



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND
ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMPETENCE USING TIKTOK AMONG EFL
COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHINA**

By

CHENG WENXUAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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October 2024

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Studies have proven that TikTok can help language learners improve their English skills. TikTok provides engaging, authentic, and interactive language-learning opportunities through diverse content and social interaction, ideal for fostering speaking competence development (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). However, little research has been done on the learning strategies for improving speaking skills using TikTok. Therefore, this experiment aims to fill this gap. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising an embedded design that incorporated a questionnaire complemented by semi-structured interviews for data collection. The questionnaire was named Strategy Inventory for Speaking Learning - TikTok version (SISL-TikTok), adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990), combined with the characteristics of TikTok and oral learning. 403 students of higher education in Beijing were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire. Pearson Correlation data analysis was used to explore the relationship between the frequency of different learning strategies and speaking competence. The semi-structured

interview was conducted with four students selected purposively. A framework analysis was conducted to systematically categorise the strategies within an analytical matrix. This study aims to examine the relationship between the frequency of language learning strategies and speaking competence, identify differences in strategy use between higher- and lower-achieving students, and assess the impact of these strategies on speaking competence. The findings indicated that students most frequently used metacognitive strategies to learn to speak English with TikTok. There was a significant correlation between the frequency of compensation strategies and speaking competence, followed by affective and social strategies. Compensation strategies were also the predictor of speaking competence. There were significant differences in using metacognitive and social strategies between higher-achieving and lower-achieving students. This study held significant implications for learners who want to improve their speaking competence using TikTok to use more strategies, especially metacognitive, compensation, and cognitive strategies. Teachers should introduce strategies to their students and organise more activities on TikTok to improve speaking competence. This study suggests a new research direction for the development of language learning strategies, which is to integrate them with social media.

Keywords: Language learning strategy, Speaking competence, TikTok

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA DENGAN
KOMPETENSI BERTUTUR BAHASA INGGERIS MENGGUNAKAN
TIKTOK DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR KOLEJ EFL DI CHINA**

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Kajian telah membuktikan bahawa TikTok boleh membantu pelajar bahasa meningkatkan kemahiran bahasa Inggeris mereka. TikTok menyediakan peluang pembelajaran bahasa yang menarik, tulen dan interaktif melalui kandungan yang pelbagai dan interaksi sosial, menjadikannya ideal untuk memupuk pembangunan kecekapan bertutur. Walau bagaimanapun, sedikit kajian telah dilakukan mengenai strategi pembelajaran yang digunakan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur menggunakan TikTok. Oleh itu, eksperimen ini bertujuan untuk mengisi jurang ini. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, menggunakan reka bentuk terbenam yang menggabungkan soal selidik yang dilengkapi dengan temu bual separa berstruktur untuk pengumpulan data. Soal selidik itu dinamakan Inventori Strategi untuk Pembelajaran Bertutur - versi TikTok (SISL-TikTok), diadaptasi daripada Inventori Strategi Oxford untuk Pembelajaran Bahasa (Oxford, 1990), digabungkan dengan ciri-ciri TikTok dan pembelajaran lisan. 403 pelajar pengajian tinggi di Beijing telah dipilih secara rawak untuk melengkapkan soal selidik. Analisis

data Korelasi Pearson digunakan untuk meneroka hubungan antara kekerapan strategi pembelajaran yang berbeza dan kecekapan bertutur. Temu bual separa berstruktur telah dijalankan dengan empat orang pelajar yang dipilih secara purposive. Analisis rangka kerja telah dijalankan untuk mengkategorikan strategi secara sistematik dalam matriks analisis. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara kekerapan strategi pembelajaran bahasa dan kecekapan bertutur, mengenal pasti perbezaan penggunaan strategi antara pelajar berprestasi tinggi dan rendah, dan menilai kesan strategi ini terhadap kecekapan bertutur. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa strategi metakognitif adalah yang paling kerap digunakan oleh pelajar dalam pembelajaran berbahasa Inggeris dengan TikTok. Terdapat korelasi yang signifikan antara kekerapan menggunakan strategi imbuhan dan kecekapan bertutur, diikuti dengan strategi afektif dan sosial. Strategi pampasan juga merupakan peramal kecekapan bertutur. Terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam menggunakan strategi metakognitif dan sosial antara pelajar berprestasi tinggi dan berprestasi rendah. Kajian ini memberi implikasi yang signifikan kepada pelajar yang ingin meningkatkan kecekapan bertutur menggunakan TikTok untuk menggunakan lebih banyak strategi, terutamanya strategi metakognitif, pampasan dan kognitif. Guru harus memperkenalkan strategi kepada pelajar mereka dan menganjurkan lebih banyak aktiviti di TikTok untuk meningkatkan kecekapan bertutur. Kajian ini mencadangkan satu hala tuju kajian baharu untuk pembangunan strategi pembelajaran bahasa, iaitu mengintegrasikannya dengan media sosial.

Kata kunci: Strategi pembelajaran bahasa, kecekapan bercakap, TikTok

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Pendidikan Berkualiti

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET-4	College English Test – Band Four
CET-6	College English Test – Band Six
CEFR	The Common European Framework of Reference levels
CSE	China’s Standards of English Language Ability
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
IELTS	The International English Language Testing System
LLS	Language Learning Strategies
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SISL-TikTok	Strategy Inventory for Speaking Learning - TikTok version
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
TEM-4	Test for English Majors – Band Four
TEM-8	Test for English Majors – Band Eight
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Importance of Language Learning Strategy on Speaking

In the past five decades, much research has been done on language learning strategies from different perspectives in the second and foreign language learning area (Hammershaug & Schipor, 2022; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Thomas et al., 2022). Language learning strategies are defined as complex, dynamic thoughts and actions selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts to regulate language learning (Oxford, 2016). They are classified into two main kinds: direct and indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990). Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The learning tools learners use change with the development of the times and technology, so research on applying language learning strategies in language learning also needs to be constantly updated.

There are three phases in language learning strategies. Thomas et al. (2022) delineated specific language learning strategy timeframes and introduced the field's leading theoretical and methodological achievements. The first phase is from 1975 to 2005. In this stage, the scholars focused on the differences between good and bad learners in using and categorising strategies. Some scholars criticised language learning strategies. In the second phase, from 2006 to 2019. For example, Dornyei and Ryan (2015) doubt whether language learning strategies exist because they think it cannot be distinguished language learning strategies from ordinary learning activities, so they turn to studying

self-regulation, which is broader and more versatile. After the discussion, the scholars withdraw this extreme view and try to find a balance between language learning strategies and self-regulation. The third phase starts in 2020. More innovative research is expected to be carried out on design, method, and analysis (Thomas et al., 2022). We are in the third phase. The research seems to return to its original intention: to use language learning strategies to help learners improve language learning efficiency.

Studies have shown that language learning strategies used in learning to speak help college students improve their speaking competence (Basalama et al., 2020; Ma & Oxford, 2014; Oflaz, 2019). Researchers found that learners who use more learning strategies in language learning are usually better (Adi et al., 2019). It means proficiency is related to language learning strategies (Ji et al., 2021). Speaking is instant communication. When conversing with others, people must listen carefully and give feedback based on their words (Syafiq et al., 2021). To learn to speak better, people must make schedules and learning plans, be highly motivated, and be responsible (Devia & Doraisamy, 2021). A well-crafted strategy can significantly enhance the speaking abilities of learners by providing them with methods to overcome challenges, improve their pronunciation, increase their vocabulary, and develop their confidence in speaking the language. Additionally, having a learning plan can help learners stay motivated and focused on their goals, making acquiring a new language more enjoyable and successful (Oflaz, 2019). It can be inferred that language learning strategies provide an effective method for college students to manage their learning process.

Many researches have shown that students at the same stage with higher or lower achievement also have different strategies. For example, Ranjan et al. (2021) divided

Spanish students into higher-achieving and lower-achieving students. Through the experiment, it is found that there is a positive weak to medium relationship between the use of LLS and the proficiency of higher-achieving students. This shows that with the increase in the use of LLS, the proficiency level increases moderately. The most used strategy is metacognitive strategies by higher-achieving students, the same as those studied by Habok and Magyar (2017). However, lower-achieving students use the compensatory strategy most. Therefore, we should find the strategies higher-achieving students use and teach these to lower-achieving students to improve their speaking proficiency (Rubin, 1975).

1.1.2 Speaking Competence of Students in Higher Education

Nowadays, English speaking skills are regarded as indispensable skills that people use to talk to others worldwide. Speaking skills have always been considered the most challenging of the four skills learners should master in language learning (Kehing et al., 2021). Firstly, in daily life, English is more like a tool that people use to promote other activities, like having discussions or negotiations and making agreements. Secondly, employees in joint ventures or companies cooperating with other foreign enterprises need to talk with foreign coworkers about their business in English to make a deal and contribute to developing their companies or countries (Basalama et al., 2020). A good command of English-speaking skills can help learners increase competitiveness at work and better communicate with others daily.

English speaking competence is a crucial skill that people should grasp to communicate with other English speakers in daily life or at work. A good English speaker can talk with others fluently and exchange information correctly and

effectively. English has been emphasised since students are very young. With the development of society, people pay more attention to English-speaking competence. On the one hand, college students must meet the language requirements to gain their graduation certification and continue higher education. On the other hand, more jobs ask people to be immersed in English so that coworkers from every country can communicate with them easily (An et al., 2020). We all know that every English domain has its characteristics and challenges. As a result, finding out which language learning strategy can help improve speaking competence more effectively is worth exploring.

After years of English learning, the students are still not good at speaking in their academic performance compared with the other three domains: listening, reading, and writing. The data on Test Taker Performance in 2022 was published on the official website of The International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The IELTS is taken by students who want to get further study after graduation from senior high schools or universities so that the score can be on behalf of the speaking competence of students at the higher education level. The data reports that the academic mean performance of Chinese test takers in reading, listening, writing, and speaking is 6.5, 6.2, 5.8, and 5.7, respectively, on a 9-band scale. The data show that students have the worst performance in English speaking compared with the other three domains.

There are many reasons why students have poor oral English. From the policy perspective, the Ministry of Education in China puts forward high listening, reading, and writing requirements, except for speaking. The decision makes students ignore the importance of speaking. Therefore, to pass the College Entrance Examination, students spend more time practising listening, reading, and writing skills. As a result, students

are not willing to speak or even practice speaking skills. As for students, they are not interested in speaking English because they have fewer opportunities to use it in daily life. Other students feel shy about speaking English to others or in public because they think they have not mastered the skill very well and are afraid of making mistakes (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). From the perspective of English in China, students lack the opportunity to speak English in daily life or school. Based on the situation overall, learners hardly take the initiative to learn English speaking, let alone use learning language learning strategies to improve oral English proficiency.

With the continuous development of “the Belt and Road Initiative” and the further promotion of regional economic cooperation, the demand for competent speakers in China's job market has grown rapidly in recent years. The China National Civil Service Examination selects fresh students and staff of various majors with bachelor’s degrees or above. It represents the demand for multiple talents in China's domestic employment market. A shocking finding was that, in 2021, the demand for competent speakers only accounted for 3.55% of the total talent demand and increased to 5.76% in 2023. This showed that the overall demand for competent speakers in China's employment market had risen by 62.14%. The rapidly growing employment market provides many opportunities for competent speakers who have received higher education but also sets higher requirements for competent speakers. Students need to master more solid oral English skills to pass the employment and better overcome the work. In this context, English speaking becomes students' basic and necessary ability to live, study, and work. High requirements have been made for students to meet the standard of university study, especially English-speaking competence to communicate with other fellows.

1.1.3 The English-Speaking Standard of Chinese Higher Education

Recently, the development of English proficiency has received increasing attention from China's government. In 2018, the Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission of the People's Republic of China released *China's Standards of English Language Ability* (CSE) (refer to Figure 1.1, Ministry of Education, 2018). CSE is the first English proficiency assessment standard for Chinese English learners. The standard covers all stages of universities, middle schools, and primary schools. The scale is aimed at Chinese English learners and users. It divides English proficiency into nine levels, which are categorised into three stages: elementary stage, intermediate stage, and advanced stage. For each aspect and level of English proficiency, a comprehensive, clear, and detailed description of the characteristics has been made (Chen & Hu, 2020).

CSE 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can communicate extensively over a wide range of social and cultural topics and can adjust the content and manner freely and effectively. ● Can effectively communicate and negotiate complicated and controversial professional topics on formal occasions.
CSE 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can effectively discuss a wide range of topics in formal and informal settings, using appropriate rhetorical devices to enhance the effect utterances. ● Can express his/her viewpoints accurately and fluently on professional topics at academic seminars. ● Can thoroughly and effectively communicate or consult on complex and controversial issues encountered at work.
CSE 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can discuss a variety of familiar topics, appropriately express the desire to speak, and hold the floor. ● Can express personal opinions about abstract topics and adjust the content and styles of expression. ● Can make formal academic presentations and provide further explanation based on questions, using accurate, clear, and coherent language.
CSE 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can discuss hot social issues or familiar topics in his/her field and respond appropriately to remarks, interruptions, etc. ● Can make some insightful remarks on given topics related to social culture and learning; has a broad repertoire of oral expressions and can speak in a coherent and organised manner. ● Can communicate or negotiate effectively when dealing with daily disputes or unexpected situations.
CSE 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can comment or communicate on everyday topics as well as familiar topics and popular social issues, using clear, organised, and logical language. ● Can, after preparation, briefly comment on topics in his/her field. ● Can communicate or consult effectively on matters of daily life, such as business, travel, and shopping.

Figure 1.1: China's Standards of English-Speaking Ability (CSE)

Note: the "speed" mentioned in this figure refers to the rate of speech in English, which is defined as follows:

Fast: approximately 140-180 words/min;

Normal speed: approximately 100-140 words/min;

Slow speed: approximately 80-100 words/min;

Very slow: approximately 60-80 words/min.

The statements of these five levels in Figure 1.1 show the demanding requirements that learners should pursue to reach a high level of speaking competence. For college students of other majors, the standards of grades five and six can sufficiently express the speaking level that college students should achieve. After the analysis, the researcher divided the ability requirements of each level into two aspects: topic deepening and difficulty improvement. From level 5 to level 6, the issues required to be discussed in the scale have increased from simple daily life, hot issues, and familiar

professional fields to unexpected daily disputes, emergencies, and socio-cultural aspects. From the difficulty perspective, the level 5 scale requires learners to communicate briefly, clearly, and effectively. At level 6, learners are required to have in-depth discussions and comments. As for level 7, the requirement for English majors, the scale hopes that students can make academic reports and discuss abstract topics. At the same time, the difficulty has also been raised from discussion to appropriate expression by users. At the 8th and 9th levels, the breadth of topics is more penetrating into all fields of life, work, and academics, and the difficulty requires that users learn to use rhetorical devices for topics from simple to complex and fully expressed.

As shown in Fig 1.1, CSE is gradually in line with the international test. The Ministry of Education of China, the British Council of Culture and Education, and the American Educational Testing Service Center have completed the link of The International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Aptis, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) with CSE. All these standards reached a consensus (Chen & Hu, 2020; Papageorgiou et al., 2019). Currently, the linking is mainly aimed at the fourth to eighth levels of CSE. Table 1.1 shows links between the scores of speaking in IELTS, Aptis, and TOEFL and the corresponding level of speaking in the CSE. Peng et al. (2022) connect each level of the scale with the level of the Common European Framework of Reference levels (CEFR) overall (refer to Table 1.2).

The college students' oral proficiency in CSE 5 and CSE 6 means that their IELTS oral scores can reach 5.5-6 points, Aptis oral scores can reach 37-43 points, and TOEFL oral scores can reach 17-20 points. On the other hand, this is also equivalent to the B1 and B2 levels of the CEFR standard. If their oral level reaches CSE 7, it equals 6.5 points for IELTS, 47 points for Aptis, 23 points for TOEFL, and C1 for CEFR.

Table 1.1: Link between English Speaking Score in IELTS, Aptis, and TOEFL to China's Standard of English Ability

CSE	CSE 4	CSE 5	CSE 6	CSE 7	CSE 8
IELTS (0-9)	5	5.5	6	6.5	7
Aptis (0-50)	29	37	43	47	
TOEFL (0-30)	13	17	20	23	26

(Source: Chen and Hu, 2021; Papageorgiou et al. , 2019)

Table 1.2: Link between China's Standards of English Language Ability and the Common European Framework of Reference Levels

CSE	CSE 1	CSE 2	CSE 3	CSE 4	CSE 5	CSE 6	CSE 7	CSE 8	CSE 9
CEFR	<A1	A1	A2	B1	B2		C1		C2

(Source: Liu and Peng, 2018)

From the statement of the scale on the oral ability of English users, we can see that the Chinese Ministry of Education has high expectations for college English learners. Under such a standard premise, the researcher believes China's oral English education will be given due attention and developed rapidly. From a macro perspective, the release of CSE in China can promote the modernisation and internationalisation of English in China. At the medium level, it can encourage reform of teaching. From the micro level, it can promote students' autonomous learning ability in speaking. Therefore, more studies are needed to explore effective ways to improve speaking skills.

1.1.4 Using TikTok to Learn to Speak

The application of some social media platforms in learning to speak has emerged as time has required, bringing possibilities for learning. TikTok, named Douyin in China, has become a new platform to learn speaking skills in China. Many scholars have recognised its feasibility and universality in teaching English (Opsahl & Levin, 2022; Putri, 2022). Zhen et al. (2021) find that Duet Challenge, a specific function of TikTok,

helps 40% of participants increase their pronunciation from level 3 in the pre-test to level 4 in the post-test. Using TikTok in English lessons can improve students' self-confidence and motivation in speaking English (Titik et al., 2022). Therefore, the application of TikTok in teaching and learning is explored, with the aim of helping teachers and learners improve the efficiency of using social media for learning to speak.

Investigations into using TikTok as a tool for enhancing spoken English proficiency are currently in the nascent phase; however, a growing body of research has already demonstrated its potential effectiveness in facilitating improvements in spoken English skills. Scholars have realised TikTok's value in helping learners improve their speaking skills. For example, Herlisya and Wiratno (2022) conducted action research on college students in English education majors to find out that using TikTok can enhance their speaking competence by 7.75 points. Pratiwi et al. (2021) find that college students hold a positive view of using TikTok to practice their speaking skills and literacy through observation and questionnaires. Zaitun et al. (2021) use action research to find that students increase their confidence to express ideas through TikTok, and the result of the pre-test of speaking and post-test increased significantly. However, the language learning strategies used to practice speaking competence with TikTok must be explored.

Studies have shown that learners are willing to use TikTok to improve speaking skills (Pratiwi et al., 2021; Yang, 2020, June). In a quantitative survey, Yang (2020, June) found that 28.88% of the participants had already used TikTok as their out-of-class English learning strategy, and 64.17% of them would like to apply TikTok with a teacher's guidance. She also suggested that students employ affective strategies to enhance their motivation for learning English and social strategies to learn with other

users or authors of videos. Chinnappan et al. (2023) found cognitive strategies are the most used when they improve their speaking skills with social media, including TikTok, while affective strategies are the least. However, Yang (2020, June) and Chinnappan et al. (2023) focus on the lower secondary English as a Second Language learners. The strategies used by higher education learners are less known.

1.2 Problem Statement

Language learning strategies (LLS) play a critical role in enhancing the efficiency of language learners and improving the teaching effectiveness of educators. These strategies support learners in planning, implementing, and evaluating their language learning processes (Wael et al., 2018). Despite the extensive research on LLS, most studies focus on general language proficiency, with limited attention to specific aspects of language, such as speaking skills. Furthermore, existing research is predominantly centred on secondary education, leaving a significant gap in understanding the use and effectiveness of LLS in higher education.

Speaking is a vital language skill that significantly impacts learners' overall communicative competence. While many studies suggest that LLS, particularly the six strategies outlined in Oxford's classification (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies), are beneficial for improving oral English proficiency (Adi et al., 2019). Using language learning strategies to practice English can help students increase their confidence and motivation (Rahmawati et al., 2021). However, recent systematic literature review on language learning strategies reported the inconsistent of the most frequent used strategies (Ranjan et al., 2021). For instance, a study show that cognitive strategies help learners in the highest frequency

to practice in different methods so that they can better grasp the speaking skills (Taheri et al., 2020). Other studies proved that metacognitive strategies are most used by learners to manage their learning process (John et al., 2021; Wael et al., 2018).

Additionally, research highlights metacognitive strategies as the most effective and frequently used by high achievers (Ranjan et al., 2021), while other indicates a preference for compensation strategies (Taheri et al., 2020). Similarly, lower-achieving learners are reported to favour either compensation (Ranjan et al., 2021) or social strategies (Taheri et al., 2020). These inconsistencies suggest the need for a deeper exploration of how individual LLS contribute to speaking proficiency across different learner levels in higher education, how strategy use differs between high- and low-achieving students, and which strategies are most effective for enhancing oral English performance.

While researches have extensively examined LLS in conventional classroom environments (John et al., 2021; Taheri et al., 2020; Wael et al., 2018), studies focusing on their application in digital learning contexts, such as social media platforms, remain limited. TikTok, as an emerging platform, offers unique opportunities for oral English learning through its rich video materials and interactive features. Studies indicate that TikTok can boost learners' speaking proficiency (Chinnappan et al., 2023; Zhen et al., 2021), confidence, and motivation (Ferstephanie & Lady Pratiwi, 2022; Xiuwen & Razali, 2021; Yang, 2020, June). However, the role of LLS in the TikTok learning process has not been adequately explored. Existing researches present conflicting findings regarding the most frequently used strategies on TikTok. Some studies suggest cognitive strategies are prevalent (Chinnappan et al., 2023), while other highlight metacognitive strategies. Additionally, the relationship between the

frequency of strategy usage on TikTok and oral proficiency improvement has not been thoroughly examined. Another gap lies in the lack of investigation into how high-achieving and low-achieving learners differ in their use of LLS on TikTok.

Given these gaps, it is unclear which strategies most effectively enhance oral proficiency on TikTok and how learners of varying proficiency levels utilize these strategies. Addressing these issues is essential for optimizing learning outcomes and guiding learners and educators in the strategic use of TikTok as a language learning platform. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the relationship between LLS use and oral proficiency improvement on TikTok in higher education. Specifically, it will analyze which strategies contribute most significantly to speaking improvement, the differences in strategy use between high- and low-achieving learners, and the implications for leveraging TikTok as a dynamic learning platform.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives of this study:

1. To identify the language learning strategies used by students in learning to speak with TikTok.
2. To investigate the relationship between the frequency of strategies used by learners in learning to speak with TikTok and their speaking competence.
3. To identify different language learning strategies used by higher-achieving students and lower-achieving students.

4. To examine the influence of language learning strategies on students' speaking competence.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows.

1. What language learning strategies are used by students in learning to speak with TikTok?
2. What is the relationship between the frequency of strategies used by students in learning to speak with TikTok and their speaking competence?
3. What different language learning strategies are used by higher-achieving students and lower-achieving students?
4. How do language learning strategies influence students' speaking competence?

1.5 Research Significance

Firstly, this study creatively explored the usage of language learning strategies on TikTok. The benefits of TikTok for learning to speak have been proved by some studies. However, they did not explore the specific strategies that learners use in learning to speak on TikTok. This is the first study to integrate TikTok, the popularly used short video application, into language learning strategy utility, which gives language learning strategies a new direction to develop.

Secondly, for the sake of teachers, this study gives a new teaching method of using language learning strategies to practice speaking skills by using TikTok. The present study provides additional evidence concerning exercising speaking capability with resources and opportunities provided by TikTok. The findings give confidence to the teachers who want to introduce TikTok into speaking techniques learning and make the learning process more systematic and effective with the help of language learning strategies.

Third, in terms of learners, the specific relationship between speaking competence and each language learning strategy and the difference in using language learning strategies between higher-achieving and lower-achieving students is explored in this study. The findings can help students find the most suitable way for themselves to practice their speaking competence using materials on TikTok. Then they can get better work opportunities.

1.6 Research Scope

This study investigates the language learning strategies employed by students in higher education with TikTok for oral practice during study period. This study collected data in a mixed method with questionnaires and semi-structured interview. Data were collected at a single point in time. The respondents consisted of students from universities in Beijing, a highly developed city in China. They use TikTok as a learning platform to enhance speaking competence.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations in this study. First, this study used questionnaire and semi-

structured interview to do data collection. The questions in the questionnaire and time of the interview are limited to collect all learning strategies that learners used. The respondents of this study may also have some misunderstandings of the information both in questionnaire and interview. Secondly, this study is a cross-sectional study. The data were collected in a short time to find language learning strategies that learners use to practice their speaking skills on TikTok. The change of learners' speaking skills cannot be measured within this time frame. Therefore, it is impossible to judge whether the students' oral ability can be improved faster than other students who do not use language learning strategies in learning to speak on TikTok. Third, the sampling of respondents is also a limitation for this study. The participants were selected from universities in Beijing. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other cities, learners in other lower grade students. Forth, the last speaking score was collected, but there is no guarantee that it is recent. A current measurement of the respondents' speaking ability is needed in future studies.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Terms

Based on the context of this research, the terms are introduced as follows to make a better understanding of this study.

1.8.1 Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLS) refer to “complex, dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts to regulate the learning of language” (Oxford, 2016). In this study, language learning strategies are operationalised as the thoughts and actions that learners take when they practice speaking English on TikTok to better plan their learning process and

overcome emotional and technical difficulties to improve their speaking proficiency.

1.8.2 Speaking Competence

Speaking competence can be thought of as “combinatorial,” involving linguistic knowledge, core speaking skills, and communication strategies, which must all cohere simultaneously to constitute speaking competence and facilitate fluent and intelligible speech production (Goh & Burns, 2012). In this study, speaking competence is defined as the capacity that learners can communicate and speak fluently and accurately in English, which is learned by using TikTok with the guidance of language learning strategies. Speaking competence is measured by the scores on the speaking tests of IELTS, TOFEL, Aptis, CEFR, CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4, and TEM-8. Based on individual scores and China’s Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) benchmarks, we convert all speaking scores to a 100-point scale.

1.8.3 TikTok

TikTok is a short video platform widely used all around the world. TikTok can be used as a teaching aid and as a video teaching resource for classroom teaching (Gao et al., 2023). In this study, TikTok is operationalised as a learning platform that provides short video content and interactive features, allowing learners to practice speaking through activities such as downloading learning materials, practising speaking or communicating with others using language learning strategies.

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