



FROM DIGITAL REHEARSAL TO FACE-TO-FACE SPEAKING: EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL-MEDIATED INTERACTION AS SITUATED PRACTICE

Zakky Yavani^a, Muhsiyana Nurul Aisyiyah^a, Asyrof Bahauddin Mubarak^a

^a English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of *Tarbiya* and Teacher Training, UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon

*Corresponding author: Perjuangan Street, Sunyaragi, Cirebon, West Java, 45132. E-mail address: zakkyavani@syekhnurjati.co.id

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abstract

Use of digital technology in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has altered the way learners interact with language and communication. It is also not clear if confidence built up by learners in digital media is transferable into live, spontaneous speech. This study sought to understand how EFL learners view digital media in creating talking opportunities and in building their confidence when they are willing to communicate, and in preparation for face-to-face, spontaneous talking. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. In the quantitative phase, a 20-item instrument designed to measure confidence in speaking EFL through the dimensions of multimodality, technology, and knowledge processes was completed by 50 students of the English Language Teaching Department, State Islamic University of Cirebon, and was analyzed descriptively. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with six students to provide additional clarity to the survey answers. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed mostly positive responses, with multimodal aspects of the instrument receiving the highest mean, and confidence, the lowest. Interviewees said they used social networking sites for language input, and rehearsal with chatbots and exchanging messages for communication practice. AI-assisted systems provided a low-stakes, safe, and repeatable communication environment. Almost all students noted that the digitally-built confidence was lacking when they had to engage in free, oral communication, thereby justifying the low confidence rating. Both data sources came to the same conclusion that digital-mediated interactions functioned the best as a 'work in progress' practice that should complement, not replace, in-person practice. They also concluded that there was a need to deliberately connect the students from digital rehearsal to confident speech

INTRODUCTION

Many consider speaking to be one of the most crucial aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning as it is a measure of learners' ability to convey their thoughts and articulate their meaning in verbal discourse (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Wulandari & Salsabilla, 2026). However, the need for speaking practice continues to be a limitation for many learners, and an obstacle for them can be decreased self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and restricted opportunities to engage in active participation in the classroom (Chea, 2025; Kafabih et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2025). Shy or less confident learners tend to hesitate, refrain from speaking, or worry about the possible mistakes they will make (Fadillah et al., 2025; Jácome & dos Santos, 2025). This has a negative impact on the quality of the learner's active participation and the learner's communication willingness and their learning.

While studying a foreign language comes with its typical challenges and hurdles, incorporating technology into language learning also brings a host of opportunities. One such opportunity is digital mediated interaction, where people communicate via instant messages, discussion forums, social media and/or video calls. English learners have more opportunities to practice the language due to the flexibility and variety that digital mediated interaction offers

(Afriadi, 2026; Han et al., 2024; Siddig, 2020). In pedagogical terms, digital mediated interaction can be considered a practice of meaningful communication in the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies framework. Language learning occurs through communication that goes beyond isolated practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). For EFL speaking classes, digital mediated interaction implies that learners practice language use in a variety of contexts before the actual practice of communication (Fei & Li, 2025). Some studies in this area show that, in the EFL context, efforts to integrate social backgrounds of learners helped them to engage in multimodal communication and participate in collaborative tasks that integrated their previous experiences and critical thinking (Misa, 2023; Saifulloh et al., 2025), and that incorporating digital interaction in teacher education reinforced adaptive practice (Nabhan & Habók, 2026). Most of this work focuses on critical reading and literacy, whereas speaking practice and digital mediated interaction that leads to in-person interaction has been largely neglected.

Mobile-assisted language learning, chatbots, and social networking tools extend users' practice opportunities for writing and speaking, leading to more accurate, fluent, and diversified use of vocabulary and improved pronunciation (Cruzatty & Vélez Yanza, 2025; Khomariyah & Ekowijayanto, 2025; Pinandhita, 2025; Sreelakshmi et al., 2026). Mobile-assisted language learning, chatbots, and social networking tools prove to be useful and effective practices of speaking and writing in foreign languages. Even though some claim that current digital tools do not capture all dimensions of speaking and writing, a range of digital tools assist language learners in developing their speaking and writing skills when integrated in the language classroom.

There are affective factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and readiness to communicate that influence speaking development (Afidawati et al., 2024; Han et al., 2024; Ikhsanto & Nastiti, 2025; Rmelah et al., 2026) supportive and less pressured environments, which include Community Language Learning and perhaps digital media, help learners to feel at ease when expressing themselves and to be more inclined to initiate communication (Wulandari & Salsabilla, 2026), while the authors of the studies all make a case that confidence and anxiety are interrelated (Afidawati et al., 2024; Ikhsanto & Nastiti, 2025; Rmelah et al., 2026); a lack of preparation and the fear of mistakes or negative evaluation leads to anxiety, which in turn results in the lack of willingness to communicate. The studies focusing on multimodality bring yet something different; in video as a medium, there is motivation and a decreased level of difficulty in comprehension, making it preferred over the rest of the available media by EFL learners (Pratiwi & Trisanti, 2025), integrating multiple communication modes adjusts to diverse preferences and within learning groups adds to the willingness to communicate (Rohi & Nurhayati, 2024), and the application of various multimodal communication strategies helps to build both presentation skills and confidence (Fatwassani et al., 2025).

While the current strands of research have provided some insights, there is a need to integrate research borne out of the interplay between digital tools, affective and motivational issues, multimodality, and multiliteracies as all these perspectives have been studied in relative isolation (Afidawati et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2024; Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021; Hsieh, 2022; Nidara et al., 2024; Yavani, 2023). Studies under the scope of multiliteracies and situated practice tend to focus on literacy and reading practice as opposed to speaking practice (Misa, 2023; Nabhan & Habók, 2026; Saifulloh et al., 2025). Therefore, the ways in which digital mediated communication serves as a situated practice space to develop speaking confidence and readiness to communicate have been studied to a limited extent, and there is an even greater lack of studies that investigate if and how speaking confidence gained through digital practice can be generalized to unsupported, face-to-face speaking. Despite these limitations, some surveys have suggested students gain confidence when using digital media. However, the nature of surveys prevents them from probing if the confidence gained during the rehearsed, controlled

digital setting has any impact to natural, unsupported, spoken interaction. This study aims to address the identified research gap by integrating a structured survey with a follow-up interview through which the researcher will examine the perception of EFL learners on the potential of digital mediated communication to serve as a situated practice space for developing confidence to communicate during face-to-face interactions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), beginning with a quantitative descriptive survey to measure students' perceptions of digital-mediated interaction and speaking confidence, followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews to explain and elaborate the survey results.

Participants and Setting

Survey phase. Fifty students from the English Language Teaching Department at a State Islamic University in Cirebon participated, selected through convenience sampling because of their accessibility and experience with digital-mediated English learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Memon et al., 2025; Obilor, 2025).

Interview phase. Six students who had completed the questionnaire were purposively selected from among sixth- and fourth-semester respondents to represent varied patterns of digital platform use (social-media-dominant, AI-chatbot-dominant, and mixed use) identified in their survey responses. Interviews were conducted individually in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for reporting; participants are referred to as Student 1 through Student 6 to preserve confidentiality.

Instruments and Procedures

The questionnaire consisted of 20 close-ended, four-point Likert-scale statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree) organized into four sections: multimodality, technology, knowledge processes, and speaking confidence, preceded by demographic and platform-use items. It was reviewed by an English education lecturer prior to distribution and administered online via Google Forms from April 20–30, 2026.

The interview guide contained twelve open-ended questions covering platform use, the perceived helpfulness of multimodal resources, experiences connecting speaking tasks to personal life, comparisons between digital and classroom practice, and perceived changes in confidence and participation. Interviews lasted approximately 20–30 minutes each and were conducted after survey data collection was complete.

Before analysis, participants in both phases were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their responses and recordings would remain confidential and be used only for academic research. Participation was voluntary in both the survey and the interview phase.

Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) based on items and dimensions for each type of questionnaire. For interviews, the conversations were translated directly into Bahasa Indonesia and thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's guidelines. Transcribing meant reading the statements multiple times to understand what participants meant when they made certain statements. Based on this understanding, participants were given identifiers and codes. The codes were consolidated in a given theme. The themes were then matched with the four dimensions of the questionnaire (multimodality, technology, knowledge processes, and speaking) confidence to

determine the correlation, extension, or contradiction of the qualitative data to the survey responses. The reporting was done in English only at the end to ensure that the meaning of the data was conveyed as it was during coding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics and Digital Platform Use

The 50 survey participants were mostly female ($n = 34$, 68%) and predominantly from the sixth semester ($n = 29$, 58%), as shown in Table 1, followed by the fourth (28%), second (10%), and eighth (4%) semesters. The dominance of sixth-semester respondents indicates that most participants had relatively extensive experience with English learning and digital media in academic contexts.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants ($n = 50$)

Academic Level	n	Male (f, %)	Female (f, %)
2nd Semester	5	2 (4%)	3 (6%)
4th Semester	14	3 (6%)	11 (22%)
6th Semester	29	9 (18%)	20 (40%)
8th Semester	2	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Total	50	16 (32%)	34 (68%)

Short-form content platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts) were the most widely used tools for English learning (94%), followed by YouTube (92%), Google Classroom (60%), and Zoom/Google Meet (56%); smaller proportions used ELSA Speak (24%), Discord (16%), Roblox (14%), Cake/Stimuler (14%), and Tandem/HelloTalk (12%), with a few students additionally mentioning ChatGPT, Duolingo, and online games with communication features. Most students used digital media for speaking practice regularly: 42% sometimes, 40% several times a week, and 18% almost daily, with no participant reporting rare or no use patterns consistent with the six interviewees, all of whom described digital media as a routine, mostly out-of-class part of their speaking practice, used more heavily outside class than within it because of limited class time.

Quantitative Findings

Table 2 presents the distribution of responses to all 20 questionnaire items, and Table 3 summarizes the resulting mean scores across the four dimensions.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Responses to the Questionnaire Items (%)

No.	Item	SD	D	A	SA
1	Familiar with using various media (text, audio, video)	2%	0	30%	68%
2	Video/audio helps understand speaking materials	0	2%	28%	70%
3	Easier to learn speaking via visual/audio materials	0	2%	28%	70%
4	Media combination increases interest	0	2%	42%	56%
5	Media forms help express ideas in English	2%	2%	56%	40%
6	Experience difficulty using technology	38%	38%	20%	4%

7	Technology helps practice speaking outside class	2%	0	18%	80%
8	More confident using digital media than direct interaction	0	8%	60%	32%
9	Digital platforms help interact in English	0	0	46%	54%
10	Technology makes me more active in learning	0	6%	60%	34%
11	Can connect materials with daily experience	0	2%	32%	66%
12	Learn speaking better with real-life materials	0	2%	16%	80%
13	Try to use English in various situations	0	14%	66%	20%
14	Contextual learning aids understanding	0	2%	56%	42%
15	Actively build own understanding	0	12%	70%	18%
16	More confident speaking English via digital media	2%	2%	64%	32%
17	More confident expressing opinions via digital platforms	0	4%	70%	26%
18	More comfortable practicing in digital-based learning	0	2%	58%	40%
19	Digital media reduces fear of speaking English	0	2%	62%	36%
20	Still feel less confident despite using digital media	30%	36%	30%	4%

Table 3. Summary of Mean Scores Across Questionnaire Aspects

Questionnaire Aspect	Mean	Median	SD
Multimodality (Items 1–5)	3.58	4	0.56
Technology Use (Items 6–10)	3.14	3	0.61
Knowledge Processes (Items 11–15)	3.38	3	0.55
Speaking Confidence (Items 16–20)	3.06	3	0.60
Overall	3.29	3	0.58

Perceptions of multimodality (Items 1–5) were the most positive of the four dimensions ($M = 3.58$). The strongest responses concerned video and audio materials aiding comprehension of speaking materials, with 70% strongly agreeing on both Items 2 and 3, and 68% strongly agreeing that they were familiar with using varied media (Item 1). More than half strongly agreed that combining different media increased their interest in learning (Item 4), and most agreed or strongly agreed that multimodal resources helped them express ideas (Item 5).

For technology use (Items 6–10, $M = 3.14$), 80 percent of participants strongly agreed technology facilitated practicing speaking outside class (Item 7), the highest agreement in the survey, while positive opinions were also shown for confidence, interaction and engagement, and active participation through the technology platforms (Items 8–10). Of note, for the challenge of technical difficulties (Item 6), 76 percent Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. This shows that for most participants, there were little to no major technical difficulties, as evidenced by the interviews, where some participants did.

For knowledge processes (Items 11–15, $M = 3.38$), 80 percent of participant strongly agreed in understanding how to better speak when materials were provided to relate to real-life situations (Item 12), and 66 percent strongly agreed in the ability to relate English materials to everyday situations (Item 11). Moderate agreement was shown for the other two items (Item 13

and 15) at 66 percent Agree & 70 percent Agree respectively, inclining that for most participants, having contextscenarios was of utmost importance when compared to other elements.

For speaking confidence (Items 16–20, $M = 3.06$), most participants agreed or strongly agreed with feeling more comfortable and less fearful when speaking through digital media (Items 16–19), with the strongest result found for comfort practicing speaking in digital-media-based learning (Item 18: 40% Strongly Agree, 58% Agree). Yet this dimension had both the lowest mean of the four and the smallest share of "Strongly Agree" responses overall only 26–36% strongly agreed across Items 16, 17, and 19, compared to 56–80% strong agreement in the other three dimensions and 34% still agreed or strongly agreed that they felt *less* confident despite using digital media (Item 20). This gap between generally positive agreement and comparatively weak strong agreement is the pattern the interview data helps explain below.

Qualitative Findings

Platforms as exposure versus practice tools

All students interviewed distinguished between passive exposure and active practice of speaking. They listed Tik Tok, YouTube, and other applications with instant video-making features, such as Instagram Reels, as their preferred resources for practice. Students learned vocabulary and pronunciation by imitating and listening to the video recordings. One student said he practiced by repeating interactive segments of the Reels. Another student stated he learned new phrases by listening to the podcasts of YouTube and corrected some mispronunciations of Tik Tok videos. For active practice of speaking, participants used some AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini as well as language exchange apps like Small Talk 2 Me, Stimuler, and Hello Talk. Participants stressed that Gemini and ChatGPT allowed them to set topics, and thus practice in great length, with a single topic which normally would only be provided the duration of one classroom activity for speaking practice. Most participants stated this practice was done outside of class time since classroom time was dominated by the lecturers, with great control on time and digital resources..

Multimodal resources supporting comprehension and motivation

According to the survey, all six students ranked video and audio as the most helpful media for phrase preparation because they helped with pronunciation, intonation, and the ability to express something in a certain way. Student 4 said because of video, she was able to see expression and context, which helped her a lot, and Student 2 said video, audio, and text express, pronounce, and help one learn vocabulary respectively, thus, having all three was a lot better than having only one. Student 6 said reading text does not help you imagine a conversation like hearing a speaker or seeing the speaker does. Student 6 said she uses subtitles because the speaker helps her imagine a conversation especially when she sees words that she can look up. Student 5 said she gets easily bored, so having videos, even if they are helpful, won't keep her interested. Student 5 said she looked for videos that were not boring in order to stay motivated to practice. Even though they were not helpful in the main way, text based resources were ranked as a lower level preparation way, and they were mainly used to look up the words that were shown in videos. Student 5 said she relied on DeepL for translating what she encountered in some Instagram captions.

Situated practice through personally relevant, AI-mediated topics

An observed pattern was that tasks targeted at students' lived experiences made real-world communication feel easier and more natural. Student 1, Student 2, Student 4, and Student 6 chose to speak about daily activities, hobbies, schoolwork, and even their favorite media

because they were more familiar. Student 4 explained that everyday topics are more ‘sticky’ because they are practiced more often, and Student 2 explained that topics that involve fewer thinking-efforts become more relatable and better serve as a contextual basis for task completion. Several students named a new two-step process for many digital speaking tasks: first, pulling together video, article, and/or AI prompt ideas and then recording verbal English outputs of their personal and organizational notes. For example, Student 6 explained how she searched YouTube for native and non-native speakers narrating their daily activities, made bullet points of her own activities, translated them, then practiced speaking; similarly, Student 1 explained she completed an English Club task by searching for verbally expressed Instagram and YouTube comments, made her own sentences, and then recorded spoken English verbiage.

Both Student 3 and Student 5 said they used ChatGPT for role-play to act as a friend or interviewer. Student 3 said they used ChatGPT to create prompt-based questions that they described as “follow-up” questions for a task that prompted them to speak about Greek mythology from the Percy Jackson book. Student 5 described using ChatGPT to suggest “fun” topics that shared relevance with Student 5’s experience to a greater extent so that the role-play conversation “flows” more naturally. The role-play prompt rendered the conversations less scripted and became more personally real to the individuals described. This reflects the situated-practice principle that meaningfully derived contextualized communication is the primary driver of the acquisition of a second language. This also explains the 66% of participants that agreed strongly that they were able to connect the teaching material to their everyday lives (Item 11).

Speaking confidence built through digital rehearsal

Students consistently linked increased confidence to three features of digital-mediated interaction. First, non-judgmental, immediate correction: Student 5 said digital platforms “directly tell us where our mistakes are” without scolding, which made her feel more comfortable than in class, while Student 3 similarly valued being able to ask ChatGPT for correction whenever grammar or vocabulary felt uncertain. Second, repeatability: several students (Students 1, 2, and 6) emphasized being able to redo a recording or retry a conversation until satisfied, reducing the pressure of a single, judged attempt; Student 6 specifically contrasted this with live presentations, where “there’s no redoing it” once a mistake is made in front of classmates. Third, anonymity and reduced social visibility: Student 4 explained that online interlocutors did not know her personal background, so she worried less about how she was perceived and spoke more freely, describing herself as able to “speak however I want” without fear of judgment; Student 1 similarly felt more comfortable with voice messages and chats because only close friends, not a full classroom, would hear mistakes, and Student 3 noted that practicing with AI rather than classmates meant mistakes felt less embarrassing since no one else was present to witness them. These mechanisms align with the survey’s strongest confidence-related result 58–70% agreement that digital practice felt more comfortable (Item 18) and help explain why confidence scores, while positive, were not as strongly endorsed as multimodality.

Willingness to communicate fostered by rehearsal

Beyond comfort, several students reported that digital rehearsal measurably increased how often and how actively they attempted to speak English a pattern consistent with willingness to communicate as an outcome distinct from, but related to, confidence itself (cf. Han et al., 2024). Student 1 and Student 6 said greater exposure to English through YouTube and social media made them more willing to try using newly heard expressions themselves, moving from passive viewing toward active imitation over time. Student 2 explained that digital rehearsal let

her "prepare courage" before speaking in front of others, treating solo digital practice as a stepping stone to live participation rather than a separate activity. Student 4 similarly linked the flexibility of digital platforms being able to choose when, where, and what to practice to a greater willingness to try, since the informal atmosphere felt less pressured than a formal classroom setting. Student 3 reported the clearest behavioral shift, stating that she used to rarely practice speaking at all but now practices far more often simply because AI access removed the earlier barrier of needing another person or a scheduled class session to speak with.

The unfinished transition to spontaneous face-to-face speaking

Despite these gains, every interviewee reported that confidence built through digital practice did not fully transfer to spontaneous or face-to-face speaking. Student 1 and Student 4 said they still felt unprepared and nervous speaking live in front of classmates, particularly in academic settings, because of fear of pronunciation or grammar mistakes; Student 1 specifically described going blank when trying to recall an English equivalent for an Indonesian word under time pressure. Student 2 and Student 6 distinguished between prepared digital practice, where they felt confident, and unplanned interactions such as video calls or being asked to respond immediately where nervousness returned regardless of medium; Student 6 noted that even after months of confidence-building digital practice, being asked to speak spontaneously with a fellow learner (rather than a native speaker, whom she felt was more understanding of mistakes) still produced noticeable nervousness. Student 3 went further, noting that even AI-mediated conversation was "not entirely the same as speaking with a human," because AI responses differ from genuine human response patterns, so she still felt less confident in fully spontaneous, unprepared exchanges despite extensive AI practice. This distinction between rehearsed and spontaneous speaking offers a direct explanation for the survey finding that speaking confidence had the lowest mean score and the fewest "Strongly Agree" responses among the four dimensions: digital media appears to build confidence primarily in low-stakes, preparable contexts rather than in the spontaneous, evaluative situations that speaking assessments and real-time classroom interaction typically require.

Perceived limits of digital-mediated interaction

Alongside its benefits, students identified recurring limitations. Technical issues weak internet signals, unstable web access, and unreliable connections were mentioned by most students as a persistent barrier: Student 5 said the web-based platforms she tried were often disrupted by poor signal, which was itself a reason she gravitated toward ChatGPT's app-based voice notes instead, while Student 2 and Student 6 both named internet or device problems as their most common practical difficulty. Several students also noted linguistic difficulties that digital tools did not fully resolve: vocabulary recall under time pressure, uncertainty about pronunciation stress patterns, and grammar anxiety during spontaneous responses (Students 1, 2, 4, and 6). Student 1 described the sensation of an English equivalent "disappearing" from memory mid-sentence, and Student 6 highlighted grammar as the most persistent difficulty, since spontaneous speech left little time to check whether a sentence was constructed correctly. Student 3 raised a further concern about over-reliance on AI for generating ideas and corrections, noting that she sometimes struggled to identify a topic without AI suggestions first, which suggests that heavy dependence on chatbot assistance could substitute for, rather than build, independent language production. Student 5 added that AI-suggested topics were not always personally interesting, which occasionally reduced her motivation to continue a practice session. These limitations mirror the comparatively modest technology-dimension mean (3.14) in the survey and reinforce why students frame digital tools as a supplement rather than a full solution.

A shared view: digital media as a complement, not a replacement

Every one of the six students, without prompting toward a particular answer, stated that digital-mediated interaction should complement rather than replace face-to-face practice. Reasons converged around three points: classroom interaction trains spontaneity and real-time responsiveness that digital rehearsal cannot fully replicate (Students 1, 3, 4, 6); face-to-face communication involves eye contact, live expression-reading, and unpredictable response that build different skills (Students 1, 4); and class time alone is too limited to provide sufficient practice, so digital media extends opportunities rather than substituting for them (Students 2, 4, 5). Several students proposed a specific sequencing: using digital tools to build vocabulary, gather ideas, and rehearse before class, then using class time for live, spontaneous practice with peers and lecturers (Students 2, 6) a model directly informing this study's pedagogical implications.

Table 4 presents a joint display that merges the quantitative and qualitative results for each dimension, together with the meta-inference drawn from integrating the two data sources.

Table 4. Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Dimension	Quantitative Result (Survey, n = 50)	Qualitative Theme (Interviews, n = 6)	Joint Interpretation (Meta-Inference)
Multimodality	Highest mean of the four dimensions (M = 3.58); 68–70% strongly agreed that video/audio materials aided comprehension (Items 1–3).	All six students described video and audio as the most helpful media for pronunciation, intonation, and motivation; text was used mainly for vocabulary lookup.	Confirmation: the interviews explain why multimodality scored highest video and audio convey pronunciation, expression, and context that text alone cannot.
Technology Use	Moderate mean (M = 3.14); 80% agreed technology supports practice outside class (Item 7), yet most did not report major technical difficulty (76% disagreed, Item 6).	Students valued AI chatbots and apps mainly for expanding practice time beyond limited class hours, but named unstable internet connections and over-reliance on AI as recurring barriers.	Expansion: the interviews add nuance the single technology-difficulty item could not capture specific, recurring barriers coexist with generally positive perceptions.
Knowledge Processes	Second-highest mean (M = 3.38); 80% strongly agreed real-life materials aided learning (Item 12), with slightly lower agreement on active application (Item 13).	Students chose personally relevant topics (daily activities, hobbies) to reduce cognitive load and used AI role-play to simulate authentic, two-way exchange.	Confirmation and explanation: the interviews illustrate the situated-practice mechanism behind the survey scores, showing why personal relevance mattered most.
Speaking Confidence	Lowest mean of the four dimensions (M = 3.06) and the smallest share of “Strongly Agree” responses (26–36%); 34% still felt less confident despite digital media use (Item 20).	Confidence gained through non-judgmental correction, repeatability, and reduced social visibility, but this rehearsed confidence did not consistently transfer to spontaneous, face-to-face speaking.	Divergence resolved through integration: the interviews explain the lowest quantitative score by distinguishing rehearsed from spontaneous confidence a distinction the survey alone could not detect.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge on a consistent picture: students perceive digital-mediated interaction positively across all four dimensions, but the strength of that endorsement, and the underlying reasons for it, differ by dimension. This aligns with earlier findings that technology-enhanced environments are perceived as engaging and motivating (Cruzatty & Vélez Yanza, 2025; Yavani, 2023), while extending that literature by identifying *which* features of digital interaction learners credit with these effects.

Multimodality received the strongest and most consistent support in both data sets. Students' descriptions of video and audio aiding pronunciation and intonation, and of visual variety sustaining motivation, support prior claims that multimodal input offers multiple pathways for meaning-making (Pratiwi & Trisanti, 2025; Rohi & Nurhayati, 2024) and echo multiliteracies scholars' observation that learners naturally draw on visual, audio, and linguistic modes together (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Ilmi et al., 2020).

Technology use was positively but more moderately endorsed, and the interviews clarify why: students valued technology chiefly for expanding practice opportunities beyond class time (echoing Bayotas, 2023, on video-recording platforms supporting oral performance, and Huang, 2023, on technology-mediated environments creating meaningful communicative contexts), while simultaneously naming internet connectivity and over-reliance on AI assistance as persistent constraints. This qualifies Cruzatty and Vélez Yanza's (2025) observation that digital tools cannot fully substitute for face-to-face interaction: in the present data, the limitation was not only about authenticity of communication but also about practical access and the risk that convenient AI assistance could crowd out independent effort if left unscaffolded.

Knowledge processes, reflecting the situated-practice construct central to this study, showed strong positive perceptions in both data sets. Interview accounts of choosing personally relevant topics and using AI role-play to simulate authentic exchange directly instantiate The New London Group's (1996) principle that learning strengthens when tied to meaningful, contextual communication, and align with prior evidence that experience-based and situated learning improve engagement and fluency (Hsieh, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Saifulloh et al., 2025; Sevy-Biloon & Chroman, 2019). The slightly more moderate agreement on actively applying English across situations (Item 13) compared to connecting materials to daily life (Items 11–12) also matches Misa's (2023) finding that situated practice more readily builds engagement and understanding than it does spontaneous application, foreshadowing the same rehearsed-versus-spontaneous gap that emerged more strongly in the confidence dimension.

Speaking confidence and willingness to communicate are where the two data sets add the most to each other. The survey showed the confidence dimension had the lowest mean and the fewest strongly positive responses; the interviews explain this as a gap between *rehearsed* and *spontaneous* confidence. Digital rehearsal reliably reduced anxiety, built comfort, and increased willingness to communicate through non-judgmental correction, repeatability, and anonymity consistent with Mahmawati et al. (2025), Anam (2025), and Han et al.'s (2024) finding that digital communication activities support learners' willingness to communicate and engagement, and with Gürbüz and Cabaroğlu's (2021) observation that communicative speaking activities gradually reduce speech anxiety but this comfort did not consistently transfer to live, unplanned, face-to-face speaking, where fear of judgment and grammar or pronunciation mistakes persisted (cf. Afidawati et al., 2024; Nidara et al., 2024). Students' reports of increased willingness to participate also echo Sevy-Biloon and Chroman's (2019) finding that authentic digital communication increases motivation to communicate, while their simultaneous reports of persistent spontaneous-speaking anxiety qualify more optimistic prior claims about digital media's confidence-building role: the present data suggest its effect is context-dependent rather

than uniform, strongest in low-stakes, preparable rehearsal and weaker in high-stakes, spontaneous transfer a distinction not always visible in single-method survey studies.

In answer to the research question, the data indicate that EFL students perceive digital-mediated interaction as a genuinely useful situated rehearsal space: one that builds speaking confidence and willingness to communicate through repeatable, personally relevant, low-risk practice, but whose benefits remain only partially transferred to spontaneous, face-to-face interaction. This is consistent with the near-universal interview finding that students see digital media as a complement to, not a substitute for, face-to-face interaction (cf. Cruzatty & Vélez Yanza, 2025), and it reframes digital-mediated interaction not as an end point for speaking development but as a rehearsal stage that requires deliberate bridging toward live, unscripted communication.

Pedagogical Implications

Given these findings, educators can extend rather than replace classroom speaking practice with multimodal and AI-mediated digital resources, particularly ones that let students prepare on personally relevant topics before speaking live. Because students distinguished rehearsed from spontaneous confidence, teachers should deliberately pair digital preparation with unrehearsed, in-class speaking opportunities (e.g., impromptu discussion following AI-assisted preparation) so that confidence gained digitally is explicitly transferred to live interaction, rather than assuming digital comfort will automatically generalize on its own. The sequencing several interviewees proposed using digital tools before class to build vocabulary, gather ideas, and rehearse, then reserving class time for live, spontaneous practice with peers and lecturers offers a concrete model for lesson design that mirrors how these students already study independently. Activities such as digital storytelling, AI role-play, and structured video-based tasks can support both content preparation and oral proficiency, while instructors continue to provide feedback, model spontaneous response, and guide learners through difficulties that digital tools cannot fully replicate. Because several students also flagged over-reliance on AI-generated ideas and corrections as a limitation, teachers might scaffold AI use toward independent production over time for instance, requiring students to attempt an idea or correction themselves before consulting a chatbot. At the institutional level, addressing connectivity issues, which multiple students identified as a recurring practical barrier, and providing guidance on balanced rather than over-reliant AI use would help sustain the benefits identified in this study.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The survey sample was drawn through convenience sampling from a single department at one university, and the six interview participants, while selected to represent varied platform-use patterns, cannot capture the full range of student experience; findings should therefore be interpreted as illustrative rather than representative. Self-reported perception data, in both the questionnaire and the interviews, may not fully correspond to students' actual speaking behavior or measurable proficiency gains, which future research could address through observational or performance-based measures. Finally, because interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and translated into English for reporting, some nuance in students' original wording may not be fully preserved despite efforts to stay close to their intended meaning during coding and translation.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study found that EFL students perceive digital-mediated interaction as a valuable situated rehearsal space, with the strongest support for multimodal resources and

the most tempered support for speaking confidence. Interviews with six students clarified that digital rehearsal builds confidence and willingness to communicate mainly through non-judgmental correction, repeatable practice, and reduced social visibility, but that this rehearsed confidence does not automatically extend to spontaneous, face-to-face speaking explaining the comparatively modest quantitative score for the confidence dimension. Across both data sources, students consistently viewed digital-mediated interaction as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face practice, and as a rehearsal stage on the way to, rather than a substitute for, spontaneous live communication. Combining structured digital rehearsal with deliberate opportunities for live, spontaneous speaking may therefore offer the most effective path for moving students from digital rehearsal to confident, durable face-to-face speaking in EFL classrooms.

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