



ISSN 2827-8151 (Online)
SRAWUNG: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

<https://journal.jfpublisher.com/index.php/jssh>

Vol. 5, Issue 4, (2026)

doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v5i4.1071

EFL Undergraduates' Perceptions of TikTok as a Supplementary Speaking Skills Tool in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how first-year EFL undergraduates in Cambodia perceive and use TikTok as a supplementary tool for developing English-speaking skills. It investigated students' perceptions of TikTok for speaking improvement, the ways they use the platform for speaking practice, and the perceived effectiveness of TikTok for fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. A quantitative survey design was adopted. Data were collected through a five-section questionnaire administered to 132 first-year students at a university in Phnom Penh, and the sample size was determined with Cochran's formula adjusted by the finite population correction for a population of 200. A pilot test with 30 students produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.981. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis. All six dimensions fell within the neutral range ($M = 2.71$ to 3.49), with technological factors rated highest ($M = 3.49$, 59.70% agreement). Most respondents followed English-learning accounts (91.7%), and 68.2% agreed that short videos helped them understand English quickly. Practice was mainly receptive, since 60.6% watched and imitated English-speaking creators while only 11.4% created English videos. Agreement was lower for improved fluency (48.50%), speaking confidence (45.50%), and reduced speaking anxiety (41.70%). These results indicate an exposure-production gap in which accessible input and enjoyment do not readily become spoken output. TikTok is therefore best used as a complementary resource within structured speaking instruction that requires learners to produce, share, and respond to spoken content.

Keywords: Cambodia, EFL Undergraduates, Speaking Skills, Supplementary Tool, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

TikTok has increasingly been explored as a pedagogical tool for enhancing English-speaking skills, moving from a purely entertainment platform toward a resource with recognized instructional value in higher education (Hongsa et al., 2023; Salazar-Rosas et al., 2023). Several theoretical frameworks, including the Technology Acceptance Model, Communicative Language Teaching, Social Constructivism, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Communicative Competence, together provide a multidimensional foundation for understanding how digital platforms are integrated into language learning, emphasizing perceived usefulness, authentic interaction, and collaborative engagement (Canale & Swain, 1980; Davis, 1989; Hymes, 1970; Katz et al., 1973). Within this framework, TikTok is understood to hold considerable potential for improving fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence, and this study treats motivation, speaking anxiety, ease of use, and social interaction as relevant psychological, technological, and social factors (Abdulqadir & Zahawi, 2025). In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the integration of digital technology into English language education has become a central element of human resource development across Southeast Asia.

Recognizing this critical role, Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport devised an initiative known as the Digital Education Strategy for Schools 2024–2030 (MoEYS, 2024). This strategy is anchored in a vision to build a solid digital foundation for education, promote lifelong learning, and cultivate a knowledge-based society. Central to the policy is Transformation 4, which prioritizes an integrated digital curriculum and pedagogy designed to improve the efficiency, customization, and accessibility of educational experiences. Within this national agenda, social media platforms have gradually emerged as valuable educational resources, and TikTok, a short-form video-sharing application, has gained significant popularity among younger users (Yang et al., 2025).

A growing body of scholarship supports this potential empirically. TikTok ranked second among the most downloaded applications worldwide in 2019, and language-learning videos ranked second among its most consumed knowledge-sharing content, a finding consistent with more recent systematic reviews documenting the platform's expanding disciplinary applications across higher education (Yang, 2020; Yang et al., 2025). Short-form video content more broadly has been associated with measurable gains in foreign language learning outcomes when paired with structured pedagogical design (Zhang et al., 2022). Complementary evidence from artificial-intelligence-mediated speaking interventions indicates that speaking skills and willingness to communicate can improve through repeated interaction, a condition that informal, self-directed TikTok practice may partly approximate (Fathi et al., 2024).

In the Cambodian context specifically, incorporating TikTok into classroom communicative exercises has been found to improve students' speaking scores, with most students holding positive perceptions of the platform for communicative tasks (Chhoeut et al., 2023). Students' positive attitudes toward technology more broadly have been shown to contribute to enhanced learning outcomes in Cambodian higher education, a pattern consistent with evidence that student achievement in this setting is shaped by multiple determinants beyond motivation alone (Pound, 2026; Vireak et al., 2025). Teacher accountability has likewise been identified as an influential factor shaping learning outcomes at the lower secondary level in Cambodia, which underscores the instructor's role in mediating the effectiveness of any digital tool, TikTok included (Syna & Socheath, 2026). The components of TikTok as a social media platform, an online learning window, and an educational tool have further shown favorable correlations with young people's acceptance of the platform for educational development (Azman et al., 2021).

Despite this potential, TikTok's educational value remains underutilized when its use lacks pedagogical structure. Adolescent short-video use has been examined in relation to cognitive functioning and academic performance, with evidence that patterns of use matter for learning outcomes, and many students continue to report low confidence, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes when speaking English (Azman et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Technical problems, non-educational distractions, and the absence of teacher guidance further reduce TikTok's effectiveness as a learning tool. These issues are compounded by inconsistent internet connectivity and limited access to information technology in Cambodian higher education, a digital divide that, combined with instructors' limited technological expertise, continues to hinder effective implementation (Chhoeut et al., 2023; Vireak et al., 2025). Despite years of formal English instruction, many students continue to struggle with spoken English because of limited authentic practice, minimal exposure to native speakers, and persistent speaking anxiety, and technology has been widely examined as a means of reducing such anxiety (Huang & Liu, 2025).

Guided by this gap, the present study investigates how TikTok functions as a supplementary tool for enhancing English-speaking skills among adult learners. The study asks what perceptions students hold toward using TikTok to enhance their English-speaking skills, how students use TikTok to practice speaking in daily life, and to what extent TikTok is perceived as effective in improving learners' fluency and confidence in English speaking. These three questions correspond directly, in order, to the study's three objectives, namely to inspect students' perceptions, to explore patterns of use, and to evaluate perceived effectiveness, and together they frame an inquiry into whether an entertainment-oriented platform can meaningfully support the development of spoken English proficiency among adult learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TikTok usage serves as the primary input, providing authentic English content, interactive features, and communication opportunities (Hongsa et al., 2023; Rita et al., 2019). Its effectiveness, however, is shaped by technological, psychological, and social factors, and the interaction of these factors leads to development across three speaking dimensions. Fluency develops through repeated exposure and practice, pronunciation develops through imitation and auditory input, and confidence develops through continuous participation in a low-pressure environment (Uchihara et al., 2023). Sociolinguistic competence, the ability to calibrate language in response to situational demands, is particularly salient on dynamic, audience-driven platforms such as TikTok, since it encompasses knowledge of how ideas are organized, sequenced, and connected to form meaningful narratives or conversations. In the context of short-form video content, this competence is exercised when learners produce structured, coherent speech within the temporal and thematic constraints of a TikTok clip. The fourth dimension, strategic competence, refers to the communicative strategies employed to sustain interaction when linguistic knowledge proves insufficient. These may include circumlocution, gestures, or paraphrasing to convey intended meaning, strategies that are visibly deployed and modeled in the multimodal environment of TikTok. TikTok functions as a virtual authentic environment that exposes EFL learners to naturalistic language use, affords opportunities for communicative practice across all four competencies, and situates language learning within genuine social interaction, conditions that Hymes (1970) identified as essential for true communicative development.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a widely adopted pedagogical approach that emphasizes the development of communicative competence as the primary goal of language learning (Nasimova, 2022). CLT does not treat language merely as a set of grammatical rules to be memorized. It views language as a tool for meaningful communication in social contexts, governed by principles that shape the goals of language teaching, the processes of language acquisition, appropriate classroom activities, and the roles of teachers and learners (Adem & Berkessa, 2022). In this perspective, social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp can serve as effective tools for facilitating authentic communication aligned with CLT principles. Adem and Berkessa (2022), in a case study of EFL teachers' classroom practice, examined how closely the teaching of speaking reflects CLT principles, which underscores that the communicative benefits of the approach depend on how faithfully those principles are applied in classroom tasks. Gao et al. (2023) reported that TikTok-based learning supported learning motivation and oral proficiency among learners in a hospitality and tourism education program, functioning as an informal extension of communicative classroom practice. Taken together, this evidence suggests that integrating social

media into CLT can broaden engagement and create authentic opportunities for communicative practice beyond the classroom.

Social constructivism is a theoretical framework concerned with how social interaction and cultural context shape knowledge, identity, and understanding of reality. Applying this framework to TikTok, Obreja (2024) examines how users construct and legitimate shared understandings of the platform's algorithm, an example of interpretation as a product of social negotiation and not a fixed, individually held fact. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory extends this view by framing learning as a fundamentally social process in which interaction and culture play a central role in cognitive development. According to the general genetic law of development, higher mental functions first emerge at the social level through interaction with others, described as interpsychological, and are later internalized by individuals, described as intrapsychological. External symbolic tools can facilitate interaction, collaboration, self-regulation, and knowledge construction in contemporary learning contexts, thereby promoting language development within the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 2018). Falikman (2021) offers a Vygotskian perspective on digital socialization, treating digital technologies as cultural tools through which social experience shapes development. Applied to the present study, this perspective suggests that technology functions as a mediating tool that fosters social interaction at the starting point of cognitive development and supports learners in progressing through the ZPD within informal, TikTok-based learning environments.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was originally developed by Fred Davis to explain why users accept or reject information technology (Davis, 1989). The model proposes that technology adoption is primarily determined by two key constructs, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). In educational settings, PU is often considered a stronger predictor of technology adoption than PEOU, as learners are more willing to tolerate difficulties when they perceive clear learning benefits (Fearnley & Amora, 2020). This is particularly relevant in language learning contexts, where students tend to adopt digital tools, they believe can improve their skills. In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as informal yet powerful learning tools. Applications such as TikTok have gained significant attention because of their accessibility and engaging content formats. TikTok, for example, can be perceived as useful (PU) for enhancing English speaking skills through repeated exposure to authentic language input, pronunciation practice, and interactive communication (Hongsa et al., 2023). At the same time, its user-friendly interface and short-form video design contribute to its perceived ease of use (PEOU), making it highly attractive to learners. Based on the TAM framework, students' Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) can be argued to influence their Attitudes Toward Technology (ATT) and Usage Purpose (UP), which subsequently affect their English Learning Outcomes (ELOs). The application of TAM in this study therefore provides a theoretical

foundation for examining how students' acceptance of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, contributes to the development of their English-speaking skills.

Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework to examine the relationship between TikTok usage and English-speaking skills development among EFL students. The framework consists of three main components, the independent variable, mediating variables, and the dependent variable. The independent variable is TikTok usage, which includes activities such as watching English videos, participating in speaking challenges, creating content, and interacting with others on the platform. These activities are assumed to provide learners with exposure to authentic language input and opportunities for communication practice. The dependent variable is English-speaking effectiveness, measured through three key dimensions, fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. Fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly and continuously, pronunciation relates to clarity and accuracy in speech, and confidence reflects learners' willingness to communicate in English. Between the independent and dependent variables, this study introduces three factors, psychological, technological, and social, that are conceptualized as explaining how and why TikTok usage may relate to speaking skills development. The framework proposes both direct and indirect relationships as a conceptual basis for the study. TikTok usage is expected to be associated with English-speaking skills development, and this association is conceptualized as operating through psychological, technological, and social factors. The present study describes these dimensions through descriptive statistics and does not test the relationships inferentially.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine students' perceptions of using TikTok to enhance their English-speaking skills (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions, usage behavior, and perceived improvement in speaking ability. The questionnaire generated numerical data that were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and general patterns among the variables, an approach appropriate for producing objective and measurable results from a defined sample.

The population for this study comprised 200 students at BELTEI International University. From this population, a sample of 132 participants was determined using Cochran's (1963) sample size formula, $n_0 = Z^2 p(1 - p)/e^2$, where n_0 is the sample size for an infinite population, Z is the value corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence), p is the estimated proportion of the attribute in the population (0.5 was used, since the true proportion was unknown),

and e is the acceptable margin of error (0.05). Applying these values produced $n_0 = 384$. Because the population was finite ($N = 200$) and the initial estimate exceeded 5% of that population, the finite population correction was applied, using $n = n_0 / [1 + (n_0 - 1)/N]$, which produced an adjusted sample size of approximately 131.7, rounded up to 132 participants. Although participants were ultimately selected through non-probability sampling, Cochran's formula was applied as a reference point to determine a minimum adequate sample size for quantitative analysis, and this selection procedure limits the extent to which findings can be generalized. A slightly larger number of students were approached during data collection to allow for potential non-response or incomplete questionnaires.

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire combined with open-ended items, designed to collect quantitative data and supplementary opinions from students at BELTEI International University. The questionnaire was organized into five sections. Section I collected demographic information, including gender, age, year of study, and general TikTok usage patterns, providing background on respondents and their familiarity with the platform. Section II addressed Research Objective 2 and examined students' experiences and behaviors in using TikTok for English-speaking practice, including how they used TikTok features and English-related content in their daily learning activities. Sections III and IV addressed Research Objective 1 and Research Objective 3, examining students' perspectives on using TikTok to enhance fluency, pronunciation, confidence, motivation, engagement, and communicative ability, together with the factors identified in the literature review, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In the Challenges dimension, reverse scoring was applied so that higher mean scores indicate lower perceived difficulty and lower scores indicate higher perceived difficulty. Section V included open-ended items for additional comments, allowing respondents to provide supplementary opinions used to contextualize the quantitative findings.

Table 1 Interpretation Scale for Positive Perception

Mean Range	Level	Score Range
Strongly Agree	Highest	4.50–5.00
Agree	High	3.50–4.49
Neutral	Moderate	2.50–3.49
Disagree	Low	1.50–2.49
Strongly Disagree	Lowest	1.00–1.49

Source: Proposed by the researchers (2026)

The questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies on TikTok and EFL speaking development, with modifications made to suit the Cambodian higher education context (Abdullah et al., 2023; Qodarsih et al., 2023). To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in EFL teaching and educational research prior to data collection. The instrument was piloted in two stages. The first

pilot involved 10 EFL students at BELTEI International University with characteristics similar to the target population, and was used to assess item clarity and identify wording issues, which led to minor revisions. A second pilot was then conducted with 30 EFL students from the same population group to further examine item clarity, response patterns, and the stability of reliability, a sample size considered appropriate for pilot reliability testing (Bujang et al., 2024). The reliability of the resulting 30-item questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha through SPSS, applied to the 5-point Likert-scale items in Sections III and IV. A threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was considered acceptable for internal consistency, following a widely used convention, and values were interpreted using the ranges in Table 2 (Hussey et al., 2025).

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Value and Reliability Level

Cronbach's Alpha Value	Reliability Level
$\alpha \geq 0.90$	Excellent
$0.80 \leq \alpha < 0.90$	Good
$0.70 \leq \alpha < 0.80$	Acceptable
$0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.70$	Questionable
$0.50 \leq \alpha < 0.60$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.50$	Unacceptable

Source: Proposed by the researchers (2026)

Table 3 Reliability Statistics of the Survey Questionnaire (Pilot, N = 30)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
0.981	0.981	30

Source: Proposed by the researchers (2026)

As shown in Table 3, the pilot Cronbach's alpha of 0.981 substantially exceeds the acceptable threshold, indicating excellent internal consistency and confirming the instrument's suitability for the main study (George & Mallery, 2019). A value this high can also indicate redundancy among items, suggesting that some questions may measure closely overlapping aspects of the same construct (Zakariya, 2022).

Quantitative data collected from the closed-ended items in Sections I through IV were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, computed in SPSS to summarize students' perceptions and TikTok usage patterns. Items with a mean score of 3.50 or higher were interpreted as Agree, while lower scores were interpreted as Neutral or Disagree depending on the scale range, and reverse scoring in the Challenges dimension was applied consistently, so that higher means indicate fewer perceived problems and lower means indicate more. For percentage interpretation, combined Agree and Strongly Agree responses represent a low perceived challenge, while

combined Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses represent a high perceived challenge. Comments from the open-ended items were reviewed to identify frequently mentioned themes and were used to supplement and contextualize the quantitative findings, without formal qualitative analysis. To further examine the consistency of responses and participants' understanding of the questionnaire, summary item statistics were analyzed, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Summary Item Statistics

Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Max/Min	Variance	Number of Items
3.230	2.867	3.433	0.567	1.198	0.020	30

Source: Proposed by the researchers (2026)

The results show an overall mean of 3.230, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents. The relatively small range and low variance suggest that responses were consistent across items and that participants understood the questionnaire in a clear and stable way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All 132 respondents provided consent, confirmed Year 1 student status in the Faculty of Education, Arts and Humanities, and confirmed using TikTok for English learning, so no responses were excluded from analysis.

Table 5 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=132)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Female	91	68.9
Male	40	30.3
Prefer not to say	1	0.8
Age		
18–20 years	104	78.8
21–23 years	23	17.4
24–26 years	5	3.8
Years of English Study		
Fewer than 3 years	55	41.7
3–5 years	50	37.9
6–10 years	16	12.1
More than 10 years	11	8.3

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026)

Respondents were predominantly female (68.9%) and aged 18 to 20 (78.8%), consistent with the first-year undergraduate profile and with TikTok's primary user demographic. Nearly 80% had studied English for fewer than six years, indicating that the sample largely represents early-intermediate learners, a profile relevant to

understanding their reliance on informal platforms such as TikTok for language exposure.

TikTok use was well established among respondents. Nearly half (47.0%) had used the platform for more than three years, and a further 24.2% for two to three years, so the large majority had substantial prior familiarity with it. Daily use was moderate to high, with 35.6% spending 30 to 60 minutes per day and a combined 41.0% spending at least one hour daily. Exposure to English-learning content was extensive, with 91.7% of respondents reporting that they followed English-learning accounts. Intentional speaking practice was less consistent, however, since 53.0% used TikTok for speaking practice only sometimes (about once a week), 22.0% did so often, and 7.6% practiced daily, while 17.4% rarely or never used it for this purpose.

Beyond learning, respondents used TikTok for a range of purposes, most commonly entertainment (49.2% of respondents), followed by lifestyle and travel content (33.3%) and music and dance (32.6%), with news and current affairs, comedy, socializing, and non-English learning content each selected by roughly a quarter to a third of respondents. This entertainment-dominated pattern of use considerably exceeds the proportion of respondents engaged in deliberate English-learning activity, suggesting that language learning on TikTok occurs largely within a broader leisure context and seldom as a primary purpose.

When asked which specific activities they used for English-speaking practice, respondents most often reported watching English-speaking creators and imitating their speech (60.6% of respondents), followed by following English-learning accounts and practicing along (38.6%). More interactive or productive activities were less common, including commenting in English on videos (25.8%), participating in TikTok challenges such as duets or stitches (18.9%), using TikTok's audio features to practice pronunciation (14.4%), and creating original English-language videos (11.4%). This pattern indicates that TikTok-based English practice in this sample is dominated by receptive and imitative behavior, with far less active production. Consistent with this, the video content respondents found most useful for speaking improvement was practical and communicative in nature, led by daily conversation videos (53.0%), followed by music and song videos (36.4%), and by entertainment and comedy content, pronunciation videos, and vlogs by native speakers (each 34.8%), while more intensive shadowing-practice videos were the least selected content type (19.7%).

Turning to students' perceptions of TikTok for English speaking specifically, three dimensions were assessed. Usage Behavior recorded a section mean of $M = 3.30$ ($SD = 1.04$, 49.40% agreement), interpreted as Neutral, indicating moderate engagement with English content but limited active speaking practice. Actively searching for English-speaking videos and watching such content during free time received the highest agreement in this dimension (both around 55%), while recording one's own voice while using TikTok was the lowest-rated item ($M = 3.02$,

36.40% agreement), confirming that active speaking production remains the weakest aspect of TikTok-based learning behavior in this sample. Engagement and Motivation recorded the highest mean among these three dimensions, $M = 3.38$ ($SD = 1.03$, 51.80%), also Neutral, with finding TikTok enjoyable receiving the highest agreement (56.80%, $M = 3.45$) and feeling relaxed while learning receiving the lowest (50.00%, $M = 3.29$). Perceived Effectiveness recorded $M = 3.33$ ($SD = 1.03$, 50.50%), Neutral, with learning useful expressions rated highest (56.10%, $M = 3.41$) and pronunciation improvement also rated positively (54.50%, $M = 3.38$). Notably, improving speaking fluency (48.50%, $M = 3.24$) and increasing speaking confidence (45.50%, $M = 3.28$) were the two lowest-rated items in this dimension, both falling below majority agreement.

The remaining two dimensions addressed factors influencing TikTok use. Technological Factors recorded the highest section mean across all six dimensions in the study, $M = 3.49$ ($SD = 0.99$, 59.70%), with short videos helping students understand English quickly, ease of finding relevant content, and anytime-anywhere access all reaching Agree-level endorsement ($M = 3.55$ to 3.58), while general ease of use for learning purposes remained at a neutral level ($M = 3.23$). This ranking is descriptive and reflects the highest observed mean, since no significance test of section-mean differences was conducted. Psychological Factors recorded $M = 3.41$ ($SD = 0.96$, 50.60%), with encouragement toward regular practice the only item reaching Agree level (58.30%, $M = 3.52$), while reducing speaking anxiety received the lowest agreement in this dimension (41.70%, $M = 3.17$). The Challenges dimension recorded the lowest section mean, $M = 2.71$ ($SD = 1.00$, 45.49%), and used reverse scoring, so lower means indicate greater perceived difficulty. Difficulty understanding some English-speaking videos was the most salient challenge ($M = 2.66$), followed by concern about others' opinions when participating on TikTok ($M = 2.69$) and internet connectivity problems ($M = 2.72$), with difficulty filtering non-educational content and distraction toward entertainment content reported at a similar, moderate level.

Table 6

Table 6 Summary of Descriptive Statistics Across All Sections

Dimension	M	SD	Agreement (%)	Interpretation
Technological Factors	3.49	0.99	59.70	Neutral
Engagement & Motivation	3.38	1.03	51.80	Neutral
Psychological Factors	3.41	0.96	50.60	Neutral
Perceived Effectiveness	3.33	1.03	50.50	Neutral
Usage Behavior	3.30	1.04	49.40	Neutral

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026)

As Table 6 shows, every dimension fell within the Neutral interpretation range. Technological Factors was descriptively the highest-rated dimension overall, and challenges the lowest, indicating that respondents viewed TikTok's

accessibility and usability more favorably than its demonstrated impact on speaking outcomes, with perceived difficulties present but not dominant.

The finding that students predominantly use TikTok for entertainment while benefiting from incidental English exposure aligns with *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, which holds that users actively select media to satisfy specific needs, including entertainment, social interaction, information, and education, shifting the analytical focus from what media do to people toward what people do with media (Katz et al., 1973). While respondents were primarily motivated by entertainment, language learning emerged as a secondary and often unintentional benefit, consistent with reviews identifying social media as a language learning environment that supports learning beyond formal instruction (Barrot, 2022). McQuail (1984) extended *Uses and Gratifications* through cognitive and cultural dimensions, proposing that users seek informational benefits alongside emotional and imaginative experiences from media engagement. This dual orientation is reflected in the present findings. Students engaged with TikTok primarily for entertainment and relaxation, yet they simultaneously encountered authentic English input through native-speaker content, conversational language, and pronunciation models. The clear preference for daily-conversation and pronunciation-focused content further indicates that students sought informational and educational gratifications alongside entertainment, a semi-conscious motivation to engage with content that is both enjoyable and linguistically relevant. This dual motivation of entertainment and learning may explain why TikTok is perceived favorably as a supplementary learning tool despite its non-academic design. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, learners' platform choices reflect active decision-making driven by perceived gratifications, making TikTok a plausible environment for incidental language learning among EFL students who are already habitual users of the platform.

The Technology Acceptance Model attributes technology adoption to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, and the present data support this distinction clearly (Davis, 1989). Technological Factors recorded the highest descriptive mean in the study, indicating strong perceived ease of use, while perceived usefulness presented a more uneven picture. TikTok was seen as moderately useful for pronunciation and vocabulary exposure, but its perceived usefulness for higher-order outcomes, namely fluency and spontaneous speech production, was comparatively weaker. This gap points to a structural tension in using an entertainment-oriented platform for language education. Accessibility and enjoyment alone were insufficient to maximize learning outcomes in this sample, and structured pedagogical scaffolding, including task design, teacher guidance, and explicit learning objectives, appears necessary to convert incidental exposure into intentional skill development.

This exposure-production gap is the most consequential pattern in the dataset, and it qualifies the optimistic picture painted by several studies cited earlier in this

manuscript. Within the Perceived Effectiveness dimension, fluency (48.50% agreement) and confidence (45.50% agreement) were the two lowest-rated items, both below majority agreement, and recording one's own voice (36.40%) was the lowest-rated behavior in the usage dimension. Receptive and imitative behaviors such as watching and following content dominated over productive activities such as commenting, joining challenges, or creating original videos. This pattern is consistent with the concern that informal exposure does not automatically generate the output practice that speaking development requires. Fathi et al. (2024) reported gains in speaking and willingness to communicate through artificial intelligence-mediated interaction, which places learners in active exchange, and the present findings suggest that passive, self-directed TikTok use does not offer a comparable interactive condition. The findings also contrast with Chhoeut et al. (2023), who combined TikTok with planned communicative activities in a pre-post study of Grade 10 students in Cambodia and reported improved speaking scores alongside favorable student opinions. Chhoeut et al. (2023) embedded TikTok in teacher-designed lessons, whereas the present respondents used it largely on their own initiative, so the difference in outcomes may reflect the presence or absence of pedagogical structure. The present cross-sectional survey cannot test this explanation.

The comparatively low score for anxiety reduction (41.70% agreement, $M = 3.17$) also connects this study to the Communicative Competence framework introduced earlier, and specifically to Hymes's (1970) argument that communicative development depends on authentic social interaction. Foreign language speaking anxiety has long been recognized as a barrier to spontaneous output (Horwitz et al., 1986), and Huang and Liu (2025) likewise identify persistent speaking anxiety among the barriers that limit spoken English development. The present data are consistent with this literature. Students described TikTok as enjoyable and motivating, yet this motivational benefit did not extend to a corresponding reduction in anxiety or gain in confidence. This suggests that TikTok's affective benefits operate somewhat independently from the interactive, socially embedded practice that Communicative Competence theory treats as necessary for confident output.

The relatively low salience of technical and structural barriers in this sample also merits comment against the regional literature. Although inconsistent internet access and limited digital infrastructure have been identified as obstacles to technology-mediated English learning in Cambodian higher education (Vireak et al., 2025) and as sources of reduced confidence among EFL learners more broadly (Azman et al., 2021), internet connectivity problems and other structural challenges were reported here as only moderate concerns, well below the level of the platform's perceived motivational and technological benefits. This may reflect the specific context of an urban university with relatively better digital infrastructure, and it suggests that the barriers documented by Vireak et al. and Azman et al. are not

uniform across Cambodian higher education settings but vary with institutional and regional conditions, distinction future comparative research could usefully examine.

Taken together, the findings support, extend, and partly contradict earlier research. They support Uses and Gratifications and Technology Acceptance accounts of why students use TikTok, since ease of access and enjoyment were the platform's clearest strengths, which is compatible with reports of motivational benefits from TikTok-based practice (Gao et al., 2023). They extend research on interaction-based speaking interventions by suggesting that exposure without structured opportunities for output is a weak route to fluency and confidence (Fathi et al., 2024). They also add to the account of persistent speaking anxiety in Huang and Liu (2025) by showing that anxiety reduction received the lowest agreement among the psychological items, even among regular TikTok users. The findings partly contradict reports of speaking gains from TikTok when it is embedded in planned communicative lessons, because respondents here reported only neutral perceptions of fluency and confidence gains from largely self-directed use (Chhoeut et al., 2023). Because this study measured perceptions and not performance, it cannot confirm or refute actual speaking gains reported elsewhere. The central contribution is the distinction between TikTok as an accessible source of exposure and TikTok as a driver of productive speaking skill.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how first-year EFL undergraduates at BELTEI International University perceive and use TikTok as a supplementary tool for developing English-speaking skills. Across the six dimensions measured, mean scores ranged from 2.71 to 3.49 and all fell within the neutral interpretation range, which indicates cautiously favorable perceptions and not strongly positive ones. Students were experienced and frequent users of the platform, and 91.7% followed English-learning accounts, yet their use was largely entertainment oriented. Practice was dominated by receptive and imitative activity, with 60.6% watching and imitating English-speaking creators and only 11.4% creating English videos. Technological factors received the highest descriptive rating ($M = 3.49$), while fluency (48.50% agreement), confidence (45.50%), and anxiety reduction (41.70%) fell below majority agreement. The central finding is therefore an exposure-production gap, in which students benefit from accessible English input and stay motivated but have limited opportunity for the spoken output that the development of communicative competence requires.

These results carry theoretical and pedagogical implications. Consistent with Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, students adopted TikTok because it is accessible, easy to use, and gratifying, although its perceived usefulness for higher-order skills such as fluency and spontaneous speech remained weaker than for pronunciation and useful expressions. From a

communicative competence perspective, exposure alone does not supply the interactive practice that confident speaking demands. TikTok is therefore best positioned as a complementary resource within structured English instruction. Instructors can convert incidental exposure into output by assigning tasks that require learners to record, share, and respond to spoken content, supported by teacher guidance and peer feedback. Institutions that expand digital access under national digital education strategies should pair that access with deliberate pedagogical design.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The study measured perceptions and not speaking performance, used a cross-sectional descriptive design, and did not test differences among dimension means inferentially, so it supports no causal or mediation claims about the effect of TikTok on speaking outcomes. Participants were recruited through non-probability sampling from a single institution, which limits generalizability, and reliability was established on a pilot sample. The very high pilot alpha (0.981) may also indicate redundancy among items. Future research should apply inferential techniques such as regression or structural equation modeling to test the proposed relationships, use quasi-experimental designs with measured speaking performance, sample across multiple institutions, and add interviews or speaking assessments to explain why exposure does not translate into confident production.

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