

The Existence of CEFR Reception Competence of Communicative Language Activities in TikTok

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Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides a standardized measure of language proficiency, guiding language learning and assessment globally. With the increasing use of digital media, videos have become an influential tool in language acquisition. TikTok, as a popular social media platform, offers engaging content that may support language learning. However, limited research has explored how TikTok videos align with CEFR communicative competence descriptors. This study aims to analyze the CEFR competence level of reception communicative activities in TikTok videos using the illustrative descriptor scale. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes ATLAS.ti software to analyze 200 TikTok videos collected through the hashtag #learnenglish. The findings reveal that the most frequently occurring descriptor is overall oral comprehension, appearing in 62 videos, while the A1 level is the most represented, accounting for 25% (50 videos). These results suggest that TikTok videos predominantly cater to beginner-level learners. The study highlights the potential of TikTok as a supplementary language learning tool and provides insights for future research on optimizing digital platforms for CEFR-aligned language education.

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INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a globally recognized framework that modernizes language education by integrating educational principles, well-defined language competencies, and practical resources for curriculum development and teaching guidance (CEFR, 2020). Beyond setting curriculum guidelines, CEFR also plays a crucial role in language assessment and learning material development (Mohamed, 2023), serving not only as a tool for determining language proficiency levels but also as an effective instrument for establishing curriculum guidelines, conducting language assessments, and developing learning materials. Various countries have adopted CEFR to enhance their language education systems. For instance, Arab nations have utilized CEFR to develop language curriculum frameworks (Mohamed, 2023) while Malaysia has effectively revised its English language curriculum to align with CEFR

standards (Khair & Shah, 2021). By adopting CEFR-based curricula, countries establish strong foundations for internationally recognized language learning standards, ensuring consistency and effectiveness in both instruction and assessment.

CEFR plays a crucial role in both language assessment and the development of teaching materials, providing a standardized framework for evaluating proficiency and enhancing learning outcomes. Several studies have examined the effectiveness of CEFR-based assessments in different countries. For instance, Fleckenstein et al. (2018) investigated the accuracy of CEFR-based assessments by comparing standardized TOEFL ITP scores with conventional assessments among EFL high school teachers in Germany. Similarly, Holzknicht et al. (2018) analyzed the agreement between experienced assessors from Finland and Austria in evaluating students' writing performance, highlighting the challenges and potential of CEFR in ensuring assessment consistency across countries. Beyond assessment, CEFR integration in teaching materials has also proven beneficial. Fennely (2016) structured instructional content using CEFR can-do descriptors to improve reading, listening, and writing skills, while Darmi et al. (2017) designed CEFR-aligned materials to enhance communicative competence at the University of Malaysia. Additionally, Prisia & Melor (2019) incorporated both textbook (Pulse 2) and non-textbook materials to expand students' vocabulary knowledge. These studies pointed out the CEFR's effectiveness in fostering comprehensive language learning by strengthening assessment reliability and facilitating structured curriculum development, thereby enhancing English proficiency in diverse educational contexts.

CEFR categorizes overall language competency into four major groups: General Competence, Communicative Language Competence, Communicative Language Activities, and Communicative Language Strategies (CEFR, 2020). To enhance language instruction, educators can focus on Communicative Language Activities, ensuring classroom practices are more effective, relevant, and aligned with learners' real-world communication needs. Reception Competence, for instance, involves processing input through oral comprehension, reading comprehension, and audio-visual comprehension (CEFR, 2020). The CEFR provides an illustrative descriptor scale for reception activities, including understanding conversations, reading correspondence, and interpreting announcements and instructions, each requiring specific competencies. Additionally, the CEFR (2020) moves beyond the traditional four-skill model (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) by integrating general competence, communicative language competence, and task-based strategies into four modes of communication. This structured framework supports proficiency assessment and skill development across different communicative contexts. In the digital era, communicative language reception extends to comprehending and interpreting messages across diverse social media platforms, reflecting the evolving nature of language use in modern communication.

As the education system evolves, integrating social media content into language learning presents new and engaging opportunities. Various studies have explored the benefits of different social media platforms for language acquisition. For instance, Istifci & Ucar (2021) review of social media use in language learning acknowledged the critical role of various kinds of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype, because they offer flexible language practice without being constrained by time, space and distance. Mamudi & Alamry (2021) found that Instagram's text and video features significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Ratnaningsih & Gumindari (2022) reported that YouTube's TED content positively influences English listening skills among tertiary students. Additionally, Herlisya & Wiratno (2022) demonstrated that TikTok-based speaking video projects effectively improve students' speaking

abilities. These findings pointed out the potential of social media platforms to be incorporated into language learning to help enhance different language skills and foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment.

TikTok has emerged as one of the widely used short-video sharing platforms that, beyond its entertainment value, is increasingly recognized as a resource for language learning. Studies have highlighted its potential benefits in fostering language acquisition. Anumanthan & Hashim (2022) found that TikTok videos can facilitate verb learning, while Syakirah & Santosa (2024) identified selected TikTok videos as suitable for B2-level English learners. Additionally, Yélamos-Guerra et al. (2022) emphasized its role in enhancing motivation and engagement, which are crucial for effective learning. TikTok has also been explored as a tool to improve speaking skills (Herlisya & Wiratno, 2022) and to provide accessible language input through publicly available content (Lee, 2023). To add, Ika & Santosa (2023) explored interaction within the CEFR framework, mentioning the importance of understanding communicative language activities in digital learning contexts. These findings suggest that TikTok has the potential to be an effective platform for language learning, particularly when its content is structured within a recognized pedagogical framework like CEFR.

However, challenges remain, as Zhang (2021) pointed out issues such as uninteresting content, lack of explanation, and pronunciation inaccuracies when using social media, such as TikTok, as learning resources. Moreover, while previous research has investigated TikTok's impact on vocabulary acquisition, speaking, and engagement, there is still a need to examine how it supports receptive language skills within a structured framework. Based on these considerations, this study aimed to analyze how the communicative language activities proposed in CEFR-defined reception competencies—such as listening and reading comprehension—are represented in TikTok videos. This study offered some insights into their role in language learning and their alignment with pedagogical standards.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically content analysis, to examine the presence of CEFR-defined reception competencies—oral, audiovisual, and reading comprehension—in TikTok videos. Content analysis is a systematic method for interpreting textual, visual, and audio data, making it suitable for analyzing social media content (Stemler, 2018). This approach enables researchers to assess how language-learning materials are structured and disseminated on selected TikTok videos. The study analyzes the top 200 TikTok videos tagged with #LearningEnglish. This hashtag was chosen because it is widely used by educators, content creators, and learners to share English language learning resources. Data collection follows an open approach, utilizing audiovisual and digital qualitative instruments to capture communicative activities related to CEFR-defined reception competencies (CEFR, 2020). These competencies include *overall oral comprehension, understanding conversation between other people, understanding as a member of a live audience, understanding announcements and instructions, understanding audio (or signed) media and recording, watching TV, movies, and videos, overall reading comprehension, reading correspondence, reading for orientation, reading for information and argument, reading introduction, and reading as a leisure activity*. To analyze the data, ATLAS.ti is used to categorize and evaluate these competencies across CEFR levels (A1 to C2). The process involves (1) inputting the 200 TikTok videos into ATLAS.ti, (2) coding content based on CEFR descriptors, (3) applying a scale of

illustrative descriptors, and (4) identifying the type and degree of reception competence in each video. The recorded data includes video details (username, title), annotations, and update dates, facilitating a structured evaluation of TikTok’s role in language learning. The classification of reception competencies is illustrated in Table 1.

No	Video Info	Oral Comprehension						Audio-Visual Comprehension						Reading Comprehension						Annotation	Date
		A 1	A 2	B 1	B 2	C 1	C 2	A 1	A 2	B 1	B 2	C 1	C 2	A 1	A 2	B 1	B 2	C 1	C 2		

Table 1. Data Analysis Instrument (ATLAS.ti)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 200 selected TikTok learning videos reveals a diverse range of CEFR-defined reception competencies in communicative activities. Various types of reception activities, such as oral comprehension, audiovisual comprehension, and reading comprehension, are present in the selected videos, though their distribution varies. Some activities appear more frequently, indicating their prominence in language-learning content on TikTok, while others are less commonly featured. In terms of proficiency levels, the findings suggest that TikTok learning videos predominantly cater to lower CEFR levels, particularly A1 and B1. Higher proficiency levels, such as C1 and C2, are less frequently represented. This distribution reflects the accessibility of TikTok content for learners at different stages and highlights the platform’s potential to provide language input across multiple levels. The following sections present a detailed breakdown of the identified reception activities and their corresponding CEFR levels.

The Type of CEFR Reception Competence

The findings indicate that TikTok learning videos incorporate a variety of CEFR-defined reception competencies, with certain types appearing more frequently than others. Among the 11 identified reception activities, *overall oral comprehension* emerges as the most prevalent, with a score exceeding 62. This suggests that TikTok learning videos primarily emphasize listening skills, possibly due to the platform’s video-based format, which naturally supports spoken language input. Given that language learners often struggle with listening comprehension, the prominence of this category highlights TikTok’s role in providing accessible auditory exposure in an engaging and informal setting.

Reading as a leisure activity ranks second, with a score of 34, indicating that TikTok videos offer an enjoyable and engaging environment for language learners to practice reading, albeit in a more relaxed context. This category suggests that learners are exposed to reading materials that are not necessarily academic or instructional, but rather entertainment-based, such as short stories, poems, or fun facts. This kind of content, designed for enjoyment rather than formal learning, still provides opportunities for learners to practice reading in an engaging and less structured format, potentially

contributing to vocabulary expansion and familiarizing them with informal language structures commonly used in everyday communication.

Following this, the score of *overall reading comprehension* (26) reflects that TikTok also engages learners in more formal reading tasks. These can range from on-screen text accompanying educational content to captions or instructional graphics. These texts are typically designed to supplement the spoken content, thereby reinforcing comprehension and helping viewers to understand more complex language features, such as grammar and vocabulary. Although reading comprehension activities on TikTok may not always involve in-depth analysis, they still allow learners to enhance their reading skills in a more accessible, visually engaging manner.

Reading for information and argument occurred 21 times, highlighting TikTok's potential to provide content where viewers read for specific purposes, such as gathering information or engaging in discussions about various topics. This type of reading might involve watching content related to news, opinions, or debates, where captions or on-screen text are crucial for enhancing understanding and helping learners extract relevant details from the video. The lower score for this category suggests that while there are opportunities for such reading tasks, they are less frequent compared to the more casual or general reading activities available.

Understanding conversation between other people scores 20, indicating that videos featuring interactive dialogues, discussions, or interviews are moderately present in the dataset. However, reception activities such as *understanding as a member of a live audience*, *reading for orientation*, *understanding announcements and instructions*, *reading instructions*, *understanding audio (or signed) media and recordings*, *reading correspondence*, and *watching TV, films, and videos* all receive scores below 20. The lower frequency of these competencies suggests that TikTok's educational content may not typically include structured, formal listening or reading tasks, such as following complex instructions or engaging with lengthy written materials. Figure 1 below visualizes the findings and data distribution.

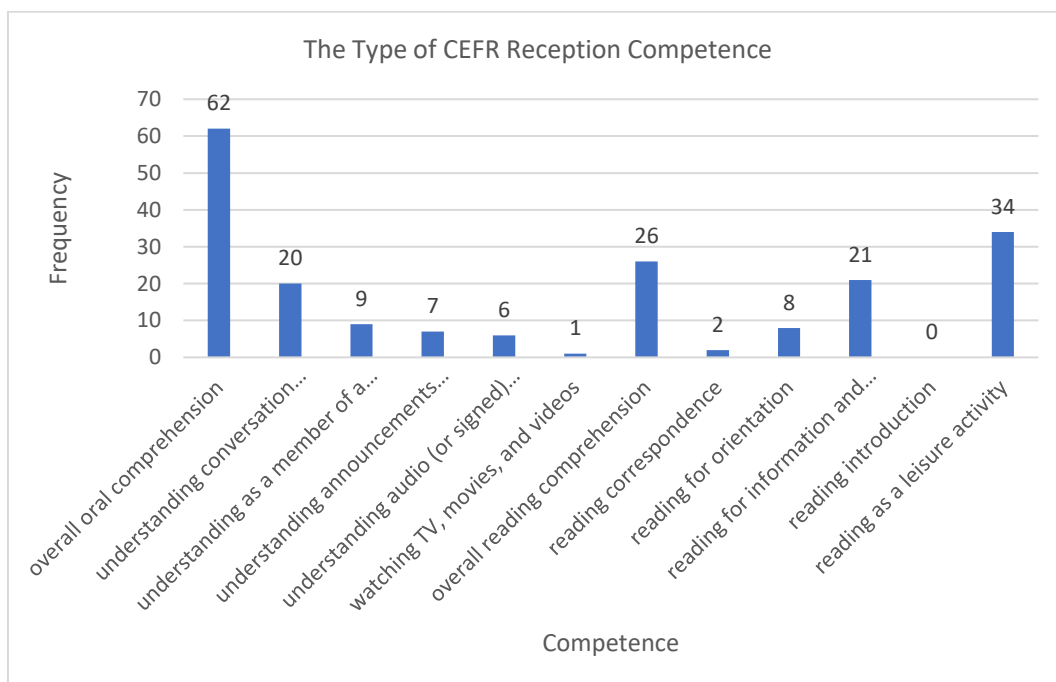


Figure 1. The Type of CEFR Reception Competence in TikTok Videos

In conclusion, the study shows that TikTok videos mainly support oral comprehension and general reading skills, with less emphasis on specialized or advanced language abilities. This trend reflects TikTok's informal, interactive nature, making it particularly useful for beginner to intermediate learners seeking authentic language input in a dynamic format. While the platform is primarily audiovisual, it also incorporates reading tasks through subtitles, captions, and on-screen text, which help bridge spoken and written language and make reading tasks more accessible. However, the study highlights that reading activities are less prominent compared to oral and audiovisual content, emphasizing TikTok's focus on auditory and visual elements. Overall, while TikTok proves valuable for developing oral and general reading competencies, it is most beneficial for learners at early to intermediate proficiency levels.

The Level of CEFR Reception Competence

The analysis of CEFR reception competencies in TikTok learning videos highlights a significant concentration of content at the lower proficiency levels, with Level A1 taking the lead, representing 25% of the videos analyzed. This suggests that TikTok is most commonly utilized by beginner learners. A1-level content generally includes basic language skills, such as simple greetings, common phrases, and introductions, along with an emphasis on listening to simple sentences and understanding very basic vocabulary. The prominence of this level indicates that TikTok serves as an entry point for new language learners who may benefit from the platform's dynamic and visually engaging format. Additionally, this suggests that TikTok's design, with its short videos and visual components, is well-suited to delivering bite-sized, easily digestible content that aligns with the needs of early learners.

Following closely is Level B1, which makes up 23% of the videos analyzed. This level is typically associated with intermediate learners who are capable of handling more complex sentence structures and engaging in everyday conversations. TikTok's informal and conversational style naturally complements this level, as videos often feature real-life scenarios, practical language use, and interactive communication, which are crucial for B1 learners. The high percentage of B1 content suggests that TikTok videos play a significant role in bridging the gap between beginner and advanced stages, allowing learners to gradually build confidence in conversational skills and comprehension. This indicates that TikTok videos can have quite complicated content.

Level A2, representing 17% of the analyzed content, is the next most frequent proficiency level. A2-level content generally introduces more complex vocabulary and basic grammar structures, preparing learners for more nuanced communication. Given that TikTok videos at this level likely involve short, context-driven interactions or explanations, they serve to reinforce learners' understanding of everyday contexts, such as shopping, traveling, and socializing. This level, though less frequent than A1 and B1, still plays a crucial role in helping learners gain practical language skills.

The presence of pre-A1-level content, which makes up 14%, reflects TikTok's accessibility to absolute beginners. These videos are designed for learners who are just starting to familiarize themselves with the language, possibly covering the most fundamental vocabulary and pronunciation aspects. However, this level constitutes a relatively small portion of the overall content, which might suggest that TikTok is less utilized for introductory-level language exposure compared to other forms of media or platforms.

At the B2 level, which constitutes 14% of the content, TikTok shows a relatively moderate presence of advanced language materials. B2 learners are typically expected to manage more complex and abstract language structures, including specialized topics and detailed conversations. The relatively lower frequency of B2-level content suggests that while TikTok can support intermediate learners with general language practice, it is less commonly used for more specialized or in-depth language exercises typically associated with this proficiency level. This may indicate that TikTok's content is more focused on broader, everyday language skills rather than the more nuanced or technical aspects of language that B2 learners are expected to master.

Finally, the minimal presence of content at the C1 and C2 levels (6% and 1%, respectively) reflects a gap in advanced language materials on the platform. At these levels, learners typically engage with highly complex content, including academic discussions, in-depth analyses, and specialized topics. The limited availability of such content on TikTok may point to the platform's primary focus on everyday language use, suggesting that TikTok may not yet be an optimal resource for advanced learners seeking to further refine their language skills. See Figure 2 below for the illustration.

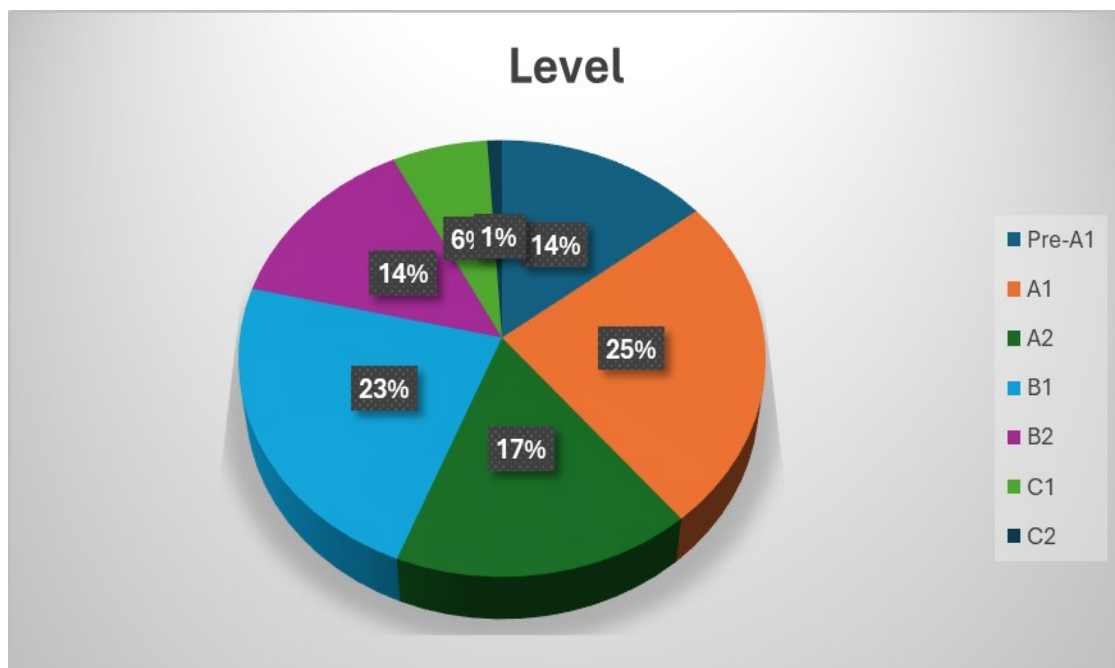


Figure 2. The Level of CEFR Reception Competence of TikTok Videos

In conclusion, the findings emphasize that TikTok primarily serves as a learning tool for beginners and intermediate learners, with a heavy emphasis on A1 and B1-level content. While there is some representation of the A2, pre-A1, and B2 levels, the platform appears to be less utilized for advanced language learning, as evidenced by the low percentage of content at the C1 and C2 levels. This suggests that TikTok is a valuable resource for learners at the foundational stages of language acquisition but may not yet fully meet the needs of advanced learners looking for more complex language tasks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

TikTok creators provide interactive language learning videos that benefit teachers and students. These videos help improve conversation comprehension and text understanding through activities like following instructions and interpreting media content. Learning videos are available at various levels, allowing learners to choose according to their proficiency. However, the short duration of these videos restricts comprehensive learning. Although TikTok content does not always align with CEFR levels, it offers valuable language learning support, especially for A1-level learners. This research focuses on CEFR reception activities using a small sample of TikTok learning videos. To gain a comprehensive understanding, larger-scale studies are needed. Future research should explore other CEFR communicative activities and determine the CEFR levels in TikTok videos. This will help us understand how TikTok supports language learning and aid in designing structured learning approaches.

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