

# RECONSTRUCTING THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA: TIKTOK INFLUENCERS AS MORE CAPABLE OTHERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

## RECONSTRUINDO A ZONA DE DESENVOLVIMENTO PRÓXIMO NA ERA DIGITAL: OS INFLUENCIADORES DO TIKTOK COMO “OUTROS MAIS CAPAZES” NA APRENDIZAGEM DA LÍNGUA INGLESA

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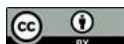
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### Abstract

Grounded in the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, this study investigates the role of TikTok influencers as potential More Capable Others within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in English language learning. The research explores how digital mediation provided by influencers contributes to learners' linguistic development, particularly in grammar comprehension, speaking confidence, and argumentative construction. Using qualitative methods, including participant responses and thematic analysis, the study examines whether influencer-generated content facilitates movement from assisted performance to independent competence. The findings indicate that influencers function as episodic and micro-level mediators who provide accessible explanations, corrective feedback, and affective support. This mediation enables learners to perform tasks previously beyond their independent ability, reflecting the mechanism of internalization central to ZPD theory. However, the mediation is learner-initiated, fragmented, and digitally situated, differing structurally from traditional

### Resumo

Com base na teoria sociocultural de Lev Vygotsky, este estudo investiga o papel dos influenciadores do TikTok como potenciais “Outros Mais Capazes” no âmbito da Zona de Desenvolvimento Próximo (ZDP) na aprendizagem da língua inglesa. A pesquisa explora como a mediação digital proporcionada pelos influenciadores contribui para o desenvolvimento linguístico dos alunos, particularmente na compreensão gramatical, na confiança na fala e na construção argumentativa. Utilizando métodos qualitativos, incluindo respostas dos participantes e análise temática, o estudo examina se o conteúdo gerado pelos influenciadores facilita a transição do desempenho assistido para a competência independente. Os resultados indicam que os influenciadores atuam como mediadores episódicos e em nível micro, fornecendo explicações acessíveis, feedback corretivo e apoio afetivo. Essa mediação permite que os alunos realizem tarefas anteriormente além de sua capacidade independente, refletindo o mecanismo de internalização central à teoria da ZPD. No entanto, a mediação é iniciada pelo



classroom scaffolding. The study concludes that TikTok influencers can extend the ZPD into socio-digital spaces, repositioning epistemic authority while complementing, rather than replacing, formal English language instruction.

**Keywords:** Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). More Capable Other. Sociocultural Theory. Digital Mediation. English Language Learning.

*aluno, fragmentada e situada digitalmente, diferindo estruturalmente do apoio tradicional em sala de aula. O estudo conclui que os influenciadores do TikTok podem estender a ZPD para espaços sociodigitais, reposicionando a autoridade epistêmica ao complementar, em vez de substituir, o ensino formal da língua inglesa.*

**Palavras-chave:** Zona de Desenvolvimento Proximal (ZDP). Outro Mais Capaz. Teoria Sociocultural. Mediação Digital. Aprendizagem da Língua Inglesa.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the learning landscape has undergone a significant shift from formal educational spaces to digital platforms. This transformation reflects what Greenhow and Lewin (2016) describe as the integration of social media into mainstream educational practices, where learning increasingly occurs across formal and informal environments. In the context of rapid technological development, education is no longer confined to institutional settings but is embedded within digital networks that shape how knowledge is accessed and shared.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in English language learning, where learners—including university students and professionals preparing for English proficiency tests—frequently prefer TikTok-based classes, live sessions, and short instructional videos rather than enrolling in conventional face-to-face programs while digital platforms allow learners to control pace, timing, and repetition, thereby fostering autonomous engagement with language materials.

Furthermore, TikTok functions not merely as an entertainment platform but as a participatory learning space. Zulli and Zulli (2022) argue that TikTok's algorithmic structure encourages micro-learning through short-form, highly engaging content that blends education and entertainment. In language learning contexts, users actively search for grammar explanations, vocabulary development, test strategies, and pronunciation guidance through brief yet repetitive video exposure. This aligns with Godwin-Jones

(2018), who highlights the role of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in supporting informal, self-directed language development through digital applications.

Within this environment, epistemic authority appears to be shifting. Traditionally, teachers in formal classrooms were regarded as the primary holders of legitimate knowledge. However, in digital spaces, authority is increasingly constructed through visibility, credibility, engagement metrics, and perceived communicative clarity. According to Nichols (2020), in networked societies, expertise is often evaluated through social validation mechanisms rather than institutional affiliation. Consequently, English-learning influencers may be perceived as more approachable and relatable than formal instructors, thereby gaining epistemic trust among learners.

This shift raises an important theoretical question regarding the role of the “provider of assistance” in language development. In the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed by Vygotsky (1978), cognitive growth occurs through mediated interaction with a more capable other. While this role has traditionally been associated with teachers, contemporary digital contexts suggest that mediation can also occur through algorithmically mediated interactions, comment sections, and live-streamed sessions. As Lantolf, Thorne, and Poehner (2015) emphasize within sociocultural theory, mediation is not limited to physical classroom interaction but can occur through various symbolic and technological tools.

Therefore, it is essential to examine whether and how TikTok influencers function as more capable others in English language learning, and how this transformation reshapes the dynamics of learners’ linguistic development. This study contributes theoretically to reinterpreting the concept of ZPD in digitally mediated environments and empirically explores the reconfiguration of epistemic authority in contemporary English language learning practices.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS**

Over the past seven years, the development of digital technology has significantly transformed societal learning patterns (Rahman & Amir, 2019; Yaumi *et al.*, 2023 Rahman & Weda, 2018). Social media platforms are no longer merely entertainment spaces but have become flexible and accessible alternative learning media (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2026;

Rahman *et al.*, 2019; Rahman & Weda, 2019). Research by Escamilla-Fajardo *et al.* (2021) demonstrates that TikTok possesses pedagogical potential because its short, visual, and interactive video format enhances user engagement in learning processes. Similarly, Zeng and Abidin (2023) found that younger generations utilize TikTok as a knowledge-sharing platform due to its fast, practical, and contextually relevant content structure.

In the context of English language learning, recent scholarship on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) indicates that short-form digital content supports vocabulary development and learner autonomy. Godwin-Jones (2018) emphasizes that mobile technologies enable informal, self-directed language practice beyond classroom constraints, particularly through repeated exposure and contextualized input. Additionally, Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that language acquisition is facilitated when anxiety is reduced and learners experience low-pressure environments. Digital platforms that allow self-paced engagement and voluntary participation may therefore lower affective barriers and encourage greater linguistic experimentation. These findings suggest that emotional comfort and flexible access play crucial roles in shifting learning preferences toward digital platforms.

Theoretically, learning as a social process has long been explained within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) introduced by Lev Vygotsky (1978) in *Mind in Society*. ZPD refers to the distance between an individual's actual developmental level (what can be performed independently) and potential developmental level (what can be achieved with assistance from a more competent individual). In this theory, cognitive development occurs through social interaction with a more capable other, traditionally understood as a teacher, tutor, or adult possessing higher competence. Thus, social mediation constitutes the core mechanism of development within the ZPD.

Contemporary developments have expanded the concept of ZPD into digital contexts. Lantolf, Thorne, and Poehner (2021) argue from a Sociocultural Theory perspective that mediation is not limited to face-to-face interaction but may occur through cultural tools, including digital technologies. This perspective suggests that online platforms can function as mediational spaces where learners receive linguistic support through interaction, modeling, and symbolic tools.

However, most ZPD research continues to focus on formal educational contexts with structured pedagogical frameworks. Poehner (2019) emphasizes the importance of

dynamic assessment in classroom settings as a systematic implementation of ZPD, where the teacher plays a central mediational role. Such studies rarely examine how mediational authority may shift from institutional educators to digitally visible figures whose credibility is shaped by communicative performance and audience engagement.

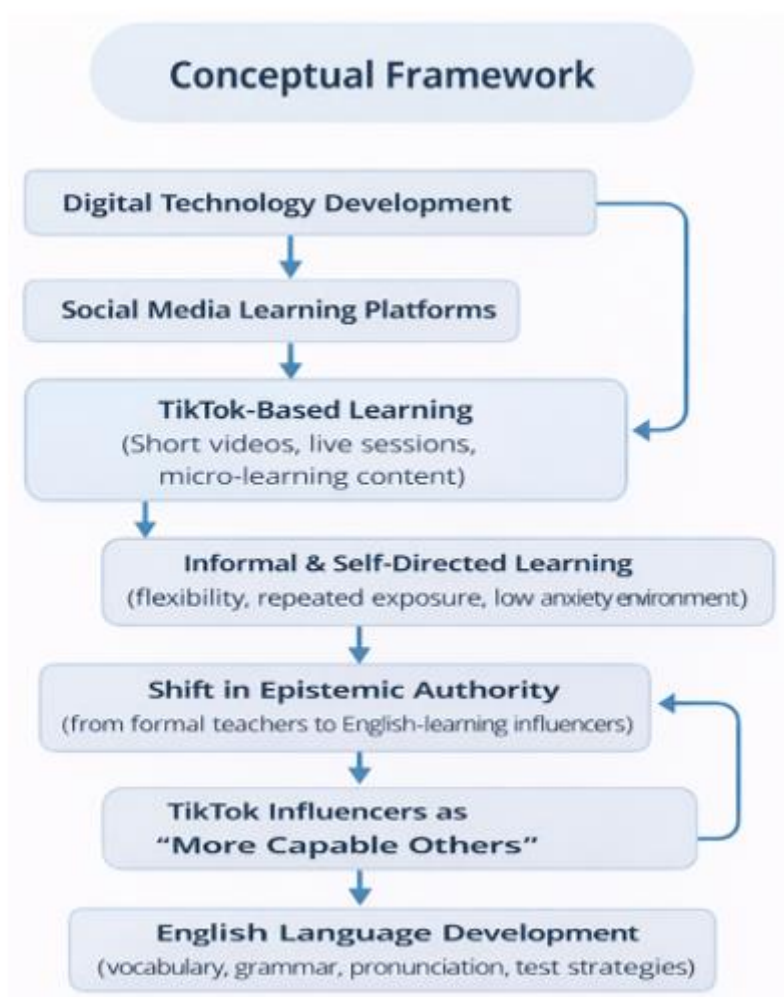
Furthermore, discussions of knowledge legitimacy in contemporary society indicate changing constructions of expertise. Nichols (2020) argues that in the digital era, public perceptions of expertise are increasingly shaped by accessibility, communicative style, and perceived relatability rather than institutional credentials alone. Within TikTok contexts, English-learning influencers may therefore be perceived as more approachable and understandable than formal instructors, potentially repositioning the teacher's role as the more capable other in learners' experiences.

Based on this literature review, it is evident that although research on TikTok in language learning has expanded over the past seven years, there remains a gap in linking this phenomenon to the reconstruction of the ZPD concept and the shift in epistemic authority. Most studies focus on media effectiveness or learner motivation without deeply examining how digital influencers reshape mediational structures and redefine the more capable other in English language learning. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the shift in learners' perceptions of authority from formal instructors to TikTok influencers within the ZPD framework.

## 2.1 Conceptual framework

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



The conceptual framework illustrates how the development of digital technology expands learning environments through social media platforms, particularly TikTok. In this digital space, English-learning influencers can function as “more capable others” who mediate learners’ understanding through short instructional videos and interactive content. This mediated interaction reflects the principles of the Zone of Proximal Development proposed by Lev Vygotsky, where language development occurs through guided support within learners’ proximal learning range.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research design**

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory case study design to examine how learners reconstruct epistemic authority in English language learning through TikTok and how this reconstruction redefines the notion of the more capable other within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed by Lev Vygotsky. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research aims to explore learners' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations rather than to measure instructional effectiveness. The study is grounded in a sociocultural perspective that views learning as socially mediated and context-dependent.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants consisted of twelve English learners aged between 18 and 35 years, including university students and working professionals who actively use TikTok as a platform for learning English. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all participants had experienced both formal classroom instruction and TikTok-based English learning. This dual exposure enabled participants to reflect comparatively on their perceptions of authority, mediation, and effectiveness across different learning contexts. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent prior to data collection.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and qualitative digital content analysis. The interviews, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes, were conducted either online or face-to-face. The interview protocol explored participants' reasons for using TikTok for English learning, their perceptions of influencer credibility, their comparisons between classroom instructors and TikTok educators, and their experiences of language development in both contexts. Particular attention was given to

how participants describe trust, clarity, emotional comfort, and perceived competence when engaging with different sources of instruction.

In addition to interviews, six public TikTok accounts dedicated to English language instruction were selected for content analysis based on follower engagement and thematic consistency. Selected video posts, live-session recordings, and comment interactions were examined to identify how influencers construct authority and enact scaffolding practices. The analysis focused on discourse strategies, explanation styles, reformulation patterns, responsiveness to audience questions, and audience reactions indicating understanding or trust.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to epistemic authority, perceived expertise, affective factors, and forms of mediation. Emerging themes were then interpreted through the theoretical lens of ZPD to examine how the concept of the more capable other is reconfigured in digitally mediated environments. The digital content analysis supported the thematic findings by illustrating how authority and scaffolding are discursively constructed within TikTok interactions.

## 4 RESULTS

To ensure confidentiality and comply with ethical research standards, all participants were anonymized. Each interviewee was assigned a code ranging from **P1** to **P10**, where “P” refers to *Participant* and the number indicates the order of the interview.

The participants consisted of English learners aged between 18 and 35 years, including university students and working professionals who actively use TikTok as a supplementary English learning platform. All participants had prior experience with formal classroom instruction, allowing them to comparatively reflect on institutional teachers and TikTok-based educators.

The use of participant codes (e.g., P1, P2) serves two purposes:

1. **Ethical protection** – preserving anonymity and privacy.

2. **Analytical clarity** – allowing readers to trace recurring themes across different individuals without revealing identities.

When quotations are presented in the Findings section, they are labeled using these participant codes to indicate the source of the data while maintaining confidentiality.

**P1:**

*"In class, grammar is explained comprehensively, but sometimes it feels too theoretical."*

**P2:**

*"The lecturer follows the syllabus, so sometimes it does not directly address the problem I am facing."*

**P3:**

*"In class, time is limited, so not all questions can be discussed."*

These responses indicate that learners differentiate between institutional authority and functional authority in English language classrooms. While lecturers possess formal legitimacy and curricular responsibility, learners evaluate authority based on immediacy, relevance, and practical usefulness.

This finding aligns with Goldman's (1999) concept of epistemic authority, which argues that authority is not derived solely from social status or institutional credentials but from the perceived reliability and contextual relevance of knowledge. In this case, although lecturers hold institutional legitimacy, learners perceive a gap when explanations are overly theoretical or constrained by syllabus structure.

Additionally, Wertsch (1991), within the framework of sociocultural mediation, emphasizes that the effectiveness of mediation depends on how cultural tools—particularly language—bridge learners' understanding. When mediation does not fully address learners' immediate linguistic needs, learners may seek alternative mediational resources.

Thus, the shift observed here does not imply the delegitimization of teachers but rather a transformation in how epistemic authority is evaluated in English language learning contexts.

**After P4–P5 (Relatability and Simplicity)**

**P4:**

*"On TikTok, I can directly search for the grammar I do not understand."*

**P5:**

*"The examples are more like everyday conversations, so they feel more alive."*

These findings reflect the logic of digital-age learning described in Siemens' (2005) theory of connectivism, which posits that learning occurs through networks, and the ability to access relevant information becomes more important than relying on a single authority source.

In English language learning, learners demonstrate navigational literacy by directly searching for grammar explanations or expressions that match their immediate communicative needs. Authority, therefore, becomes distributed across digital networks rather than centralized in classroom instructors.

Greenhow and Lewin (2016) further argue that social media platforms foster participatory learning environments where informal interactions can generate meaningful educational engagement. The preference for everyday conversational examples suggests that contextualized language enhances relevance and supports deeper internalization.

From a second language acquisition perspective, this also aligns with Krashen's (1982) concept of comprehensible input, which states that language acquisition occurs more effectively when learners receive understandable and meaningful input. Relatable examples reduce cognitive distance and enhance linguistic uptake.

**After P6–P8 (Emotional Comfort)****P6:**

*"In class, I am afraid of making mistakes, but on TikTok no one judges me."*

**P7:**

*"Learning on TikTok feels relaxed, so it is easier to absorb."*

**P8:**

*"Because it is flexible, I can learn without the pressure of grades."*

The emotional dimension emerging from these responses is crucial in English language learning, particularly in speaking practice. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that anxiety, fear of evaluation, and performance pressure can block language acquisition.

Classroom environments that emphasize grading and evaluation may unintentionally raise learners' affective filters, reducing willingness to experiment with

language. In contrast, informal digital spaces may lower this filter, enabling learners to receive input and attempt output more freely.

Therefore, the reconstruction of epistemic authority here is not merely cognitive but also affective. Authority becomes more legitimate when associated with psychological safety and emotional comfort in language practice.

#### **After P9–P10 (Audience Affirmation and Public Validation)**

##### **P9:**

*"I finally understood this grammar after it was explained here."*

##### **P10:**

*"Why didn't my teacher explain it this simply?"*

These public responses reflect what Jenkins (2006) describes as participatory culture, where legitimacy is collectively constructed through engagement and audience interaction. In digital spaces, authority is not solely granted by institutions but negotiated through public validation.

Moreover, Lantolf and Thorne (2006), within sociocultural theory in second language acquisition, emphasize that language development occurs through meaningful social mediation. When learners publicly express understanding in comment sections, social validation reinforces the perceived effectiveness of the mediator.

Thus, epistemic authority in digital English learning environments is constructed not only through content delivery but also through collective recognition of successful mediation.

**Table 1**

*Reconstruction of Epistemic Authority in English Language Learning: Classroom vs. TikTok*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Formal English Language Classroom</b>	<b>TikTok-Mediated English Learning</b>
<b>Institutional Role</b>	Lecturer/teacher with certified academic qualifications	Influencer/content creator without formal pedagogical mandate
<b>Basis of Authority</b>	Institutional legitimacy and curriculum responsibility	Perceived communicative clarity and practical usefulness
<b>Grammar Instruction</b>	Systematic, syllabus-based, often theory-driven	Problem-focused, simplified, example-oriented

<b>Speaking Practice</b>	Scheduled classroom interaction, limited time	Modeled through short conversational clips and live sessions
<b>Error Correction</b>	Direct teacher feedback, time-constrained	Live clarification, comment-based responses, peer reinforcement
<b>Scaffolding Structure</b>	Structured and sequential progression	Micro-scaffolding in short, replayable segments
<b>Emotional Climate</b>	Evaluative, grade-oriented environment	Informal, low-pressure, self-paced
<b>Access to Mediation</b>	Restricted to classroom hours	Continuous, searchable, on-demand
<b>Learner Position</b>	Dependent on teacher-led progression	Self-directed navigation of linguistic problems
<b>Validation of Authority</b>	Based on institutional recognition	Based on audience engagement and visible comprehension responses

Table 1 illustrates the comparative reconstruction of epistemic authority within English language learning contexts. In formal classrooms, authority is structurally embedded in institutional roles. Teachers are recognized as legitimate mediators because of their academic credentials and curricular responsibility. Instruction follows a predetermined syllabus that structures grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and writing development sequentially.

In contrast, TikTok-mediated English learning reconfigures authority through perceived communicative performance. Authority emerges from the influencer's ability to simplify grammar explanations, provide relatable speaking models, and respond to immediate learner concerns. Unlike classroom-based scaffolding, which progresses linearly, TikTok employs micro-scaffolding—short, targeted instructional units that address specific linguistic problems.

This comparison does not suggest the displacement of classroom authority. Rather, it demonstrates a functional redistribution of epistemic influence. Learners continue to recognize teachers' institutional legitimacy, yet they supplement classroom mediation with digitally accessible explanations that align more closely with their immediate linguistic needs.

Within the framework of Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, this shift indicates that learners actively seek mediators who operate most effectively within their proximal zone. The presence of TikTok as a learning environment expands the spatial

and temporal boundaries of mediation, allowing English language development to occur beyond classroom constraints.

#### 4.1 TikTok influencers as the more capable other in the digital ZPD

The second objective of this study was to examine whether and how influencers on TikTok function as the *more capable other* within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework proposed by Lev Vygotsky, and how this shift influences learners' English language development dynamics.

##### 4.1.1 Functional criteria of the more capable other

**P1:**

*"When I don't understand a grammar rule, I search on TikTok and usually find an explanation that helps immediately."*

**P2:**

*"They explain step by step, and after that I can try exercises by myself."*

**P3:**

*"After watching the video, I feel more confident using it in speaking."*

These responses indicate that learners perceive TikTok influencers as enabling them to perform linguistic tasks that were previously difficult to accomplish independently. Within Vygotsky's ZPD framework, the *more capable other* is defined as a mediator who facilitates movement from assisted to independent performance. The data suggest that influencers fulfill this function when their explanations bridge specific gaps in grammar comprehension or speaking confidence.

However, this mediation differs from traditional classroom scaffolding. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) argue that in sociocultural second language acquisition, development occurs through mediated interaction in which learners gradually internalize external assistance. The participants' statements—particularly regarding increased confidence in speaking—indicate a process of internalization, suggesting that digital mediation can indeed contribute to language development.

Thus, influencers may function as *more capable others* not by institutional authority, but by operational effectiveness in resolving immediate linguistic challenges.

#### 4.1.2 Micro-scaffolding and episodic mediation

**P4:**

*"In live sessions, they correct mistakes directly and explain again."*

**P5:**

*"Each video focuses on one small grammar problem, so it's easier to follow."*

**P6:**

*"I replay the explanation until I fully understand it."*

These findings reveal a distinctive form of scaffolding that can be described as **micro-scaffolding**—short, targeted, and problem-specific assistance. Unlike classroom instruction, which often follows a linear curriculum, TikTok-based mediation occurs in fragmented yet precise segments.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), who first introduced the concept of scaffolding, emphasized the importance of structured support tailored to learner needs. In TikTok environments, scaffolding becomes modular and self-paced. Learners enter specific moments of mediation when encountering difficulty and disengage once understanding is achieved.

This episodic mediation suggests that the digital ZPD is flexible and learner-activated rather than teacher-sequenced. Language development, therefore, becomes more self-directed while remaining socially mediated.

#### 4.1.3 Affective mediation and speaking development

**P7:**

*"I feel less afraid to try speaking after watching their explanations."*

**P8:**

*"Because it's not graded, I feel more comfortable practicing expressions."*

In English language classrooms, speaking anxiety is a well-documented barrier to development. Krashen (1982) argues through the Affective Filter Hypothesis that

emotional variables such as anxiety and fear of evaluation can impede language acquisition.

Participants' accounts indicate that TikTok environments lower the affective filter by removing formal evaluation and creating a low-pressure atmosphere. This emotional safety appears to encourage experimentation with new vocabulary and expressions, particularly in speaking practice.

Therefore, influencers may function as *more capable others* not only cognitively but affectively. Their mediation reduces psychological barriers, indirectly supporting learners' progression within their ZPD.

#### 4.1.4 Changing dynamics of english language development

**P9:**

*"Now I practice English more often because I see short videos every day."*

**P10:**

*"Before, I only learned English during class. Now I search for explanations whenever I need them."*

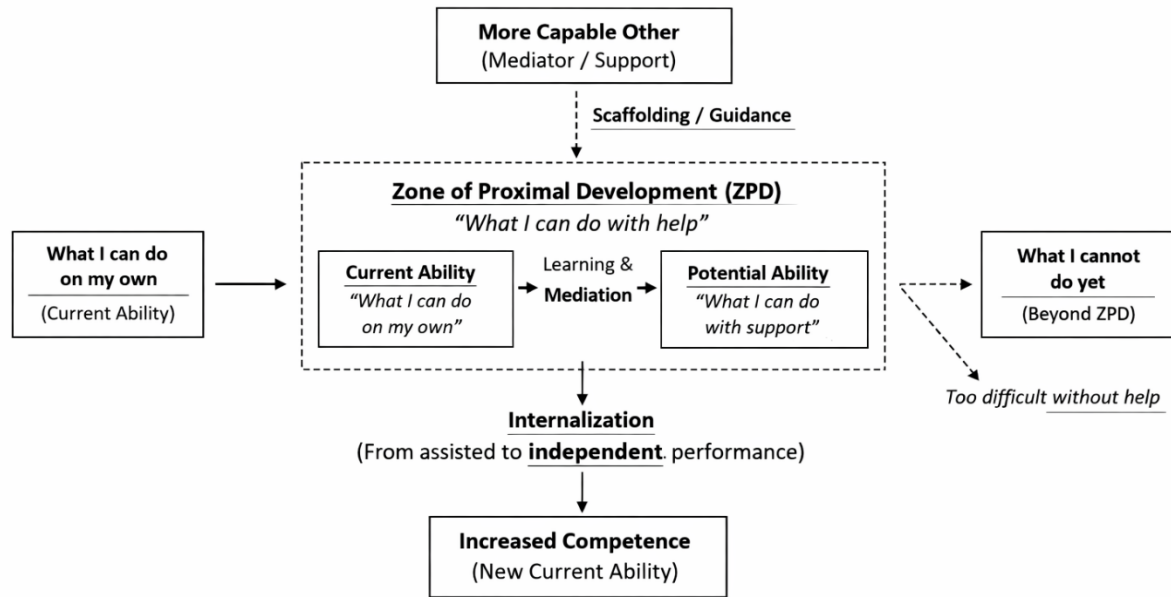
These statements suggest a transformation in the temporal and structural dynamics of English language development. Exposure becomes more frequent, though distributed in short intervals. Learning shifts from being schedule-bound to continuous and need-driven.

Siemens (2005) argues that digital learning environments restructure knowledge acquisition by embedding learning within everyday digital routines. In this study, learners' engagement with short grammar or speaking videos increases contact with English input outside classroom hours.

Within a Vygotskian framework, this implies that the ZPD is no longer confined to classroom interaction. Instead, it expands into digitally mediated spaces where learners actively seek assistance at moments of difficulty. Development becomes iterative, decentralized, and embedded in daily media consumption patterns.

**Figure 2**

*Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the Role of the More Capable Other*



Learning development occurs through assistance from a more competent individual, until abilities that were initially performed only with support can eventually be carried out independently. This is what is meant by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) according to Lev Vygotsky: a developmental space in which a person is not yet fully capable but can progress through mediation, scaffolding, and social interaction. This process culminates in internalization, namely the transformation of assisted performance into independent competence.

Influencers can be positioned as a More Capable Other if they genuinely provide mediation that helps English language learners move from inability toward linguistic independence. In other words, when students who initially do not understand grammatical structures, lack confidence in speaking, or are unable to construct arguments in English become capable of performing these tasks independently after receiving explanations or examples from influencers, the process reflects the mechanism of the ZPD. Therefore, this diagram serves as a conceptual foundation for analyzing whether influencers merely function as content providers or truly act as developmental agents within a sociocultural framework.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed by Lev Vygotsky remains theoretically relevant in contemporary digital learning environments. The findings reveal that TikTok influencers can function as More Capable Others when they provide meaningful mediation that enables English language learners to move from assisted understanding to independent performance. Through targeted explanations, micro-scaffolding strategies, corrective interactions, and affective encouragement, influencers support learners' development in grammar mastery, speaking confidence, and argumentative skills.

However, unlike traditional classroom mediation, digital scaffolding is episodic, learner-activated, and embedded within everyday media consumption practices. This shifts the dynamics of language development from teacher-centered sequencing to on-demand, self-directed engagement. Despite this structural transformation, the core Vygotskian mechanism—mediation leading to internalization—remains intact.

Therefore, this study does not suggest the displacement of classroom teachers but rather highlights an expansion of mediational agents in English language learning. Influencers operate as supplementary developmental agents within a hybrid socio-digital learning ecology. Theoretically, the study contributes to the reinterpretation of ZPD in digitally mediated contexts and offers a foundation for understanding how epistemic authority and scaffolding practices are being reshaped in contemporary language education.

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The authors have competing interests academically or financially in writing and reporting

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION STATEMENTS

Author 1 worked on the methodology of this paper, focusing on the original idea, writing the original manuscript, validation, project administration, data curation, and sources.

Author 2, 3 and 4 worked on supervision and validation, as well as resources.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data is available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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