

Exploring Students' Voices on The Use of Chatgpt as A Speaking Partner in English Practice

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ABSTRACT

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Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan ChatGPT sebagai mitra berbicara dalam praktik berbicara bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan melibatkan mahasiswa Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di Horizon University Indonesia yang mengikuti kegiatan latihan berbicara berbantuan ChatGPT selama empat minggu. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan jurnal reflektif, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk menelaah persepsi mahasiswa, manfaat dan tantangan yang dirasakan, serta dampak penggunaan ChatGPT terhadap motivasi dan kepercayaan diri berbicara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa secara umum memandang ChatGPT sebagai mitra berbicara yang membantu, mudah diakses, dan tidak menghakimi. Penggunaannya meningkatkan kesempatan berlatih berbicara, mendukung pengembangan kosakata, serta menyediakan umpan balik langsung yang berkontribusi positif terhadap motivasi dan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa. Meskipun demikian, ditemukan beberapa tantangan, seperti keterbatasan interaksi emosional, respons yang terkadang kurang alami, dan kesulitan dalam mempertahankan percakapan kontekstual yang panjang. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa ChatGPT dapat berfungsi sebagai alat pendukung yang efektif dalam praktik berbicara bahasa Inggris, khususnya apabila diintegrasikan dengan bimbingan pedagogis yang tepat untuk mendukung kemampuan komunikasi lisan pembelajar EFL di pendidikan tinggi.

This study investigates university students' perceptions of ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English-speaking practice. Employing a qualitative research design, the study involved English major students at Horizon University Indonesia who engaged in ChatGPT-assisted speaking activities for four weeks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals and analyzed using thematic analysis to examine students' perceptions, perceived benefits and challenges, and the impact of ChatGPT on their motivation and speaking confidence. The findings reveal that students generally perceived ChatGPT as a helpful, accessible, and non-judgmental speaking partner. Its use provided increased opportunities for speaking practice, facilitated vocabulary development, and offered immediate feedback, which contributed positively to students' motivation and confidence. Nevertheless, challenges were identified, including limited emotional interaction, occasional unnatural responses, and difficulties in sustaining extended contextual conversations. Overall, the study concludes that ChatGPT can function as an effective supplementary tool in English-speaking practice, particularly when integrated with appropriate pedagogical guidance to support EFL learners' oral communication in higher education.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education has opened new pathways for enhancing language learning experiences. Among these innovations, conversational AI tools such as ChatGPT have gained remarkable attention for their potential to support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in developing communicative competence. Unlike traditional language learning platforms that rely on pre-designed exercises, ChatGPT allows learners to engage in spontaneous and meaningful dialogues, simulating real-life conversational contexts that are often difficult to replicate in classroom settings.

Language educators have long emphasized that communication lies at the heart of effective English learning. Speaking, as one of the core language skills, requires not only grammatical accuracy but also fluency, confidence, and interactional competence. However, in many EFL contexts, opportunities for authentic speaking practice remain limited. Learners frequently experience anxiety, lack of confidence, and insufficient exposure to natural conversations. Teachers, on the other hand, often struggle to provide equal attention and interactive speaking opportunities to every student due to time constraints and large class sizes. These persistent challenges have encouraged the exploration of technological solutions that can extend the learning environment beyond classroom walls.

The limitation of authentic speaking opportunities is a recurring issue in EFL education. In many classrooms, the emphasis on reading and writing overshadows the development of oral communication skills. Consequently, students may achieve strong grammatical knowledge but lack the fluency and confidence required for real-world communication. This imbalance often leads to low communicative competence, where learners can construct grammatically correct sentences but struggle to use them effectively in natural conversation. Additionally, psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, lack of self-efficacy, and language anxiety further inhibit their speaking participation, creating a cycle of passive learning.

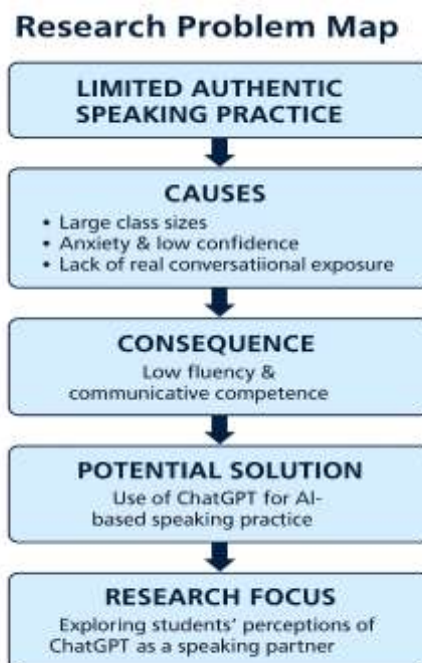
These issues are compounded by institutional and contextual factors including large class sizes, limited contact hours, and a lack of immersive language environments. In many educational systems, especially in non-English-speaking countries, English is treated primarily as an academic subject rather than a communicative tool. As a result, students rarely experience the kind of authentic, spontaneous exchanges that foster true communicative growth. The *Research Problem Map* reflects this complexity by showing how structural, emotional, and pedagogical factors converge to restrict learners' opportunities for effective speaking practice.

Amidst these challenges, AI-based innovations such as ChatGPT have introduced new possibilities for overcoming traditional limitations. ChatGPT's capacity to generate contextually relevant and human-like responses enables learners to practice conversation in a personalized, interactive, and non-judgmental environment. This unique combination of *accessibility, immediacy, and adaptability* provides learners with a sense of autonomy allowing them to engage in dialogue anytime and anywhere without fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, by receiving instant feedback and exposure to natural sentence patterns, students can gradually refine their pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse strategies.

Recent studies have highlighted that conversational AI can play a vital role in reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing learners' self-confidence, particularly when used as a supplementary tool for language practice. For instance, AI chat systems can simulate realistic social exchanges, encourage learners to take linguistic risks, and help them develop communicative resilience. These benefits align closely with the pedagogical shift toward learner-centered and technology-enhanced approaches, which emphasize personalization, engagement, and experiential learning.

Therefore, this research situates ChatGPT not merely as a technological novelty but as a potential pedagogical partner that supports continuous language practice beyond the classroom. It seeks to explore how EFL students perceive the use of ChatGPT as a speaking companion—whether it can effectively address their learning barriers, foster greater confidence, and contribute to communicative competence. By understanding these perspectives, educators and researchers can better evaluate how AI-driven tools

can be integrated into language curricula to create more dynamic, inclusive, and interactive learning environments.



Picture 1. *Research Problem Map*

The *Research Problem Map* illustrates the underlying challenges faced by EFL learners in developing effective speaking competence. The central issue limited authentic speaking practice emerges from multiple interrelated factors such as large class sizes, students' anxiety and low confidence, and insufficient exposure to real conversational contexts. These constraints often result in low fluency and weak communicative competence, hindering learners' ability to use English effectively in real-life situations.

To address these limitations, the integration of AI-powered tools like ChatGPT presents a promising pedagogical innovation. ChatGPT enables learners to engage in spontaneous, judgment free conversations, providing them with flexible and consistent opportunities to practice speaking. Consequently, this research focuses on exploring students' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a speaking partner, examining how this technology may enhance engagement, confidence, and communicative performance among EFL learners.

Literature Review

Existing studies have explored the role of AI and chat-based tools in improving English learning outcomes. Research by Dwivedi et al. (2023) and Lin & Chen (2024) demonstrated that AI chatbots can enhance pronunciation, fluency, and learners' motivation. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2023) highlighted that conversational AI offers a new avenue for learner autonomy and self-directed speaking practice. However, the majority of these studies have focused on the quantitative measurement of learning outcomes such as accuracy or vocabulary gains rather than students' personal and emotional engagement with the tool. Very few have provided a qualitative exploration of learners' lived experiences when interacting with AI as a speaking partner.

Research Gap

Despite growing interest in AI-assisted language learning, there remains a limited understanding of how students perceive and internalize the use of ChatGPT in speaking practice. Prior research tends to overlook affective and psychological dimensions such as learners' motivation, comfort, and perceived improvement. As a result, there is a pressing need to investigate not only the linguistic outcomes but also the human experience behind the interaction. Addressing this gap allows researchers to better comprehend the pedagogical and emotional implications of using AI as a conversational partner in English learning.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore university students' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English practice. It seeks to identify how learners evaluate its usefulness, benefits, and challenges, as well as how it influences their confidence and motivation to communicate in English. By doing so, the study intends to provide insights for language educators and curriculum developers on how AI can be effectively integrated into English speaking activities.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive the use of ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English speaking practice?
2. What benefits and challenges do students experience when using ChatGPT for speaking practice?
3. How does ChatGPT influence students' motivation and confidence in improving their English speaking skills?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English practice. The qualitative approach was selected because it provides a deep understanding of learners' subjective experiences, attitudes, and reflections rather than relying solely on numerical data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for investigating social and educational phenomena where human experiences and interpretations play a central role. In this context, the students' voices and lived experiences offer valuable insights into how AI-mediated communication influences their speaking skill development, confidence, and motivation.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Horizon University Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had prior experience using ChatGPT for English-speaking practice. A total of 50 university students participated, representing various English proficiency levels and academic programs. All participants had interacted with ChatGPT as part of their self-directed or class-related speaking activities for at least four weeks before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were strictly observed throughout the process in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) ethical research guidelines.

Research Instruments

The primary data collection instrument in this study was an open-ended qualitative questionnaire administered through Google Forms. This instrument functioned as a written interview, allowing participants to provide detailed, reflective, and experience-based responses in their own words. The use of an open-ended questionnaire was considered appropriate for qualitative inquiry, as it enabled the collection of rich narrative data while offering flexibility for participants to reflect deeply on their experiences.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore students' experiences of using ChatGPT as a speaking partner, perceived benefits and challenges, and its influence on their motivation and speaking confidence. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers and provide concrete examples from their learning experiences to ensure data depth and credibility.

In addition to the open-ended questionnaire, participants were asked to submit reflective journals documenting their interactions with ChatGPT during English-speaking practice. These reflections served as supplementary qualitative data to enhance data triangulation and strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, in line with recommendations by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2022) regarding the use of multiple qualitative data sources.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a three-week period using Google Forms. The open-ended questionnaire link was distributed to participants who met the inclusion criteria and had provided informed consent. Participants completed the questionnaire independently, allowing them sufficient time to reflect on their experiences and articulate their responses thoughtfully. The reflective journals were collected digitally after participants completed the questionnaire and were analyzed alongside the

questionnaire responses. All data were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest and authentic responses. This written data collection approach supported participants' autonomy while maintaining alignment with the qualitative focus of the study.

Data Analysis

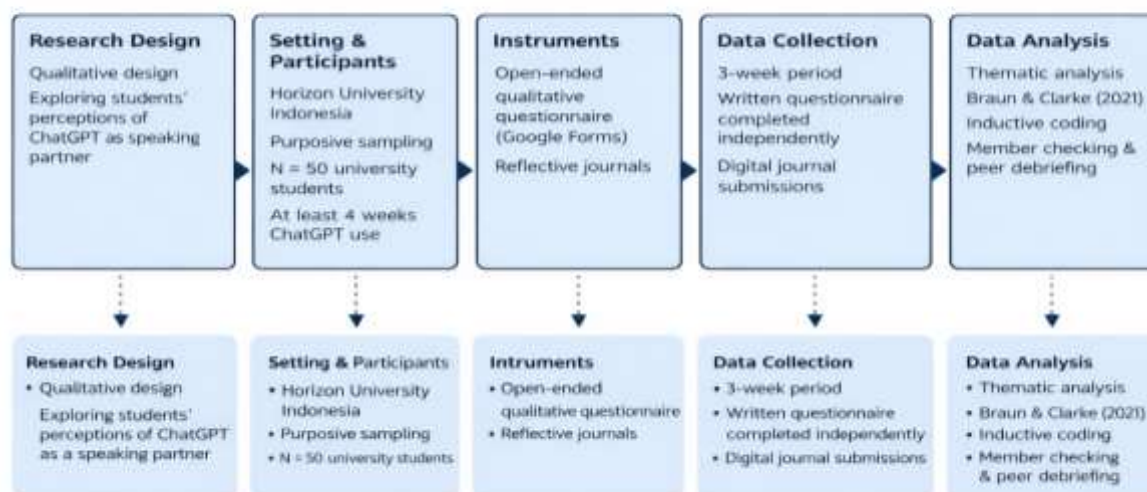
The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This method was selected because it allows for systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns and meanings across qualitative datasets, making it particularly suitable for exploring students' perceptions, experiences, and reflections.

The analysis began with a familiarization process, during which the researcher repeatedly read all questionnaire responses and reflective journal entries to gain an overall understanding of the data. Initial codes were then generated inductively by identifying meaningful segments of text related to students' perceptions of ChatGPT, perceived benefits and challenges, motivation, and speaking confidence. These codes were derived directly from participants' written responses rather than from predetermined categories.

Next, the codes were examined and grouped into potential themes by identifying recurring patterns and relationships across participants' narratives. The emerging themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between themes. Each theme was then defined and named to accurately represent the essence of participants' experiences and perspectives.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, data triangulation was conducted by comparing themes derived from the questionnaire responses with those emerging from the reflective journals. Peer debriefing was also employed to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the validity of the interpretations. The final themes were then used to construct a coherent narrative explaining students' voices on the use of ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English-speaking practice.

Methodology Overview



Picture 2. Methodology Overview

The Methodology Overview illustrates the systematic flow of the research process, beginning with the research design and concluding with data analysis. This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring university students' perceptions of ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English-speaking practice. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of students' subjective experiences, reflections, and interpretations of AI-assisted interaction.

The study was conducted at Horizon University Indonesia and involved English major students selected through purposive sampling. All participants had prior experience using ChatGPT for English-speaking practice for a minimum of four weeks, ensuring the relevance of their responses. Data were collected using an open-ended qualitative questionnaire administered via Google Forms, complemented

by reflective journals. These instruments allowed participants to articulate their experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges in a reflective and detailed manner.

Data collection took place over a three-week period, during which participants completed the questionnaire independently and submitted their reflective journals digitally. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework. An inductive coding process was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes across the datasets. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were applied. The final stage of the methodology focuses on synthesizing the findings to explain how ChatGPT supports and challenges students' English-speaking development, motivation, and confidence in higher education contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that university students hold generally positive perceptions of ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English-speaking practice. Students described ChatGPT as a supportive and non-judgmental platform that allowed them to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes. This sense of psychological safety encouraged students to experiment with language use more freely, particularly in constructing sentences and expressing ideas, which is often a challenge in conventional classroom speaking activities. The absence of social pressure and negative evaluation made ChatGPT a comfortable space for initial speaking practice, especially for learners with lower confidence.

In terms of perceived benefits, students reported that ChatGPT provided increased opportunities for speaking practice beyond classroom limitations. Its accessibility enabled learners to practice English at any time, facilitating repeated exposure to spoken interaction. Students also highlighted improvements in vocabulary use and sentence organization, as ChatGPT frequently offered alternative expressions and corrective feedback. The immediacy of responses was perceived as particularly helpful, as it allowed learners to notice and reflect on language errors in real time, supporting gradual language development.

Despite these advantages, several challenges emerged from students' experiences. A commonly reported limitation was the lack of emotional engagement in interactions with ChatGPT. While the tool was considered linguistically helpful, students felt that conversations sometimes lacked natural flow and human-like responsiveness. Occasional repetitive or contextually inappropriate responses also made it difficult for learners to sustain longer and more meaningful conversations. These limitations suggest that, although ChatGPT can simulate conversational practice, it cannot fully replicate authentic human interaction.

The influence of ChatGPT on students' motivation and speaking confidence was another significant finding. Many students reported increased motivation to practice speaking due to the flexibility and low-anxiety environment provided by the tool. Regular interaction with ChatGPT helped students feel more prepared and confident when engaging in real-life English communication. However, students also emphasized that ChatGPT was most effective when used as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for interaction with lecturers or peers.

Overall, the results indicate that ChatGPT can play a meaningful role in supporting English-speaking practice by offering accessible, low-pressure opportunities for language use. When integrated with appropriate pedagogical guidance and reflective learning activities, ChatGPT has the potential to enhance students' motivation, confidence, and communicative competence in EFL contexts within higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored university students' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a speaking partner in English-speaking practice and revealed that conversational AI can serve as a valuable supplementary tool in EFL learning contexts. The findings indicate that ChatGPT provides learners with flexible, low-anxiety opportunities to engage in spoken interaction, allowing them to practice English beyond the constraints of time, classroom settings, and peer-related pressure. This supportive environment contributes positively to students' confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

While students acknowledged the benefits of improved vocabulary use, increased speaking practice, and enhanced motivation, they also recognized the limitations of ChatGPT, particularly its inability to fully replicate the emotional depth and spontaneity of human interaction. These findings suggest that ChatGPT should not be viewed as a replacement for teachers or peer communication but rather as a complementary learning partner that supports continuous and self-directed speaking practice.

Overall, the study highlights the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT in promoting learner autonomy, reducing speaking anxiety, and fostering confidence in English communication. The integration of AI-based tools into English-speaking activities should therefore be guided by thoughtful instructional design to ensure meaningful interaction and reflection. Future research may further explore how conversational AI can be optimally combined with classroom-based speaking activities to maximize communicative competence and learner engagement in higher education EFL contexts.

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