the following: T - Tools for Teachers and Students, O - Optimization of Students' Confidence, Video Editing Skills, and Talents (CVT), and K - Knowledge Resources for Teachers. These are also found in figure 2.

T - Tools for teachers and students

The relevance of TikTok in education bloomed palpably this pandemic because of the migration of students and teachers from face-to-face to online learning. TeachTokerist 21 made it clear that:

“T21: First is in the creation of instructional materials. With the emergence of online instruction, blended learning, flipped classrooms, and the like, TikTok can be a tool for teachers in creating their educational videos”.

In online learning, TikTok may be a substitute for real-time class discussion; teachers can record their content and upload it on the platform to disseminate information which will be forwarded to other social media sites for students’ consumption. TeachTokerist 17 opined:

“T17: It can be a source or a tool for delivering some informational content, just like what other creators do in their content on TikTok. Just like what I have done before, I upload my videos on TikTok and save them. Then, I will forward the videos to our Facebook chat rooms or ClassDojo”.

Teachers can also use TikTok as a recording tool for students’ assignments especially when they need to demonstrate a skill. The platform can be particularly useful in displaying students’ skills in cooking, dancing, singing, and observing an experiment, as perceived by TeachTokerists 1, 4, 5, and 15.

“T1: I asked my students to cook eggs differently using TikTok. After that, they will upload the videos and tag me”.

“T4: They will perform a modern dance using TikTok”.

“T5: I ask my students to record their dances and songs through TikTok as their Performance Tasks (PT)”.

“T15: Students will create TikTok videos to explain something, to share their thoughts about a concept, or to present their observations from an experiment”.

The findings of Anumanthan and Hashim (2022) show that TikTok is an excellent teaching tool, and that students enjoyed the class when TikTok was used. TikTok’s broad reach is the appropriate medium for sharing factual information that may help with formal studies as a supplement to other existing standards of practice (Rahayu, 2022; Sikkandar et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers can use this application to enhance teaching and learning (Maretha & Anggoro, 2022).

O - Optimization of students’ CVT

Another theme that has emerged in this study is the ability of TikTok to optimize students’ confidence, video editing skills, and talents. Therefore, it assists students in improving their existing knowledge and abilities (Azman et al., 2021).

Confidence

TeachTokerists have noticed that shy students pre-pandemic have metamorphosed into confident students who showcase what they have via social media. TeachTokerists 4 and 11 observed:

“T4: Although there are shy students, they become more confident to express themselves and to show their moves on TikTok, which can build their confidence”.

“T11: TikTok is a great platform to boost students’ confidence to show what they can do”.

Indeed, various researchers concluded that using the Tiktok application has a benefit on the level of confidence of students (Doni et al., 2022; Maretha & Anggoro, 2022; Palupi et al., 2020; Savira et al., 2022).

Video editing skills

Since TikTok contains available video editing mechanisms, students maximize their use to produce quality videos. TeachTokerist 5 supported:

“T5: TikTok can enhance different skills, one of which is editing skills. Of course, you will not post a video without editing it to make it better”.

TikTok is a platform that encourages users' creativity by offering them simple and effective user interfaces and numerous tools to edit their videos (Neyaz et al., 2020; Salam et al., 2022). TikTok can help them improve their editing abilities (Guo, 2021).

Talents

Lastly, TikTok opened doors for students to showcase their existing talents, sharpen them, and explore other talents that TeachTokerists 1 and 2 corroborated.

“T1: There are students who send their accounts to me. I get shocked by their talent, which I do not see during online classes”.

“T2: I know some students who did not dance, sing, or act before. To my surprise, they already know how, based on their TikTok videos”.

Since the beginning of lockdowns, people in many societies have been using TikTok to promote their talents as video blogging has expanded (Kavya et al., 2020). Patel and Binjola (2020) added that young people are using the TikTok platform to explore and uncover their talents. It is their preferred tool because it is free of national borders and physical and local restrictions.

K - Knowledge resource for teachers

Learning platform

More than half of the participants in this research concurred that TikTok is a treasure trove of learning experiences from the most mundane to the most technical aspects of the world, which simultaneously transpire and can readily be accessed in just one click. Indeed, they perceived TikTok as a good learning platform for teachers as long as they picked appropriate content. TeachTokerists 14 and 16 said:

“T14: There are content creators who share their knowledge or skills in various fields such as education, nursing, medicine, and dentistry, among others. The things that can be learned on TikTok are so limitless”.

“T16: If teachers follow educational content creators on TikTok, they will have other sources of information, as long they are responsible enough to choose the right people”.

Scholars, academic administrators, and university instructors benefit from TikTok, according to the research of Guo (2021), since they can seek professional information on the platform, and there will always be someone who is an expert in a particular field to disseminate their words.

Educational material

As an educational material, TikTok can be used in two ways; the first involves teachers using TikTok videos as instructional materials and supplementary materials. Instructional materials are used in specific sections of the class. In this case, TikTok videos are integrated during the motivation part of the lesson (TeachTokerists 6 and 11) and discussions (TeachTokerists 13 and 20).

“T6: I use the videos in the ‘Motivation’ part of the lesson to catch students’ attention”.

“T11: I have presented TikTok videos before in the ‘Motivation’ part of the lesson”.

“T13: Since I handle Science classes, I use TikTok videos in the discussion to catch their attention”.

“T20: I have integrated TikTok videos from news outlets in my Philippine Politics and Governance discussion”.

Additionally, TikTok videos are incorporated to supplement specific lessons. These videos are deemed credible by the teachers, which is why they are circulated in group chat rooms on Facebook. For instance, TeachTokerists 1 and 11 shared:

“T1: I enumerated some credible and reliable content creators for students to visit, and I sometimes show them their contents”.

“T11: As a research teacher, I sent TikTok videos to the Group Chat rooms of my classes because I found these videos helpful in their research. The videos are about presenting their research using IMRaD format, so it was informative”.

Whether for instructional or supplementary purposes, the TeachTokerists are in unison with the application’s usefulness, which is congruent with the study of Kusumadyahdewi and Kusumarasdyati (2021), who stated that people had an overall positive perception of using TikTok tutorial videos. Furthermore, Tiktok is a valuable social media platform for sharing information and expertise on formal subjects like health and medical fields, law, engineering, and the arts, among others (Sikkandar et al., 2022).

It is tempting to showcase only the pros of TikTok in education, but the app has its cons. In summary, the TeachTokerists enumerated that TikTok may subject students to videos with adult contents, profane language, excessive app use, unreliable information, and criticisms from other users. Although these were the shared perceptions of TeachTokerists in the Philippines as participants in this study, various researchers appear to have yielded similar findings (Anderson, 2020; Jaffar et al., 2019; Liang, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Wright, 2021).

Conclusion

This study contributes to understanding users’ experiences of mainstream social media platforms. Looking into the experiences of TeachTokerists shows that Filipino teachers, similar to all other app users, come from various life backgrounds. Teachers first use TikTok as consumers of entertaining videos like singing, dancing, skits, and POVs, much like most other users. Eventually, they become content creators; however, only some participants intentionally create educational content. On another note, the app serves as a platform for teachers to

decompress from their stressful workloads and environments. This study found that aside from being an entertainment platform, TikTok offers a potential benefit to Philippine education. Its user-friendly interface aids students in producing videos as their learning output or performance and for teachers in delivering important concepts. Educational contents are available for free and can be integrated by teachers into the teaching-learning process.

Although this study has illuminated the experiences of TeachTokerists, it also has its limitations. These findings may be accurate to a select group of TeachTokerists and may not reflect the experiences of all teachers on TikTok. A similar study may be conducted quantitatively to involve more teacher-users and to get numerical insights into their experiences. Given that this study was conducted on teachers on TikTok in general, opportunities to understand the experiences of teachers who are educational content creators are open.

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