

## The Contribution of AI-Based Chatbots to Developing EFL Students' Oral Self-Confidence

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**Abstract:** The current study aims at uncovering the role played by AI-based chatbots in enhancing the speaking confidence of EFL (English as a foreign language) students. Speaking fear and lack of self-confidence are believed to be the main obstacles that impede effective language acquisition, especially in a non-English speaking setting. The study is concerned with the impact of artificial intelligence technology on establishing effective conversational learning settings for EFL learners. Qualitative and quantitative research methods have been applied in analyzing how interacting with AI chatbots affects speaking fluency, motivation, and confidence. The results revealed that AI-based chatbots help EFL learners gain confidence through providing instant feedback, personal interaction, and more chances to practice speaking. In addition, the importance of adopting AI technology in modern English language teaching techniques was identified.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, AI-based chatbots, AI technologies, EFL learners, speaking confidence, communicate, teaching tools.

The modern integration of AI into teaching practices has dramatically influenced learning processes. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of technological advancements in the domain of education. Such advancements help enhance students' competencies by introducing some innovative elements into the learning process. One of the most common modern innovations is AI-powered chatbots. Such devices can simulate life-like interactions and provide learners with a chance to practice their skills in an interactive manner.

Speaking anxiety is one of the major problems faced by EFL learners. Students may be reluctant to participate in the discussion process due to such reasons as fears to make mistakes, be misjudged by their peers and instructors, or be negatively evaluated.



Speaking anxiety is one of the main obstacles that prevent learners from actively participating in classroom discussion and practicing their speaking skills. Traditional approaches to overcoming speaking anxiety may prove to be inadequate to help learners overcome their reluctance to communicate.

However, speaking anxiety can be mitigated through the application of modern AI technologies. In particular, modern AI chatbots provide learners with a platform free from judgments or embarrassment. Chatbots allow learners to practice their speaking skills whenever they want and wherever

Moreover, the employment of technology in foreign language education has gained much attention in recent times. Previous studies suggested that technology may contribute to enhancing learners' engagement, motivation, and communicative competence. For instance, Fryer and Carpenter (2006) pointed out that chatbots could offer an innovative approach to facilitating language learning since chatbots allow learners to practice communication interactively and independently. In addition, Fryer and Carpenter (2006) found that students were less nervous when engaging with chatbots than when talking with their teacher or peers. Huang, Hew, and Lo (2019) further asserted that AI technologies could promote learner autonomy by providing students with autonomous access to learning materials.

It is also worth noting that speaking confidence is another issue raised in the existing literature. Specifically, speaking confidence relates to individuals' self-confidence regarding their ability to speak a foreign language effectively. Many EFL learners often suffer from low speaking confidence, which hinders their willingness to practice communication skills in a second language. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, certain emotional barriers (e.g., anxiety and stress) might negatively affect language acquisition processes.

Several recent studies have established that AI-based chatbots can help alleviate speaking anxiety and boost confidence among learners. For instance, according to Lee



(2020), students who frequently used chatbots exhibited increased readiness to speak English. It is important to note that such studies also showed positive changes in terms of pronunciation, fluency, and use of vocabulary. In addition, chatbots enable learners to get instant feedback that enables them to fix any errors right away. While there are many benefits associated with using AI chatbots for language education, certain disadvantages have been pointed out by researchers. Specifically, some chatbots can have difficulties comprehending complex answers or giving wrong advice. Over-reliance on technology might result in a decline in face-to-face communication abilities. Overall, however, scholars emphasize the enormous potential of chatbots in English language learning.

A mixed-method approach was adopted in this study, involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The participants included 40 EFL students enrolled in an English language faculty. The students were selected randomly and assigned to an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group practiced speaking skills with the help of AI chatbots for six weeks, whereas the control group proceeded with their speaking training in the classroom. Members of the experimental group practiced speaking with the assistance of AI chatbots using mobile applications and websites. They performed daily conversations, pronunciation drills, and question-answer sessions in English.

The instruments of data collection involved questionnaires, class observation, and speaking tests. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to test the effect of using AI chatbots on students' speaking fluency and self-confidence levels. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants of the experimental group in order to learn about their opinions regarding chatbot-based learning. The data obtained during the process were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data, gathered using questionnaires and pre- and post-tests, were measured in percentages. The qualitative data derived from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.



The results of the study proved that the application of AI chatbots increased the levels of speaking confidence of students and improved their communicative skills. The majority of learners in the experimental group made progress in terms of their readiness to use the language both in the class and out of it. It has been found that participants from the experimental group engaged in conversation and voiced their thoughts more eagerly than learners from the control group did.

There is a number of factors explaining the positive changes achieved by learners during this study. One of them was associated with the psychological comfort students experienced when interacting with artificial intelligence software. It is clear that people tend to avoid speaking if they are afraid of making mistakes and being criticized for it. That is why learners feel relaxed and ready to express themselves freely in the company of AI chatbots.

In addition to this, learners developed pronunciation skills, improved sentence construction and expanded vocabulary knowledge thanks to continuous interactions with the software. It should be noted that regular communication with artificial intelligence contributed greatly to the enhancement of listening skills.

It was also found that the use of chatbots for learning purposes improved the students' motivation for learning language. Most of the respondents felt that artificial intelligence-based tasks were much more entertaining than usual speaking practice. The possibility of interaction, personalization, and the ability to exercise at any time made learning process much more flexible. As a result, the respondents spent more time practicing English.

Additionally, AI-driven chatbots ensured that learners practiced autonomy. Unlike previously, learners had become less dependent on teachers. It was possible for learners to make their own decisions, choose topics they wished to learn, repeat conversations as many times as necessary, and do the learning based on their pace. This has been regarded



as one of the important factors in the modern language instruction because independent learners perform better academically.

Nonetheless, there were a number of challenges discovered during the research period as well. Certain students faced technical issues in the course of using chatbots due to poor internet connection and limited availability of sophisticated AI software. In particular cases, chatbots failed to correctly comprehend what learners told them, causing communication breakdowns. Additionally, despite being important in practice for language learning, AI cannot completely substitute real face-to-face interactions because learners still need them in order to develop their conversational skills and learn the culture of other people.

However, despite the identified drawbacks, the outcomes of the current study indicate that AI-based chatbots can indeed be used as effective auxiliary means in the process of EFL teaching. The fact that AI chatbots can offer personalization, instant feedback, and unlimited opportunities for practicing oral speech skills allows considering them to be a very useful tool for helping students to enhance their speaking confidence. The use of artificial intelligence in English language instruction is likely to become an indispensable component of modern educational systems in the future.

To conclude, the use of AI chatbots as auxiliary teaching tools in EFL teaching can prove to be an innovative solution for helping learners increase their speaking confidence and communicative competence. As evidenced by the results of this study, a chatbot-enhanced learning environment offers significant benefits in terms of reducing learners' speaking anxiety, which can be attributed to a friendly and non-threatening setting offered by the computer program. Contrary to classroom learning experiences where students are afraid of being judged for their mistakes, AI chatbots provide endless opportunities for interaction without worrying about negative feedback.

In addition to that, another important conclusion drawn from this study is that consistent use of AI-based conversational programs plays an essential role in the



enhancement of speaking skills, including fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary knowledge. With the help of such applications, learners can identify their weak areas and work on improving them. The availability of chatbots means that students will be able to speak English anytime and anywhere, thus increasing exposure to the language and promoting autonomous learning skills.

With the help of instant feedback and personal interaction, learners are capable of identifying their weak spots and enhancing their oral skills. Additionally, chatbot technology provides learners with opportunities to practice English whenever and wherever they want, which leads to increased language exposure and promotes independent study techniques.

Another key result obtained from the investigation includes the positive impact that AI chatbots exert on the learner's motivational tendencies and independence. Students involved in chatbot-mediated activities revealed enhanced motivation and interest in completing speaking tasks in comparison with learners whose work was based solely on conventional classroom practices. The interactive potential and flexibility of AI technology make it an engaging tool that stimulates the involvement of learners into the learning process and makes them responsible for their own language development.

Nevertheless, along with multiple benefits, some limitations should be mentioned. For instance, technical issues like poor Internet connection, lack of access to modern technology, and even chatbots' errors might have a detrimental effect on learning process. Moreover, artificial intelligence cannot fully substitute human communication, emotions, and teacher's pedagogical skills. Thus, chatbots should be perceived as auxiliary tools for learning rather than replacements of traditional classroom education.

To conclude, it is evident that the role of AI-based chatbots in EFL teaching proves to be significant because these tools have enormous transformative potential capable of making education more interactive, personalized, and convenient for learners. By implementing AI chatbots into teaching process, one can overcome some of the existing



challenges connected with students' speaking mistakes and assist in developing their independence and confidence in foreign languages.

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