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Collaborative TikTok Production as a Critical Digital Literacy Practice: Reconfiguring
Personal Narratives among Female EFL Students in Colombia.

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Abstract

Introduction: Currently, social media plays an essential role in society, especially the social network TikTok, which offers a space for students to create their own stories, thereby promoting critical digital literacy (CDL). This research explores how the collaborative production of TikToks allows female students to reconfigure their personal narratives, as well as question digital discourses and emerging social stereotypes. **Objective:** The general objective of this research is to understand the collaborative development of TikToks as a critical digital literacy practice for promoting personal narratives among 11th-grade female English students at a private school in Medellín, Colombia. **Methodology:** This study is framed within the historical-hermeneutical paradigm. This qualitative study used a narrative research approach. Data was collected through open interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis of their TikTok productions. **Findings:** The findings reveal that TikTok works as a multimodal archive which students use to narrate transitions, emotions, and identity reconstructions. Through collaborative editing and negotiation, female students progressed from passive consumption to critical production, questioning gender stereotypes. This process empowered their voices and valorized their experiences. **Conclusion:** This research concludes that when TikTok is integrated pedagogically, it goes beyond being a simple entertainment network and transcends to become a formative space for critical thinking and identity construction in virtual contexts of English as a foreign language. Therefore, it is suggested that educational curricula in Colombia should incorporate collaborative learning, which should provide ethical and emotional support to students who use these digital environments.

Keywords: Critical digital literacy; TikTok; Personal Narratives; English as a foreign language (EFL); Collaborative learning.

Resumen

Introducción: Actualmente, las redes sociales desempeñan un papel esencial en la sociedad, especialmente TikTok, que ofrece un espacio donde los estudiantes crean sus propias historias, promoviendo así la literacidad digital crítica (LDC). Esta investigación explora cómo la producción colaborativa de TikToks permite a las estudiantes reconfigurar sus narrativas personales, así como cuestionar los discursos digitales y los estereotipos sociales emergentes. **Objetivo:** El objetivo general de esta investigación es comprender el desarrollo colaborativo de TikToks como una práctica de alfabetización digital crítica para promover las narrativas personales entre las estudiantes de inglés de 11.º grado en un colegio privado de Medellín, Colombia. **Metodología:** Este estudio se enmarca en el paradigma histórico-hermenéutico. Este estudio cualitativo utilizó un enfoque de investigación narrativa. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas abiertas, grupos focales y análisis narrativo de sus producciones de TikTok. **Hallazgos:** Los hallazgos revelan que TikTok funciona como un archivo multimodal que las estudiantes utilizan para narrar transiciones, emociones y reconstrucciones de identidad. A través de la edición y negociación colaborativas, las estudiantes pasaron del consumo pasivo a la producción crítica, cuestionando los estereotipos de género. Este proceso empoderó sus voces y valorizó sus experiencias. **Conclusión:** Esta investigación concluye que, al integrar TikTok pedagógicamente, trasciende la simple red de entretenimiento y se convierte en un espacio formativo para el pensamiento crítico y la construcción de identidad en contextos virtuales de inglés como lengua extranjera. Por lo tanto, se sugiere que los currículos educativos en Colombia incorporen el aprendizaje colaborativo, el cual debe brindar apoyo ético y emocional al alumnado que utiliza estos entornos digitales.

Palabras clave: Literacidad digital crítica; TikTok; Narrativas personales; Inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL); Aprendizaje colaborativo.

Resumo

Introdução: Atualmente, as redes sociais desempenham um papel essencial na sociedade, especialmente o TikTok, que oferece um espaço onde os estudantes criam suas próprias histórias, promovendo assim a letramento digital crítico (LDC). Esta pesquisa explora como a produção colaborativa de TikToks permite às estudantes reconfigurar suas narrativas

personais, bem como questionar os discursos digitais e os estereótipos sociais emergentes.

Objetivo: O objetivo geral desta pesquisa é compreender o desenvolvimento colaborativo de TikToks como uma prática de literacia digital crítica para promover as narrativas pessoais entre as estudantes de inglês do 11.º ano em um colégio privado de Medellín, Colômbia.

Metodologia: Este estudo está inserido no paradigma histórico-hermenêutico. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa que utilizou uma abordagem de investigação narrativa. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas abertas, grupos focais e análise narrativa de suas produções no TikTok.

Resultados: Os resultados revelam que o TikTok funciona como um arquivo multimodal que as estudantes utilizam para narrar transições, emoções e reconstruções de identidade. Por meio da edição e negociação colaborativas, as estudantes passaram do consumo passivo à produção crítica, questionando os estereótipos de gênero.

Esse processo fortaleceu suas vozes e valorizou suas experiências. **Conclusão:** Esta pesquisa conclui que, ao integrar o TikTok pedagogicamente, ele transcende a simples rede de entretenimento e se torna um espaço formativo para o pensamento crítico e a construção de identidade em contextos virtuais de inglês como língua estrangeira. Portanto, sugere-se que os currículos educacionais na Colômbia incorporem a aprendizagem colaborativa, a qual deve oferecer suporte ético e emocional aos estudantes que utilizam esses ambientes digitais.

Palavras-chave: Letramento digital crítico; TikTok; Narrativas pessoais; Inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL); Aprendizagem colaborativa.

Introduction

Currently, social media plays a fundamental role in society, defined as a channel for art that integrates interculturality and participation in cultural movements in Medellín. This is due to increased digitization and access to digital devices (López Gil and Sandoval Sarrías, 2023). In this case, social media such as TikTok offer a space in which students create their own stories, thereby promoting critical digital literacy in the education sector (Hernández-Marín, 2024; Rodríguez Cruz, 2025). Included in these platforms, TikTok is highlighted as a space where adolescents not only participate in a social way but also as a platform that helps the young generation to create and share their personal stories. Its short video format encourages extensive content consumption, making it an interesting tool for educational integration (Morales-Navarro et al., 2024). In this context, a school in Medellín has chosen

TikTok to inquire how critical digital literacy practices can have influences in the development and expression of personal narratives among eleventh-grade English learners aged 16 and 17 in spite of the educational potential of TikTok and its popularity among highschoolers, the effective implementation of strategies that use this platform inside the English classroom to promote a critical understanding of the narrative remains a challenge for the education system. The school faces a number of issues: The need to teach English in Colombia, other ways of learning(Digital), conscious use of digital tools, and the lack of use of TikTok in the educational context in Colombia (Tobón et al., 2022).

First of all, in our country, the need to teach English is increasingly important due to evolutionary factors. Educational standards within the Colombian educational system are key elements where the government and different educational institutions emphasize that English has a fundamental role in achieving academic success. In some cases, proficiency in English as a second language is required to access higher education, securing scholarships, and being able to access and participate in exchange programs, as indicated by documents from the Ministry of Education. (2015), the significance of learning for academic and vocational progress is frequently emphasized. For example, the National Bilingualism Plan 2015-2025 reports strategies and objectives that help improve English proficiency in Colombian society to improve their academic and professional life. The government and educational institutions in the country underscore the significance of English language education as a catalyst for academic success in professional development.

Second, using digital tools consciously involves being intentional and aware of technological interactions. This means making deliberate decisions to maximize benefits and minimize negative effects. Use digital tools with clear objectives, whether to learn, connect with others, or manage tasks. According to Newport (2019) you must have intentional use of digital tools, you need to establish specific times and purposes to interact with the technology at the same time, you should also take a break from digital devices to reevaluate their role in your life.

Third, nowadays, the lack of TikTok use in the educational context in Colombia can be traced to several factors. Primarily, Cultural ideas generally consider social networks such as TikTok to be merely entertainment platforms, leading teachers to underestimate the

educational potential of such social networks (Gutiérrez Sánchez & Estepa Maestre, 2025). Traditional curricula exclude the integration of social networks due to fears about the exposure of personal information. However, teachers can be slow down assured about the integration of TikTok into the educational environment. The incorporation of social media involves a transformation of teaching practices, which must be adapted to the Colombian reality.

Theories and foundations

Critical digital literacy (CDL)

Critical digital literacy (CDL) is defined as a paradigm that is situated in the conceptual and educational, transcending the influential use of current technologies, emphasizing the practical management of these digital tools and platforms. CDL emphasizes the understanding, analysis, and critical production of meanings in digital spaces (Lankshear & Knobel, 2015). Along these same lines, Luke (2012) argues that critical literacy, in its digital form, aims to develop citizens who are capable of understanding how these digital texts mediate social and cultural relations and how they can be used for social transformation.

In the Colombian context, CDL has been explored especially in the teaching of English as a second language. Castrillón-Ángel (2019), in a qualitative study carried out in the city of Medellín, implemented podcasting as a CDL practice with teachers in training. The findings demonstrate that the collaborative production of podcasts allowed research participants to develop multiple roles, such as editors, broadcasters, and even scriptwriters, to reflect on their personal practices, and from these, to construct critical narratives that transcend the classroom.

On the one hand, other Colombian researchers have highlighted the importance of CDL in secondary education. Herrera-Hurtado (2020), for instance, developed a critical medical literacy unit for tenth-grade students in Antioquia and discovered that this approach encourages teachers' questioning of gender and media stereotypes. In a complementary manner, Ospina-Parra et al. (2022) analyzed how university professors in Medellín acquired digital literacy skills during the pandemic, highlighting the need for a critical dimension to overcome a purely instrumental approach to technology.

On the other hand, at the international level, Vasquez, et al (2019) maintain their position that CDL is essential for students to develop an understanding of how digital platforms reproduce ideologies and establish hierarchies, and how this can be used to construct alternative discourses. Likewise, Buckingham (2015) emphasizes that in the digital field, it is essential to provide user training so that they are able to recognize the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the technologies they use in their daily lives.

Personal narratives

Personal narratives have taken a central role in current educational research as a way to understand how individuals construct meanings, develop identity, and shape both their academic and social experiences. Based on Bruner's (1991) basic approach, it is considered that human beings organize their life experiences through stories, which leads to narrative being seen as a privilege of thought and communication. In the educational field, this perspective is further developed as students are able to narrate their experiences, which focus on the circulation of memories, emotions, and critical positions regarding their environment. In recent years, narrative research has gained strength as a qualitative approach that transcends the description of experiences to become a reflective and transformative practice. In Colombia, current studies show that personal narratives become a powerful methodological and pedagogical resource.

Also, Yepes-Cardona and Giraldo-Gil (2023), In their work with displaced students in the city of Medellín, emphasize that the experiential stories that reach the school allow students to construct their identity, which has been shaped by violence, thereby contributing to the redefinition of the educational experience as a space of resistance, which is encouraged. In their conclusion, they state that personal narrative is more than just remembering an important moment; it is a projection of new possibilities for existence in society. Likewise, Losada Paredes et al, (2024) reveal that the use of storytelling to narrate life stories in primary school improves oral production and, at the same time, strengthens the construction of identities, which describe the flexibility of personal narratives as a pedagogical strategy at different levels.

At the international level, personal narratives are also recognized as integral practices of identity and as priceless analytical tools. Saldías and Roy (2020), when studying oral stories in English, offered a structural analysis that provides us to comprehend how subjects arrange their experience through narratives that integrate orientation, action, and evaluation.

TikTok as an Educational Tool

TikTok, best known for its short videos, is now considered a multimodal social network as it integrates videos, text, and visual effects, fostering detailed and creative communication. TikTok has a unique algorithm that allows exposure to diverse content and, in turn, contains interconnection patterns that can be integrated pedagogically to promote language immersion and critical thinking (Wilches Tinjacá, 2024). Furthermore, TikTok is more than just a simple entertainment social network. In Colombia, research recognizes it as an educational and social application in which students of the new generation build part of their identity and participation. Cristancho-Triana, Cardozo-Casles, and Camacho-Gómez (2022) show how the centennial generation uses TikTok to showcase their creativity and negotiate their social belonging; behaviors and situations that teachers can adopt to promote meaningful learning in students.

The incorporation of TikTok into teaching has been highlighted in various studies, which show that the use of TikTok has a significant impact on student motivation and contribution in class. According to Ruiz and Chaparro (2025), they emphasize that in a school in Colombia, the implementation of TikTok in the educational field led to an improvement in collaboration and participation among students by focusing on working on the production of videos, which is understood to have a similar potential to English learning tasks. In turn, they also show that TikTok has helped students become more fluent in English as a second language, improved their pronunciation, and ultimately helped increase their vocabulary.

Various Colombian studies indicate that TikTok increases meaningful and active learning when implemented with clear and practical objectives that lead to deep reflection on the process. It is concluded that consistent classroom intervention improves collaborative video production. According to Ruiz and Chaparro (2025) and Cristancho-Triana et al. (2022), adapting influential trends in linguistic or cultural learning also contributes to this

learning. When the social network TikTok is implemented in a critical, reflective, and creative way, it can generate a transformation in traditional teaching, creating a dynamic, multimodal, and participatory context. This aligns with the skills and competencies currently required, fostering autonomy in learning English as a second language for students.

Methodology

Research Question

How does the collaborative development of TikToks as a critical digital literacy practice promote personal narratives among 11th-grade female English students at a private school in Medellín?

General Objective

To understand the collaborative development of TikToks as a critical digital literacy practice for promoting personal narratives among 11th-grade female English students at a private school in Medellín.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the personal narratives constructed by 11th-grade female English students at a private school in Medellín through the collaborative development of TikToks as a critical digital literacy practice.
- To comprehend the influence of the collaborative development of TikToks on promoting critical digital literacy in relation to the construction of personal narratives among 11th-grade female English students at a private school in Medellín.
- To describe the influence of TikToks on female 11th-grade English students at a private school in Medellín in promoting their digital literacy and developing their personal narratives.

This research is framed within the historical-hermeneutical paradigm, using a qualitative model and a narrative research approach. The purpose of this research is to understand the collaborative development of TikToks as a critical practice of digital literacy and to identify, understand, and describe the influence of TikToks on female 11th-grade English students at a private school in Medellín in promoting their personal narratives. Narrative research permitted us to describe the digital life narratives and experiences narrated by the female students, highlighting how they build and redefine their identities through the production of TikToks. Narrative research as a method is fundamental to this research because it centers on exploring personal narratives and how individuals give meaning to their own experiences. The setting of this study allows us to understand how female students use the TikTok platform as a space to exhibit their experiences, emotions, and identities, and how this adventure impacts their critical digital literacy (Costantino, 2001).

Data analysis

In this investigation, a data analysis process was carried out, which implemented a systematic process consisting of transcription, organization, and coding, using a matrix. This matrix established a coding system aligned with the general objective and the three specific objectives of the research. The participants in this research were a total of 11 female eleventh-grade students from a private school in the city of Medellín who created various collaborative works for the social network TikTok as a digital literacy practice. The data were collected through three research techniques: open interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis of the female students' narratives and creations.

During the initial stage, all data collected through open interviews and focus groups were transcribed and stored as recordings and field notes, forming a digital corpus in which filler words and markers of doubt were removed while expressions related to experiences, opinions, feelings, and thoughts about TikTok and personal narratives were preserved. A narrative analysis was conducted to identify events, characters, chronologies, and key moments in how female students narrated their experiences creating content for TikTok. Once the corpus was consolidated, an initial open coding process was carried out following an inductive approach based on patterns in the students' narratives, leading to codes such as

sharing personal experiences, negotiating what to show or hide, questioning stereotypes, and collaborative decision-making.

For this first specific objective, to identify the personal narratives created by the students in the collaborative development of TikToks, the most important codes were those associated with concepts such as identity, experiences, emotions, and their role as young women. Taking the above into account, a coding of core codes was carried out, which emphasizes the production of narrative identities and the reinterpretation of their own narratives through TikTok.

For the second specific objective—to understand how TikTok's collaborative development influences the promotion of critical digital literacy—codes were looked for that addressed questioning social norms, analyzing TikTok's distinguishing material, discussing likes and visibility, and reflecting on the risks and opportunities of social media. From this, key codes were associated with critical knowledge of the platforms and the ability to determine what and how to publish.

Finally, for the third specific objective, to describe the influence of TikTok on the promotion of critical digital literacy in the development of personal narratives of female students, the codes concentrated on the connections between digital practices and narrative modification; for instance, changes surely, they talk about themselves, new ways of speak for their interests, and tensions between acting for TikTok and being genuine. These were organized into axial codes linked to narrative transformation and the critical use of digital materials.

Findings

According to this research, conducted through TikTok, the development of content through videos contributed as a main space that went beyond mere enjoyment, permitting eleventh-grade female students to show their identity, viewpoints, and perspectives regarding their role in school and the broader educational community. Therefore, the students interpreted concepts such as family, sisterhood, and their future while going through narratives constructed on the TikTok social network.

Personal narratives constructed through collaborative TikTok

The first objective was to identify the personal narratives constructed by the participants while collaboratively developing TikTok videos. The data collected showed that the students used the platform to narrate transitions, conflicts, and emotional processes, data that were closely connected to their senior year of high school, their friendships, and their identity. According to their discourses, TikToks were coded as emotional involvement, school nostalgia, farewells, disputes, feelings, and identity reconstruction. It is here that TikTok demonstrates that the videos produced activate narrative resources, which help students tell stories about who they were in the past, who they are now in the present, and who they will become in the future.

During several interviews, the students indicated that their selection of themes, sounds, filters, and visual effects was not random, but intentional, as they were connected to their memories and feelings. For example, when the students decided to create and produce their TikToks about saying goodbye to school or their senior year together, they were not only setting a trend but also generating an archive, so to speak, of shared experiences. Images of parts of the school and their uniforms began to function as symbols of their identity, which is about to transform. From this perspective, TikTok's collaborative projects can be understood in light of what Bruner (1991) identifies as narrative modes of knowledge, in which the subject constructs the self according to stories and symbolic decisions.

At the same time, the narratives made by the students revealed different tensions and contradictions, as some described themselves as confident and empowered young women who take control over the content they produce and publish on TikTok, as they themselves stated. However, other participants mentioned that, as young women, they feel some insecurity when speaking English, such as worries and fears about pronunciation, but also about their physical appearance or the possibility of criticism from friends or family. These ambiguities are addressed in their comments, which range from enthusiastic phrases such as "I feel very involved in the production and creation of TikToks" to concerns about media exposure or negative judgment from society. Likewise, TikTok is a platform that enables identity to be defined not as something static but as something constantly negotiated, rarely affirming freedom, and sometimes showing individual vulnerabilities.

2. Collaborative TikToks as a space for critical digital literacy

Consider the second objective, which focuses on understanding how the collaborative development of TikTok influences the promotion of critical digital literacy in the development of personal narratives. The analysis disclosed that when planning, negotiating, and editing their videos, students take part in ways that go beyond technical skills, advancing toward more critical and analytical uses of the TikTok platform.

Through the focus group and open interviews conducted with the participants, it was demonstrated that they made continuous decisions about how the platform manages the algorithm, sounds, and how trends affect visibility. They also made decisions about what to show and what to hide when creating a TikTok. These moments were reflected in codes related to content creation, discussion of meanings, critical reflection on trends, and awareness of digital risks. For example, with this in mind, before filming, the students debated whether some of the scenes could reinforce stereotypes about female drama, romantic relationships, or body image, and avoided using different representations. As participant 3 expressed,

We thought a lot about whether what we were going to record showed just the typical girls' drama or something superficial. Sometimes we changed the idea because we did not want to repeat the same things that are already seen on social media.” (Open interview, Participant 3)

As Kellner and Share (2007) state, this process carried out by female students resonates with critical digital literacy in that the students are not only consumers of digital content, but they also have to analyze and appropriate content, questioning the most common narratives and making deliberate decisions about their own self-representation. By adapting current trends to include references from their own school environment, slang, or even personal episodes, they concurrently connected with global digital cultures and affirmed their voice as young Colombian women. As Participant 5 mentioned:

At the beginning, we just followed trends, but then we started changing them so they were more related to us, to the school, and what we live as women here. (Focus group, Participant 5)

On the other hand, the collaborative nature of the TikTok projects promoted dialogic interactions in which the 11th-grade female students debated their ideas, offering different points of view and defending their decisions. Differences of opinion over what type of music to use, how to frame the video, or whether to use subtitles produce opportunities to talk about how women are represented on social media, what is considered “appropriate” or “inappropriate” content, and how they want to be seen.

Finally, the collaborative development of videos through TikTok acted as a relevant space for promoting critical digital literacy, where the eleventh-grade participants managed to go beyond being merely passive users of social media and generating content in a way that is defined as unconscious. The female students had the opportunity to participate in what is called collective reflection, which allowed them to become aware of how content is created on the TikTok social network through planning and how it is interpreted. In light of the foregoing, the students were able to question the presiding representations in their videos, explicitly those representations attached to identity and gender, and make conscious decisions about their self-representation on TikTok. The narratives created by the students demonstrate growing awareness of the right to privacy, a tendency to be recognized and heard as they desire, and an interpretation of the personal, social, and academic consequences of their actions in the social network.

At the same time, collaborative TikTok video development provides a necessary learning environment for promoting critical digital literacy; the eleventh-grade students were not merely passive users and creators of social media, elaborating content unconsciously. The female students were involved in a collective critical reflection, which helped them to understand how the content is created and produced through systematic planning and how it is interpreted. These processes permitted them to question different presiding representations, particularly those related to notions such as identity and gender, and to make conscious decisions about their own representation on TikTok. In this way, TikTok serves them not simply as an instrument to practice their creativity and English but also supplies

them with a place for critical exchange with media narratives, together with their own participation.

3. Impact of TikToks on the promotion of critical digital literacy in students' personal narratives.

The third objective of this research was to describe the influence of TikTok on the development of female students' critical digital literacy in the context of their personal narratives. The data collected indicate that, throughout the process, the participants progressed from a more spontaneous, unplanned use of TikTok to a more strategic, reflective interaction.

Firstly, the collaborative videos developed through TikTok will significantly help female students to recognize the validity and importance of the personal narratives revealed. Before this project was carried out, some of the participants stated that when they talked about their experiences, they usually defined them as ordinary and unimportant. However, when they decided to transform these narratives into videos, they talked as a group and were able to connect each of their narratives with the theoretical concepts from class, which led them to perceive their daily lives as a moment of reflection and learning.

Secondly, through this initiative, awareness was raised about what information is and how it is produced through social media. The comments in which the eleven participants questioned the "perfect" representations of teenagers, the physical standards that are normally perceived as unattainable, and the various idealized interpretations of school life, which the eleven female students compared to their own experiences in a more nuanced way. Additionally, TikToks influenced how female students told their stories in a different language and format, especially in English. The students carefully considered meaning, audience, and emotional impact when discussing what they would express and how they would represent it, making transitions and changes, combining their voices, and integrating text and music. This approach to translingualism, while not always clear, allowed the students to integrate their growing communicative skills in English with their digital literacy in Spanish, presenting English as a foreign language and linking it as an additional tool for self-expression, rather than seeing it as a structured academic requirement.

On the other hand, the research also revealed different manifestations, such as tensions and limitations. Not all participants felt the same way, as they were not entirely comfortable exposing personal aspects of their lives in a digital and media environment like TikTok. Some of the female students expressed fear of being misunderstood or receiving negative comments from family or friends. The different concerns mentioned above point to the need for educational interventions that support students in the ethical, emotional, and security aspects of their participation in social media, mainly on TikTok. Consequently, critical digital literacy cannot be reduced to encompassing simple technical or cognitive skills; it must also include emotional support and discussions about consent, privacy, and digital well-being.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand how the collaborative development of TikTok was understood as a critical digital literacy (CDL) practice, promoting and transforming it through the personal narratives of eleventh-grade students at a private school in Medellín. The findings of this study revealed that the integration of TikTok in the classroom must be done in a pedagogical and reflective way that transcends its function as a mere social network for entertainment, transforming it into a space in which students construct aspects such as their identity, negotiate meanings, and critically question digital discourses, generating more meaningful learning in students.

TikTok as a narrative space for identity construction

One of the most significant findings in this study reveals how the collaborative production of short videos on the TikTok platform allowed students to articulate their personal narratives, which connect with different experiences, such as emotional, experiential, and social ones. The themes, which related to leaving school, friendships formed, sisterhood, and future projections, demonstrate that the female students used the platform as a means to organize their experiences into narratives.

Taking the above into account, this finding connects with what Bruner (1991) mentions, who states that the constitution of narratives is a fundamental mode of thought

through which humans structure themes such as experience and configure their identity. In this way, TikTok functioned in the present research as a multimodal archive where the different effects, images, sounds, and texts were transformed into symbols that served as a resource that represented the transitional moments of their lives.

Furthermore, the findings are linked to research conducted in Colombia, as these studies emphasize that personal narratives are a valuable pedagogical tool for identity construction and social reflection (Herrera-Hurtado, 2020; Yepes-Cardona & Giraldo-Gil, 2023). However, the research carried out here makes a broader contribution by creating narratives in a digital and collaborative environment, demonstrating that identity is not only narrative but also collectively negotiated. According to Barkhuizen (2021), identity in language teaching contexts is constructed through a relational process, built through interactions and processes of reinterpretation.

Thus, despite this, tensions also emerged related to insecurity regarding exposure in virtual environments, speaking in English, and the appearance standards imposed by society. These findings demonstrate that digital spaces can be both empowering and vulnerable, which is related to Vasques' (2021) argument that digital narratives are spaces of resistance and, at the same time, spaces where a constant dispute over dominant discourses is evident.

Collaborative development of TikTok as a critical digital literacy practice

Relating this to the second objective of the research, the results reveal that the process undertaken by the female students, through a structured approach to planning, negotiation, and video editing, fostered practices that transcend the traditional technical use of TikTok.

Initially, in this research, the students were able to reflect on the use of multiple algorithms, trends, visibility, and gender representation on TikTok. This permits them to abandon their usual way of consuming content and to consider a more critical role, admitting that they have the role of generating meaning.

These findings are linked to the conceptualization of digital literacy proposed by Lankshear and Knobel (2015), who emphasize the importance of understanding and creating meaning through multiple virtual environments from a critical and reflective perspective.

This view aligns with the various debates surrounding the perpetuation of female stereotypes, according to Kellner and Share (2007), who believe that digital literacy is crucial for questioning existing power structures and the prevailing representations in virtual environments.

Furthermore, the collaborative decisions made regarding what they wanted to be displayed and what information from their narratives they wanted to exclude indicate that the students were not limited to reproducing current trends on TikTok. However, the eleven students adapted these trends to their educational context and their own experiences. This procedure, carried out by the eleven female students, is equivalent to what Luke (2012) observed regarding digital literacy and its fundamentally social nature. This implies that it is possible to generate a peer debate in which an analysis can be conducted about the integration of textual production, expressed through communication and critical analysis.

Transforming personal narratives through critical digital engagement

The third objective established in this research, the findings indicate a change in the students' perceptions of their own personal narratives as young female students through the collaborative creation and production of TikTok videos. At the beginning of the research, the students consistently stated that their experiences were "common" or "not important," but throughout the study, they began to recognize these experiences as fundamental by interpreting and sharing them through a short video format on TikTok.

This process is related to the narrative research perspective, according to Costantino (2001), which understands narratives as a practice that reinterprets and transforms lived experiences. Furthermore, it is evident that the consistent use of English as a second language in the production and creation of short videos through TikTok was not limited to an academic exercise, but rather transcended its initial purpose as an expressive educational tool. According to Ruiz and Chaparro (2025), the pedagogical use of TikTok can strengthen linguistic competence; however, this research emphasizes that this strengthening of linguistic competence is connected to the construction of identity and students' critical thinking processes.

Thus, this research identified some limitations related to students' fear of self-expression and the social judgment they might face. This demonstrates the need for critical digital literacy to encompass both ethical and emotional dimensions. As Klimenko and Herrera Varela (2022) warn, the use of TikTok in the classroom without pedagogical guidance from the teacher can have negative effects on the learning process. Therefore, the integration of this social network into the education sector must be accompanied by discussions that address privacy, consent, and digital well-being.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to understand how the collaborative development of TikToks, understood as a critical digital literacy (CDL) practice, promoted the construction and transformation of personal narratives in female 11th-grade students at a private school in Medellín. Based on open interviews, focus groups, narrative analysis, and systematic data coding, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. TikTok as a legitimate space for building personal narratives

Firstly, this study concluded that the collaborative development of TikToks permitted students to reframe their personal and school experiences as valuable and meaningful narratives to be shared. TikTok acted as a multimodal archive in which they integrated all their resources to transform them into a symbolic tool for narrating important transitions, emotions, conflicts, and future life projects.

On the other hand, the female students not only produced content based on digital trends, but also used the platform to structure their experience under a narrative logic that integrates past, present, and future experiences. In this sense, TikTok functioned as a mediating environment for identity construction where female solitude, sisterhood, female school life, and social expectations were thematized from a critical perspective.

Similarly, narrative construction was not something built individually but collectively. Collaboration had an implication, and it was the negotiation of meanings,

conscious selection of representations, and shared reflection that allowed identity to emerge as a dynamic and relational process, not as a fixed category.

2. TikTok's collaborative development strengthened critical digital literacy

Secondly, it is concluded that thanks to the rigor of the planning, editing, and publication of the videos, it was possible to promote practices that transcended the use of the platform not only as an entertainment social network but also helped to consolidate it as a platform for technical use, understood as an exercise in critical digital literacy.

The students demonstrated:

- Awareness of how the algorithm works and the logic behind visibility.
- Reflection on gender stereotypes and female representations on social media.
- Deliberate decision-making about what to show, what to omit, and how to represent oneself.
- Questioning dominant narratives reproduced in digital trends.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that these practices did not emerge spontaneously, but rather arose from processes that appeared during the students' implementation, such as dialogue, negotiation, and collective reflection. The collaborative work undertaken by the female students allowed them to contrast different points of view and, in turn, justify their decisions and argue about the social implications of the choices made regarding aesthetic and discursive aspects. This component of dialogue was fundamental for critical digital literacy to consolidate as a social practice, and for the integration of TikTok in the classroom to be understood not as a social network for entertainment, but as an opportunity to learn to produce content, as well as to deliberate, question, and construct meaning within a community.

Finally, the described process highlights a radical shift on the part of the students, moving from passive consumption to critical and conscious content production. Through the research process, the students evolved from simply being users and consumers of content to

conscious creators of meaning, enabling them to become competent in analyzing the various social, cultural, and power dynamics present on TikTok. Consequently, based on the above, it is concluded that adopting a pedagogical approach to TikTok can become a formative space that fosters effective critical thinking, digital agency, and reflective participation.

3. Transformation of perception about one's own experiences

One of the most fundamental findings in this study was the transformation the students underwent in their perception and evaluation of their own experiences. In the early stages of this research, multiple students contemplate their experiences as “common” or “irrelevant,” which manifests how, in purely traditional school contexts, the experiences of adolescents, particularly young women, are usually relegated in favor of collaborative academic knowledge. The female students began to recognize that their narratives had symbolic importance with critical potential, since the act of selecting memories, organizing emotions, and making decisions about how to represent themselves to a digital audience permitted them to reinterpret their experiences as identity constructions situated within a specific gendered social context.

This process resulted in:

Greater and fuller recognition of their voices

Narrative empowerment.

Collective validation of individual experiences.

A connection between female identity, education, and career aspirations.

However, this research was accompanied by tensions. These manifested as fear of judgment, insecurity about using English on a platform, and concern about public exposure. In this way, it became evident that digital spaces are scenarios where students are empowered, but also where a sense of vulnerability arises. Even so, the production in English acquired a purpose that transcended the academic, transforming into a tool for self-representation and discursive positioning. In this sense, the experience reveals that when integrated from a critical digital literacy perspective, English language teaching can go beyond the instrumental and become a means for identity construction, social reflection, and, last but not least, the expansion of student agency.

4. Tensions and the need for pedagogical and educational support.

Before discussing the tensions identified in this study, it is crucial to state that any process of exposure and self-representation in a digital environment involves a constant negotiation between visibility and vulnerability. When students decided to share their personal narratives publicly in their virtual environment, they exercised more than just autonomy; they also faced the stressful dynamics inherent in social media, such as the constant search for approval, the logic of liking content, and the constant comparison with other users' work. In this sense, the pedagogical use of TikTok placed the participants in a real-world scenario of digital interaction, where the students made different decisions regarding their image, the discourse they developed, and the limitations regarding the types of narratives they were willing to share.

However, the research also reveals tensions related to:

- Fear of being publicly exposed
- Insecurities about English pronunciation.
- Concerns about social and familial judgment.

The report on tensions reveals that critical digital literacy cannot be reduced solely to developing technical or cognitive skills; rather, it must integrate ethical, emotional, and digital well-being dimensions. Integrating TikTok into the classroom requires teacher support, creating safe spaces for discussions about privacy, consent, and representation. Furthermore, it is evident that the pedagogical implementation of TikTok cannot depend solely on the spontaneous use of the platform, but requires intentional and critical mediation by the teacher. Teacher support is fundamental because it allows for reflective processes on the topics discussed above, such as privacy, consent, digital footprint, and the construction of online identity, as well as creating safe spaces where students can express their feelings without fear of social judgment. Considering what has been developed in this section, the explicit integration of emotional education and digital well-being into these types of experiences is important so that student participation does not become a source of pressure, stereotypical, harmful comparisons, or dynamics that they may perceive as exclusionary. Only

through ethical and reflective guidance can teachers ensure that implementing critical digital literacy promotes the integral development of students.

5. Contributions to the Colombian educational field

Finally, this research makes a significant contribution to the Colombian context because, by demonstrating that the social network TikTok can be pedagogically integrated into Colombian education, it transcends its conception as a purely recreational platform. When integrated from a critical, collaborative, and narrative approach

- A pedagogical tool for teaching English.
- A space for identity building.
- A platform for questioning hegemonic discourses.
- A tool for educating conscious, critical, and empowered students.

Furthermore, the study contributes to challenging traditional perceptions that social media are merely tools for distraction or superficiality in the school setting. The findings demonstrate that the pedagogical value of TikTok depends not only on the platform itself, but also on the teacher's mediation and how they integrate it with a purely formative intention that guides its implementation in the classroom. In this sense, the research offers insights that help rethink educational practices in Colombia, promoting more participatory, contextualized models aligned with the digital dynamics present in the lives of young people.

This research contributes to the field of teaching English as a second foreign language by revealing that the development of linguistic competence can be articulated with the various processes of construction in the face of intensity and social reflection. It is not just about focusing on improving pronunciation or vocabulary, but about using language as a narrative tool, thus enabling students to position themselves and participate critically in global digital environments.

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