

The Impact of ChatGPT on the Development of Oral Proficiency in EFL Students at a Private Institution

Impacto del ChatGPT en el desarrollo de la competencia oral en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en una institución privada

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Abstract:

This study explored the use of ChatGPT as a tool to improve English speaking proficiency among four EFL students at A2–B1 levels, focusing on discourse management and interactive communication. Conducted in a private language institution using a mixed method action research approach, the study included ChatGPT independent practice sessions as a supplement to regular classes. The intervention included fifteen sessions with prompts created by the teacher. The research instruments included pre and post semi structured interviews which aimed to explore students' familiarity, perceptions, and experiences with ChatGPT, as well as a pre and post B1 speaking proficiency test. Results from the second speaking proficiency test, administered at the end of the study, showed students' improvement in their ability to manage discourse and participate in interactive communication.

Students also reported to gain confidence and improved their idea organization during spoken tasks. While some drawbacks were found including repetitive interactions and limited feedback, most students found ChatGPT accessible, and helpful for speaking independent practice. Overall, ChatGPT proved to be a valuable supplement to classroom instruction integrated with human interaction.

Keywords:

ChatGPT, speaking proficiency, discourse management, interactive communication, EFL learners

Resumen:

Este estudio exploró el uso de ChatGPT como herramienta para mejorar la competencia oral en inglés de cuatro estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL por sus siglas en inglés) de nivel A2-B1, centrándose en la gestión del discurso y la comunicación interactiva. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una institución privada de idiomas mediante un enfoque mixto de investigación-acción. El estudio incluyó sesiones de práctica independiente con ChatGPT como complemento a la clase. La intervención consistió en quince sesiones con indicaciones creadas por el profesor, y los instrumentos de investigación incluyeron entrevistas semiestructuradas previas y posteriores, cuyo objetivo fue explorar la familiaridad, percepciones y experiencias de los estudiantes con ChatGPT, así como una prueba de competencia oral previa y posterior de nivel B1. Los resultados de la segunda prueba de competencia oral, realizada al final del estudio, mostraron su mejora en la capacidad de gestionar el discurso y participar en la comunicación interactiva. Los estudiantes también informaron haber ganado confianza y mejorado su organización de ideas durante las tareas orales. Si bien se encontraron algunas desventajas, como las interacciones repetitivas y la retroalimentación limitada, la mayoría de los estudiantes encontraron ChatGPT accesible y útil para la práctica independiente de la expresión oral. En general, ChatGPT demostró ser un valioso complemento a la instrucción en el aula, integrado con la interacción humana.

Palabras Clave:

ChatGPT, competencia oral, gestión del discurso, comunicación interactiva, estudiantes de EFL

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the education sector by enhancing and developing more individualized and effective learning opportunities. AI systems can adjust to the students' pace, levels, and preferred learning styles, creating motivation as students' progress from one level to the next (Lucking et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2019). In addition, access to AI not only supports practice beyond the classroom but also facilitates learner autonomy in a low-risk environment (Garcia & Martinez, 2023; Ellis, 2003). In language education, tools like ChatGPT offer teachers support for the development of key communication skills. With the help of AI tools, students have numerous opportunities to engage in dialogues, which aids in the development of their speaking skills and allows them to practice in a more interactive and personalized way. The use of AI can increase motivation, foster autonomy, and provide practice in a low-pressure environment. For this reason, this study aims to explore the potential of ChatGPT in helping English language learners improve their speaking proficiency, with a specific focus on discourse management and interactive communication, two skills commonly assessed in speaking examinations. These two skills were selected because they were considered the areas where students could have more progress within the time the study was conducted. The study examines the perceptions and experiences of students participating regarding ChatGPT use in independent language learning activities. To guide the investigation, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does ChatGPT support the development of students' interactive communication and discourse management speaking skills?
2. In what ways, can ChatGPT be leveraged to enhance English learners' skills in interactive communication and discourse management?

Literature Review

English Language Learning with Technology

With our increasingly connected world, we have entered a new age where the ability to communicate in English has evolved to be more important than ever. Not only that, but also the way that the advancing technology has influenced the ways in which students cultivate their communicative competence in these ways. As indicated by Jalaluddin (2016), digital tools have facilitated greater engagement in our classrooms for some time and have allowed students the opportunity to develop, practice, and use language in context.

Digital platforms together with language apps and AI tools have revolutionized traditional language learning by creating an individualized and interactive educational experience. Harmer (2007) recommends that educators promote the integration of technology in language teaching because it builds student independence and motivation. Clements and Sarama (2003) demonstrate that suitable technological materials improve student understanding while keeping them actively involved in the learning process. Through apps and AI-based platforms, learners receive immediate feedback which enables them to identify mistakes and improve their skills during active learning sessions. According to Tomlinson (2009), computer-based activities motivate students because they provide immediate responses and customized content.

In addition, as Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (as cited in Ahmadi, 2018) point out, technology enhances teaching materials and situated learning in the learner's world. With authentic videos, interactive activities, and much more, technology-supported education makes language learning in the modern world more engaging, more accessible, and more effective than ever.

Development of Speaking Skills with ChatGPT

Nowadays, emerging artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT take students' speaking practice a step further. Not only do ChatGPT and other AI tools entering the marketplace allow students to enhance their speaking skills through self-directed practice, but they also provide students with a safe way to practice speaking in a simulated judgment-free area. By combining easy access and thoughtful design, ChatGPT and similar tools permit students to develop agency over a wide range of their own language-learning journey and manage aspects of it in a self-directed way.

The state-of-the-art language model ChatGPT from OpenAI has transformed language learning capabilities through artificial intelligence. The ChatGPT-3 architecture enables the model to generate responses that resemble human speech which allows users to have interactive conversations (ChatGPT, 2024). The model produces dialogue that closely resembles human speech according to Singh, Kumar, and Mehra (2023), making it suitable for language practice.

Students can develop their speaking abilities through this low-pressure interactive platform which replicates genuine communication. Educators can use ChatGPT to create instructions which enhance student engagement while providing specific support for different learning

needs. Through its ability to mimic real conversations, ChatGPT helps learners feel more confident while creating an immersive experience with the target language. The tool functions as a useful addition to traditional teaching methods or as an independent resource for independent learning.

Speaking Proficiency

Speaking is not just knowing words but using them fluently, accurately, and appropriately in real contexts. It allows us to express our thinking in a clear and confident manner that helps us connect with others in all contexts, personal or professional. In the area of language learning, speaking proficiency is a fundamental aspect of effective communication. According to Brown (2007), speaking proficiency consists of linguistic competence since it embraces discourse as well as strategic competence.

Two key components of speaking proficiency are discourse management and interactive communication, which are the skills focus of this study. The former is essentially important because it shows the ability to maintain the listener engaged by producing extended speech with relevant and clear information. On the other hand, interactive communication is consequential due to the fact students need to be able to initiate conversation, maintain it, and respond coherently to others as well as adapting their speech according to the context. Therefore, being proficient does not only mean just being accurate at the moment of speaking but also being capable to run discourse and engage with others (Council of Europe, 2020).

To measure language proficiency, there are frameworks such as the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR) which provides descriptors for what language users are able to do at the different levels from beginner (A1) to mastery (C2). These descriptors are used in examinations to assess how well learners can manage spoken communication.

Previous studies

In schools today, teachers continue to explore new ways to integrate technology in language teaching to enhance the effectiveness of learning, and one of the latest tools is ChatGPT. This is an AI that helps students practice speaking, and among many other things, improve their English skills as well as develop their confidence when using English.

While ChatGPT is potentially gaining fame and being used in the education field, not many studies have been

conducted on the development of language speaking skills, especially with a focus on discourse management and interactive communication. This gap allows this research to explore its potential and also limitations on how it can support the development of speaking proficiency. As technology continues to progress, tools like ChatGPT will potentially become part of the constitution of learning and teaching a language. But how has ChatGPT been explored in the education field?

Many studies have demonstrated that ChatGPT is more effective in personalizing learning for individual students. Rather than using the same lessons and tasks with all students, teachers can use ChatGPT to create activities that are unique to each student's learning needs. Zhang et al. (2022) indicate that ChatGPT supports teachers in producing more collaborative lessons and realistic conversations leading to a more engaging learning experience.

In flipped models of classroom learning, where the students must work on lessons before going to class and then use the class-time to practice, ChatGPT is also beneficial. Ahn and Lee (2023) showed an improvement in outcomes for students using ChatGPT to ask questions and obtain explanations over simply using traditional textbooks or websites.

There have been other studies where English as Second Language (ESL) students have used ChatGPT to improve their grammar and vocabulary. An example is the research conducted by Kim et al. (2023) which showed how students using ChatGPT improved their accuracy in the second language as well as increased their levels of confidence.

Also, a study completed by Garcia and Martinez (2023) demonstrated that shy students preferred practicing with ChatGPT due to the fact they found it less scary than practicing with peers in the classroom.

ChatGPT is particularly good for speaking practice. Wang and Chen (2023) found that students received helpful cues as they practiced speaking, which enhanced their pronunciation, writing, and word choices. Many students stated they felt better prepared to use English in real life situations after completing the task with ChatGPT.

Moreover, Lopez and Hernandez's (2023) research on the role of ChatGPT in helping students prepare for speaking tests revealed that it helped them to communicate more clearly and with more confidence when they did their tests. This conversational experience provided by ChatGPT really helped students get a feeling of how the test would feel.

While there are several evident benefits to using ChatGPT to practice speaking, it is also important to acknowledge some drawbacks present in these studies. For instance, the over-reliance on the platform can hinder the development of independent learning skills, critical thinking as well as spontaneity (Ahn & Lee, 2023; Lopez & Hernandez, 2023). Moreover, ChatGPT tends to become repetitive and to produce inaccurate language, which can mislead learners if there is no proper teacher's supervision (Zhang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023). Another issue encountered is the lack of human interaction, affecting the learners' communicative competence and emotional engagement (García & Martínez, 2023).

Overall, teachers need to analyze how learners are utilizing technology, and most importantly, ensure it is being used effectively. However, the existing evidence is promising. ChatGPT offers valuable support and another way for students to learn a language that is more accessible, with engaging and less stressful speaking practice.

Methodology

Research design

For this study, a constructivist worldview and a mixed-method action research approach were adopted. The data were collected using pre- and post- semi-structured interviews as well as a pre- and post-speaking test. The interviews were conducted in Spanish to ensure participants felt more comfortable and to gather richer and more accurate data. The pre-speaking test was used to diagnose students' initial speaking proficiency before conducting the study. In contrast, the post-speaking test was intended to measure students' progress in speaking proficiency, particularly in discourse management and interactive communication.

Before starting the practice with the app, students completed an induction session on how to use ChatGPT. A pilot session was also held in the classroom to ensure students understood how to utilize both the AI and the teacher-created prompts. These prompts aligned with the course content and were prepared as conversation starters. Students received directions on how to initiate conversations with ChatGPT, along with suggested questions to discuss based on each lesson and subject. In total, there were fifteen prompts, each focusing on a new topic of discussion, along with associated vocabulary, language functions, and grammar forms. The prompts were developed based on the content of the course book, ensuring that the practice with ChatGPT mirrored the lessons and the material presented within them. Throughout the sessions, students were

encouraged to ask any follow-up questions to enhance interaction and make the practice more communicative. The practice with ChatGPT consisted of fifteen sessions, each lasting fifteen minutes.

Setting and participants

This research investigated the potential impact of ChatGPT on English language learners' development of speaking proficiency, with a focus on discourse management and interactive communication. The study took place at a private English-teaching organization committed to enhancing language communicative competence. The private institution offers a total of 24 courses, and every four courses, students are able to consolidate a level.

The participants for this research were four A2-B1 (CEFRL, 2020) students who were part of course 11. Although they were expected to be B1, they have not consolidated this level. These students were selected through convenience sampling because they regularly attended classes and were willing to participate. This method was helpful since the study had limited time, and it was convenient to work with students who were already involved in the English course. To maintain confidentiality for all participants involved in this research, participants will be referred to as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, and Student 4.

All students in the selected group signed a consent form before the study started. In this document, participants were invited to take part in the study, and a detailed explanation of the study was provided. This included why they had been selected, what their participation would involve, benefits and risks, and how the data collected would be managed. This entire process was conducted in Spanish (the participants' native language) to ensure a better understanding and informed consent. Only after they agreed to the terms, the study proceeded.

Research instruments

Semi-structured Interviews

For a better understanding of students' perceptions and experiences using ChatGPT, two semi-structured interviews were held, a pre- and a post-interview. The purpose of the former was to explore the students' thoughts, experiences and general understanding of ChatGPT before conducting the study. The latter was to find out students' experiences using the app for improving interactive communication and discourse management. In addition, it explored how helpful and how easy students found the tool, if they noticed any improvements with their

speech, and lastly if they recommend using the app in the future for different purposes.

English speaking proficiency test

For the purpose of this research, the B1 Preliminary test was selected to measure participants' speaking proficiency before and after the study. The purpose of the proficiency tests was to evaluate students' proficiency before and after the study. Also, this test was selected because the speaking component aligns with the skills this study aims to explore in helping English language learners improve their speaking proficiency: discourse management and interactive communication.

The B1 preliminary assesses people's authentic communication in context. Also, not only does it measure the grammatical or pronunciation accuracy of learners' speech production, but also other elements of speech: discourse management and interactive responses. All of these were identified by Cambridge Assessment English (2019) as being important aspects of integrated language assessment. It also assesses various features of speech, including vocabulary, discourse, and the ability to manage interactions between individuals in real-world encounters.

While this test provides indicative values for speaking proficiency in current research on education, we focused on only two elements of relevance for the study: discourse management and interactive communication. These two aspects of a spoken interaction are indicative of how complete and meaningful the spoken interaction is. Although they provide informative measures of a speaker's capacity to interact in authentic conversations, the need to consider both elements meaningfully must be undertaken by administering the complete Preliminary Speaking Test.

The B1 preliminary test is divided into four sections that highlight communicative abilities. The first section is the Interview. Here is where candidates can demonstrate their comfort and their fluency in speaking about everyday topics, such as: hobbies, daily routines, and preferences. As Luoma (2004) notes, this stage focuses on how participants manage to initiate and sustain basic dialogue; thus, laying the foundation for the possibility of further interaction.

The next stage in the test is called Individual Long Turn. In this stage, test-takers are given a topic and are asked to create a speech for a longer period of time. It examines their ability to manage their discourse: organize their thoughts, link ideas together seamlessly, and keep their fluency (Richards, 2008). It also examines the speaker's

use of cohesive vocabulary with an ability to keep to a coherent structure.

Section three is called Collaborative Task. This task requires candidates to engage in parlance with their partner about a certain topic or complete a problem-solving situation. The Collaborative Task usually highlights interactive communication: taking turns, seeking clarification of meaning, and responding to a partner's position meaningfully (Bygate, 1987). The nature of the task resembles a conversation on a daily basis. However, flexibility of speech is required, with students being able to move from one idea to another in the same context.

The last section is the Discussion. In this final task, the test-taker gets to explore some themes in more depth by sharing opinions and reasoning through critical reflection. The Discussion task involves more than basic communication; it examines the speaker's ability to justify their claims, provide a refined perspective, and become engaged with more significant cognitive processing (Harmer, 2007).

Data analysis

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then, transcripts were examined to identify common themes regarding students' perceptions and experiences using ChatGPT. Regarding the pre- and post-tests, students' speaking proficiency was marked by two trained and experienced oral examiners, who provided initial and final scores for each participant. Additionally, the recordings from the pre and post proficiency tests were analyzed to find examples of language use related to Discourse management and Interactive Communication. The former focused on the student's ability to produce extended chunks of language by using linking words (cohesive devices) that allow organization and smooth transitions within the same or different ideas. Regarding Interactive Communication, it analyzed how the student-initiated conversation, maintained it, and responded coherently to others as well as their ability to adapt their speech accordingly. This mixed analysis provided rich insights on how ChatGPT supported students to improve their speaking proficiency.

Findings

This section reports on students' experiences with ChatGPT as a tool for speaking practice and its impact on their English speaking proficiency, particularly on their Discourse Management and Interactive Communication skills. It also discusses students' backgrounds, their

previous experiences with ChatGPT, and the challenges they faced during the study. Based on the findings, this section also discusses the implications of using ChatGPT for independent speaking practice.

Students' Backgrounds

From the interviews to participants, it was found that students face similar challenges when trying to improve their English-speaking skills, mostly due to a lack of real-time practice and limited opportunities to interact with others outside of the classroom. Students expressed grammar, lack of vocabulary, and anxiety, impacting fluency and confidence to speak English. Participants value receiving immediate and corrective feedback to develop their speaking skills during conversations.

Three students reported having experience with AI tools such as Meta's chatbot or ChatGPT for writing or vocabulary. However, only one student had used AI tools specifically for speaking practice. All participants expressed a desire to use ChatGPT for speaking practice, although they had varying levels of familiarity with the tool. The four students were not well-acquainted with the features of ChatGPT but showed optimism about its potential to provide flexible opportunities to speak without judgement.

Overall, participants expressed a relatively positive opinion of AI as a modern and innovative method for learning a foreign language. They hoped that regular practice and feedback could help them to develop their speaking proficiency through timely speaking practice. In the interviews, participants expressed a keen interest in using ChatGPT to develop oral skills in English and were eager to find ways to structure their spoken English in practical and accessible ways.

Proficiency test scores by category

The following chart presents students' scores in the pre- and post- speaking tests. Although the scores include all the skills that are assessed in the test, only discourse management and interactive communication will be analyzed and discussed in this paper.

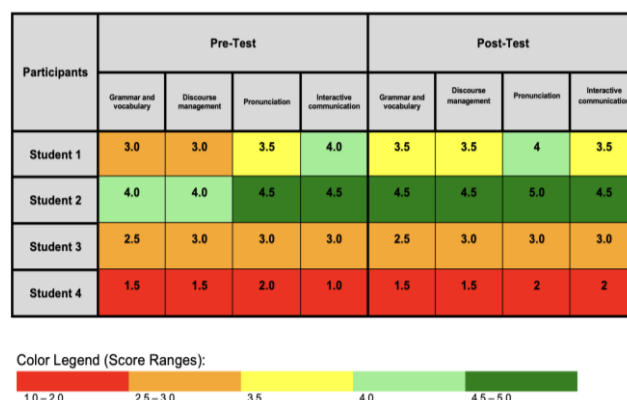


Figure 1. Proficiency Test Scores by Category

Development of Interactive communication

Student 1 decreased her score in interactive communication from 4.0 in the pre-test to 3.5 in the post-test. Examiners described her speaking performance as "mostly responding than initiating", and noted that there was "not much negotiation involved, but rather an adequate exchange of information". In the interview, Student 1 expressed that using ChatGPT helped her to take more initiative in class conversations: *"I used to be very afraid to participate... After practicing with ChatGPT, I became more encouraged. It's not that I speak perfectly now, but I do realize I can organize my thoughts better and jump into the conversation without hesitation."* Even though she seems to be more confident in speaking English and better at organizing her ideas, she may have become slightly more passive in actively participating in conversations.

In Student's 2 case, her interactive communication skills were rated at 4.5 in both the pre- and the post-test. Examiners noted that she "initiates interaction, but usually only by asking questions and not really contributing to the conversation". This may be because she provides an adequate exchange of information, but at times, she does not engage enough to keep the interaction flowing.

In the case of Student's 3, the examiners noted that there were no significant changes in performance between the pre- and post-test. They remarked that he "attempts to take turns and keeps interaction going although there is not much of negotiation." Similarly, his post test report described his communication as primarily involving the initiation of interaction, with him "asking questions to encourage participation", and "keeping interaction while doing more than the required minimum."

In contrast, Student's 4 showed improvement in her interactive communication, increasing her score from 1.0

to 2.0. After the post-test, the examiners noted that she "does not initiate interaction and her answers are limited". However, they also acknowledged that she "had made progress" due to her ability to engage in "simple exchanges of information despite encountering some difficulties." Student 4 mentioned that although AI did not feel entirely real, she noticed *"I notice that I can now better structure what I want to say."* This aligns with the examiners' observation that while she struggled with cohesion, she was able to perform simple exchanges of information, resulting in the increase of her interactive communication score from 1.0 to 2.0.

Development of Discourse Management

After the study concluded, students reflected on their initial experiences with ChatGPT and mentioned that it had been far more helpful than many had anticipated. For instance, Student 1 improved his discourse management score from 3.0 to 3.5. The report described his performance as "producing mostly extended stretches of language, despite some hesitation", and noted his use of cohesive devices such as "in general, I think, but, because, and maybe". In the interview, the student explained *"Before, I had a hard time organizing my ideas when I spoke"* and *"with ChatGPT I was able to practice without the fear of making a mistake in front of someone."* This aligns with her improvement in discourse management, which increased from 3.0 to 3.5, reflecting her increased ability to produce extended stretches of language.

Student's 2 had the highest scores at the beginning of the study but showed limited progress in her discourse management, improving from a former score of 4.0 to a latter score of 4.5. Her post-test report indicated that she "produces extended stretches of language although sometimes with hesitation" and her ideas are "easy to follow...as she makes use of a variety of acceptable discourse markers (but, it depends, probably, because, you know, actually)". Over the course of the study, the student reported an improvement in her speaking skills. Student 2 remarked, *"Before I spoke very slurred and now I feel like ideas come to me faster"*. The simulated conversations helped her avoid mixing up verb tenses and enabled her to express her thoughts more fluidly. *"I don't mix tenses as much as I used to."* The examiners noted that the student was producing "extended stretches of language" with ideas that were "easy to follow" due to the use of the discourse markers previously mentioned, which helped to connect sentences and paragraphs, creating a coherent flow. The interactions with ChatGPT help her to avoid common grammatical mistakes, providing a low-

pressure environment to practice speaking, with a focus on flow and clarity.

Student's 3 performance was stable, with both skills - Interactive communication and Discourse management - scoring 3.0. The examiners commented *"He handles communication on familiar topics, despite hesitation. He is able to construct longer utterances but makes inaccuracies at times and inappropriate usage occurs."* These results indicate some evidence of language development; however, a longer intervention period might have led to even more progress.

In the case of Student 4, discourse management remained at 1.5, with the examiner noting she "tends to repeat information and digresses from topic". This indicates there is still work to be done regarding cohesion and coherence. Student 4 described *"I've noticed that now I can better structure what I want to say, for example when I have to tell a story or explain something in English"*. Her post-test report also supports this perception, indicating some progress in her ability to produce a "simple exchange of information," despite continuing struggles with cohesion.

Confidence

What stood out the most was the ability to practice anywhere and anytime. Students found ChatGPT easy to use and accessible at any time, quickly incorporating it into their toolbox for practice, whether for completing scheduled assignments or engaging in spontaneous practice. A significant advantage for these students was the opportunity to practice without fear of judgement.

Student 1 noted: *"The truth is that I felt more comfortable with ChatGPT, I wasn't afraid of making mistakes or being judged if I said something wrong. That gave me a lot of confidence to practice more often."* She explained that she got nervous when talking to a person, but with ChatGPT, that didn't really happen.

Similarly, Student 2 stated *"I felt comfortable because I could take my time thinking about what I wanted to say, and there was no pressure...So it was great for building confidence, but I know I still need to keep practicing with real people."*

A student also noticed a difference in the way they participated in class. *"ChatGPT helped me gain confidence"* reported Student 3. *"In the oral presentations we do in class now I feel much more relaxed and can speak without being so nervous"* and *"...practicing with ChatGPT took away a lot of my anxiety about speaking"*

English". Then, the student added: *"I knew that if I made a mistake, no one would laugh or look at me strangely"*.

Drawbacks

Some students observed that their conversations with ChatGPT were becoming robotic. *"At first, it did seem quite natural to me..."* Student 1 stated *"...but then I noticed that the conversations were becoming a bit repetitive or predictable."* This observation aligns with the student's post-test feedback where she was noted for "mostly responding than initiating," and her interactive communication score dropped from 4.0 to 3.5. Despite improvements in her discourse management, the predictability of the prompts might have impacted her engagement in conversation.

Additionally, another student expressed a desire for more dynamic interaction with the AI. Student 2 remarked: *"I would have liked it to be a little more spontaneous and to react in a human way."* Student 4 agreed, stating: *"ChatGPT has no emotions or unexpected topic changes like someone would in a normal chat."* This lack of emotion in the app's responses did not favour Student 4 who had problems with connecting ideas and sentences in a clear, logical, and smooth manner, and her discourse management remained at 1.5. Her speaking performance was described as "repeats information and digresses from topic," which could have been better with more dynamic responses.

Students highlighted they wanted more helpful feedback. *"Sometimes it would tell me that my answers were correct, but it didn't explain if the structure was well-organized"* commented Student 2. Student 3 indicated that the AI lacks grammar correction; *"I would like it to help me structure my ideas better so I can speak correctly"*. This comment coincided with the examiners' comments that while Student 3 managed to maintain interaction, his discourse showed "inaccuracies" and "inappropriate usage". Particularly, there were no notable improvements in his discourse between the pre- and post-test. With this, we can notice that there is an issue in the feedback quality that could have been fundamental to consolidate discourse management skills. Additionally, Student 4 expressed a desire for a more interactive experience: *"If it could offer more dynamics or be more dynamic, where it asks questions more related to what I said, that forces me to think about what I just said, I think it would improve the experience even more."*

Furthermore, there were occasional technical difficulties that hindered the students' learning progress. Student 3 noted: *"Sometimes it didn't understand me well or it*

corrected without telling me exactly what I had said wrong." This possibly contributed to this student's scores of 3.0 in discourse management and interactive communication, despite some positive aspects in the test such as asking questions and maintaining interaction. In other words, these technical difficulties may have limited progress. Several students reported problems with pronunciation recognition, connectivity, and voice input, which caused frustration during their practice with the prompts.

As time went on, some students began to find the prompts challenging. Student 1 stated: *"When conversations became very similar, I sometimes found it difficult to stay engaged"*. This could explain why her interactive communication score decreased from 4.0 to 3.5, despite her improvement in discourse management. The predictability of the tasks may have also contributed to the decrease in her interactive communication.

Student 2 also admitted *"I had a hard time focusing on the tasks, especially when ChatGPT responded in a very robotic way."* Although this student maintained high scores, the examiners described her performance as "initiates interaction, but usually just by making questions," which indicates that her engagement with discourse management could have been better with more challenging tasks.

Student 3 expressed *"Many tasks were similar, so after a while I felt like they weren't challenging me as much anymore"*. Student 4 also stated that small changes could have made a big difference: *"If the activities had changed more often or if they had been a little more creative, I would have stayed more focused"*. This student's scores were low having 2.0 in interactive communication and 1.5 in discourse management. The examiners' noted he struggled to stay on topic and to be coherent. Probably more dynamic and personalized prompts might have helped to a better outcome.

Implications of using ChatGPT for independent speaking practice

Findings indicate that ChatGPT can be a helpful resource for independent speaking practice as it provided a safe and accessible space for students to practice where they felt more confident and less anxious. This recognizes the role in education toward promoting learner autonomy and emotional support in the language learning journey. However, the study results also revealed limitations such as a lack of dynamic interaction and limited corrective feedback from the AI. Overall, it is recommended that ChatGPT

be used as a supplementary resource accompanied by other activities and human interaction while addressing the requirements for more meaningful interaction.

Continued use and final reflections

Despite the difficulties, almost all students mentioned that they would continue using ChatGPT. *"I would use it to continue practicing, organizing ideas clearly before a presentation or speaking task"* said Student 1. Additionally, others like Student 2, view this innovative technology as a great complementary tool for the learning process: *"I would use it to practice what I learn in class, but I wouldn't use it as a replacement for interacting with people"*. Moreover, Student 3 was thankful for the freedom it provides at the moment of practicing: *"I really liked that I could practice without fear of making mistakes, to talk about various topics and to be able to practice my ideas"*. Everyone agreed that it was helpful; however, it would probably never replace human interaction. As Student 4 stated, *"ChatGPT helped me a lot to loosen up, but I know I also need to practice with people to really improve in real conversations"*.

The findings of the current study align to a certain extent with previous studies in recognizing ChatGPT as a beneficial tool that supports the practice and improvement of English-speaking skills among learners. As seen in research works of Zhang et al. (2022), Ahn and Lee (2023), and Kim et al. (2023), this study confirms that ChatGPT offers learners individualized, accessible, and low-pressure practice environments, which in turn, help reduce anxiety while increasing confidence. Furthermore, the current participants valued the immediate feedback and flexibility of ChatGPT, comparable to the advantages noted in earlier research. Like Garcia and Martinez (2023), this study also found that ChatGPT contributes in a positive manner to language fluency and accuracy, particularly in structured tasks.

However, both the current work and that of Kim et al. (2023) find the lack of effective corrective feedback, as ChatGPT sometimes fails to give adequate explanation of grammar or vocabulary usage. In addition, as Garcia and Martinez (2023) point out, the participants here also remark on the absence of emotional bonding or the presence of situational authenticity in conversations, which some feel limits the naturalness of their practice.

Despite the shared conclusions, this study also offers other contributions and limitations. While past research examined broad samples and generalized improvements, this one focuses on a small sample of A2-B1 students, offering more detailed insight into the discourse management and interactive communication components. Notably, while previous studies warned of over-reliance on ChatGPT's structured responses, this research emphasizes how

reliance may inhibit spontaneity and creativity in spoken interaction. In addition, while gains in pronunciation and sentence structure were affirmed as suggested by Wang and Chen (2023), participants also revealed a tendency toward mechanical responses, missing the natural human-like element.

Conclusion

Limitations of the study

Even though the study results demonstrate the possible use of ChatGPT as a support tool for developing English-speaking proficiency, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The length of the study was only four weeks, which is a short time frame to allow for deep or sustained growth in oral proficiency. Within the month, students took part in fifteen sessions, each one lasting fifteen minutes depending on each student because that time might have been longer. Hence, there was little opportunity for students to develop higher-level discourse and interactive capacities such as extended fluency, grammatical accuracy, or unplanned speech.

The value of this research

One of the strengths of this study was the objective tools used. Participants' oral proficiency was assessed using a pre-test and a post-test within the B1 Cambridge Preliminary Speaking Test framework, providing consistent, standardized evidence of student development in discourse management and interactive communication. The oral tests were assessed by certified and trained examiners providing consistent and reliable scores, which were then contrasted with participants' responses in the semi-structured interviews.

Recommendations for further research

More studies need to be conducted for a longer period of time, focusing on different aspects of speaking such as fluency, which was an aspect mentioned multiple times by students in the interviews. It is important to mention that this study was conducted only with a specific small sample of only four students that belonged to a private institution. For that reason, future research could replicate this study with a larger number of participants and under different conditions to increase the generalizability of the results. Needless to say, applying this tool in a varied educational context would provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI's potential. Another recommendation for future studies is to conduct research on how ChatGPT impacts students' speaking skills with different proficiency levels or just simply in different environments. Additionally, utilizing AI tools along with teacher's feedback and more dynamic task assignments may help

overcome some of the limitations associated with automated conversation systems.

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