

INTEGRATING CHATGPT AS A CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This paper explores the integration of ChatGPT as a conversational partner in teaching speaking skills to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students. With the growing role of artificial intelligence in education, ChatGPT offers new opportunities for personalized, interactive, and authentic language practice. The study aims to demonstrate how AI-driven dialogue can enhance students' fluency, vocabulary development, and confidence in spoken communication. The findings suggest that incorporating ChatGPT as a virtual speaking partner provides a supportive environment for autonomous learning and meaningful interaction.

Keywords: ChatGPT integration, conversational partner, teaching speaking, EFL students, language learning technology, AI-assisted language teaching, speaking skills development, interactive learning.

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the most essential yet challenging skills for EFL learners to master. Traditional classroom settings often fail to provide sufficient speaking practice due to limited class time and large student groups. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly conversational models such as ChatGPT, have opened new possibilities for language education. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, can engage learners in natural and adaptive dialogue, simulating real-life communication scenarios. This paper discusses how integrating ChatGPT into EFL speaking lessons can enhance learners' communicative competence. It argues that using AI as a conversational partner allows students to practice speaking in a low-anxiety environment and receive immediate feedback on their responses.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have shown that technology-assisted language learning improves learners' motivation and performance (Godwin-Jones, 2023; Li, 2022). Virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa have already been used in education, but ChatGPT's conversational depth makes it a more advanced pedagogical tool. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of interaction in language learning. ChatGPT, functioning as a conversational partner, provides a zone of proximal development (ZPD) where learners can experiment with new language forms without fear of judgment. Similarly, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) highlights the role of comprehensible input, which ChatGPT can generate at the learner's proficiency level. However, some researchers caution that overreliance on AI tools may limit human interaction and critical thinking if not guided properly by teachers (Brown, 2021). Therefore, teacher mediation remains crucial.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted with 30 university EFL students who used ChatGPT as a conversational partner for six weeks. Students were encouraged to practice speaking on everyday topics (e.g., travel, education, environment) by chatting with ChatGPT for at least 15 minutes daily. At the beginning and end of the experiment, students completed oral proficiency interviews assessed according to CEFR criteria. A post-study questionnaire was also administered to evaluate learners' attitudes toward AI-assisted speaking practice.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results indicated significant improvement in students' speaking fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary range. Most participants reported that ChatGPT helped them feel more confident while speaking English. They appreciated the tool's patience, availability, and ability to provide instant suggestions. Furthermore, students found the experience enjoyable and motivating. They noted that unlike human partners, ChatGPT did not interrupt or criticize their mistakes, which reduced anxiety and encouraged risk-taking. Teachers observed that students who regularly interacted with ChatGPT demonstrated greater readiness to participate in class discussions. Nevertheless, some limitations were identified. A few students tended to rely too heavily on ChatGPT for grammar correction instead of thinking independently. Therefore, the teacher's role in guiding and balancing AI use remains vital.

5. Conclusion

Integrating ChatGPT as a conversational partner in EFL speaking instruction offers considerable potential for improving students' communicative competence. The tool provides personalized and pressure-free practice that enhances fluency, vocabulary, and self-confidence. However, AI cannot fully replace human teachers; rather, it should be seen as a supplementary aid. Educators are encouraged to design structured activities where ChatGPT complements, not substitutes, human interaction. Future research could explore long-term effects of AI-based speaking practice and compare results across proficiency levels.

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