



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CHATBOTS TOWARDS ENGLISH ORAL PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence Chatbots have become cutting-edge technologies for language learning, providing personalized and interactive experiences for students. Specifically in English oral proficiency, AI chatbots offer opportunities for improved speaking practice, feedback, and language acquisition. Objective: This study investigates undergraduate students' perceptions of AI chatbots' abilities to improve English oral proficiency among non-English majors. Method: A sample of 230 undergraduate students of non-English majors was selected. The research employed survey method, utilizing questionnaire. Findings: The quantitative analysis revealed that 71.9% of participants viewed learning effectiveness and language fluency as being strongly and positively correlated ($r = .719$), indicating that improvements in fluency coincide with enhanced learning outcomes; 82.7% demonstrated a very strong positive correlation between learning effectiveness and usability of AI Chatbots ($r = .827$), emphasizing how crucial user-friendly interfaces are to maximizing educational opportunities. Most participants agreed that AI chatbots are useful for language acquisition. However, they identified several areas for improvement such as addressing feelings of nervousness, enhancing control over the learning process, and diversifying conversation topics to increase enjoyment and effectiveness. Novelty: Despite significant progress in AI technology, there remains a considerable lack of research on learners' views about using AI chatbots to improve their English speaking skills. Moreover, few investigations have assessed the influence of communication facilitated by chatbots on developing linguistic competence. The study's findings show that AI chatbots have enormous potential in improving English oral proficiency among undergraduate students.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, being proficient in foreign languages, especially English oral skills, is crucial for competitiveness in both local and international job markets (Annisa et al., 2023). Artificial intelligence (AI) has a substantial effect on many aspects of human life, offering a viable option for communication when native speakers are unavailable or unaffordable (Hakim & Rima, 2022). According to Okonkwo & Ade-Ibijola (2021), AI, particularly Chatbots, are extensively used in education, providing new opportunities to enhance English oral proficiency among undergraduate students. Chatbots are integrated into websites or instant messaging apps, providing students with easy online access to practice, learn, and improve their English language skills (Grudin & Jacques, 2019). Significant development in machine learning and natural language processing over the past few years have enabled chatbots to provide more complex, interactive, and customized language practice sessions (Kooli, 2023). Previous studies

have shown that AI chatbots can enhance learners' oral English proficiency. Despite technological advancements, there's a gap in understanding learners' views on AI chatbots for enhancing English oral proficiency. Limited research explores chatbot-mediated communication's efficacy in fostering linguistic competence. This study prioritized the perspective of undergraduate students, recognizing that their insights provide valuable feedback on technology-enhanced learning. By examining students' experiences and perceived usefulness of AI chatbots for oral language development, educators can gain valuable insights in language learning curricula to meet the needs of diverse learners (Al-Abdullatif, 2023). Hence, this article endeavors to fill the existing research gaps by providing empirical insights into learners' experiences with AI chatbots and setting a precedent for future technological implementations within language learning curricula.

English Oral Proficiency: English has become predominant in a variety of fields such as global trade, mass media,

telecommunications, print media, and international education (Rahman & Singh, 2021; Rao, 2019). The necessity of attaining fluency in English, particularly in spoken communication, is paramount in the contemporary era for both survival and global harmony. Oral proficiency in English encompasses a broad spectrum of linguistic skills, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatic competence, all of which are crucial for effective communication. According to Smit (2020), this proficiency signifies not only the mastery of language components but also the ability to apply them appropriately in diverse contexts. However, achieving oral proficiency can pose challenges for learners. Despite acquiring extensive vocabulary knowledge, some individuals may still struggle with fluency and effective communication.

According to Namaziandost *et al.* (2019), effective speakers not only convey information but also leave a positive impression, enabling confident and successful interactions. Achieving English proficiency is a common goal in various Asian countries, where low speaking proficiency affects graduates' employability (Kamlun *et al.*, 2020). Defining and assessing oral proficiency poses challenges due to its complex nature, involving multiple factors (Shekar, 2020). Several factors impact oral proficiency, encompassing cognitive elements such as the processes of conceptualization and formulation in speech production, linguistic aspects like grammar and vocabulary competence, and emotional factors such as anxiety and motivation. According to Ko (2023), anxiety can oral performance by causing mental blocks and loss of self-confidence, particularly affecting EFL learners (Rafli & Muslim, 2023). The evaluation of English oral proficiency in second language (L2) learners requires a comprehensive understanding of its various components, which include phonetic-phonological, morpho-phonological, morpho-syntactic, and lexical/pragmatic domains (Silveira & Martins, 2020). However, there may be disparities between teachers' assessments and expected proficiency levels, potentially leading to inaccuracies in grading if overwhelmed by numerous criteria. Therefore, addressing these challenges necessitates a nuanced approach to assessing and fostering oral proficiency in English learners.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Chatbots: The advent of AI has caused a change in education in recent years, which has prompted more research into the use of AI chatbots for language acquisition. These chatbots also called "conversational agents," facilitate communication between humans and computers leveraging AI's ability to learn and process information interactively (Fryer *et al.*, 2019). The 1960s was where chatbots first emerged, and over time, they have undergone substantial development, propelled by technological progress and the increasing need for automated communication systems (Labadze *et al.*, 2023). Chatbots are sometimes known as "online human-computer dialogue system(s) using natural language," has the ability to interpret user input and produce a response (Caldarini *et al.*, 2022); imitate spoken language in everyday situations (Yasmin & Mazhar, 2023); users can ask questions and get answers at their convenience, wherever they prefer (Bhise *et al.*, 2023; Fryer & Carpenter, 2006); provide opportunities for self-paced learning (Deng & Yu, 2023); provide instant feedback to learners (Hew *et al.*, 2022); unlimited repetition of information and content is allowed to facilitate permanent learning (Deng & Yu, 2023); arouse and maintain motivation and interest in learning in students (Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Deng & Yu, 2023; Han, 2020; Han *et al.*, 2022); reduce the workload of teachers (Pereira *et al.*, 2019); improve speaking skills (Han, 2020); and encourage shy learners by offering the chance for anonymous interaction (Pereira *et al.*, 2019). With their potential to serve as significant players in educational processes, chatbots in education have emerged as teaching assistants, learning partners, and personal tutors (Bhise *et al.*, 2023). As teaching assistants, they aid students with information, feedback, and online support. As learning partners, they engage through written and spoken communication for interactive experiences. As personal tutors, they assist with questions, enhancing learning (Deng & Yu, 2023). It is anticipated that upcoming advancements in technology will transform chatbots into smart educational tools, prompting educators to incorporate AI-

powered chatbots into their teaching strategies (Annamalai *et al.*, 2023). With the seamless integration of deep-learning instructional recommendations, chatbots have the potential to make the learning experience more continuous and automatic.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to investigate undergraduate students' perception regarding the effectiveness of artificial intelligence chatbots as tools for enhancing English oral proficiency. Additionally, we aimed to evaluate the level of utilization of AI chatbots for improving English oral proficiency. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate the correlation among various dimensions in the usage of AI chatbots for enhancing English oral proficiency. The research questions were as follows:

- What are the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding the effectiveness of artificial intelligence chatbots in improving English oral proficiency?
- How extensively are AI chatbots utilized by undergraduate students for enhancing English oral proficiency?
- What extent the different dimensions of AI chatbot usage are correlated in enhancing English oral proficiency enhancement among undergraduate students?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey method was followed to get the responses from a sample of 230 undergraduate of non-English majors from various disciplines, Dindigul district. The participants were selected using simple random selection technique. To collect data from the sample, *Perception of UG Students on AI Chatbots towards English Oral Proficiency Scale* in with five dimensions – language fluency, learning effectiveness, usability of AI, enjoyment and feedback & assessment were used. The total scale consisted with 25 statements with four-point rating responses - strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (DA) and strongly disagree (SDA). The scoring procedure followed was 4, 3, 2, and 1 to the responses of sample in SA, A, DA and SDA respectively and hence the maximum score of this part is 100. The tool was constructed and standardization procedures were followed carefully. A pilot study was conducted to know the validity, and reliability of the research tool with use of 50 undergraduate students. A cronbach's alpha reliability procedure was performed and result indicated a coefficient of r-value as =0.955, indicating a high level of internal consistency. To ensure the tool's validity, experts in the field of language teaching were consulted and their feedback was incorporated into the development process. Initially 30 items were framed, and 5 items were rejected by the experts. This helped establish the tool's credibility and effectiveness in achieving its intended purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the results of the survey aimed at exploring undergraduate students' perceptions on the utilization of AI chatbots to improve English oral proficiency. The survey questionnaire consisted of 25 statements categorized into five dimensions: (1) Language fluency, (2) Learning effectiveness, (3) Usability of AI chatbots, (4) Enjoyment, and (5) Feedback & Assessment. The learners' responses to these dimensions are presented sequentially. Table 1 shows that the average value scale midpoint (mean scale) for the dimension of 'language fluency', encompassing questions 1-5, is 2.76. Most items scored above this midpoint, indicating that AI chatbots are effective in helping undergraduate students enhance their language fluency. However item 1 (M=2.50) scored slightly below this midpoint. This implies a reduced intensity in perception regarding feelings of nervousness while conversing in English with AI chatbots. The mean scale midpoint for the dimension 'learning effectiveness', that is questions 6-10, is 2.82. Most items scored above this midpoint, indicating the potential of AI chatbots to improve motivation,

pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, and speaking proficiency. However, item 9 ($M=2.73$) and item 10 ($M=2.76$) scored slightly below this midpoint, suggesting a reduced intensity in perception toward AI chatbots regarding control over students' language learning and overcoming language barriers in oral communication. The mean scale midpoint for the dimension 'usability of AI', encompassing questions 11-15, is 2.84. Most items scored above this midpoint, indicating the positive impact of AI chatbots on enhancing undergraduate students' English oral skills. However, item 12 ($M=2.76$) and item 15 ($M=2.79$) scored slightly below this midpoint. This suggests a less strong perception toward AI chatbots among students, who feel that while they can understand the chatbots, there may be instances where the chatbots do not fully comprehend them. Similarly, item 15 suggests that students have a reduced intensity in perception regarding the adequacy of AI chatbots in offering a variety of conversation topics to improve English oral proficiency. The mean scale midpoint for the dimension 'enjoyment', encompassing questions 16-20, is 2.85. Most items scored above this midpoint, suggesting that students find interacting with AI chatbots very interesting for enhancing English oral proficiency. However, item 19 ($M=2.78$) and item 20 ($M=2.70$) scored slightly below this midpoint. This suggests a reduced intensity in perception regarding students' willingness to continue using AI chatbots and their preference over traditional methods for improving English oral proficiency.

The mean scale midpoint for the dimension 'feedback & assessment', encompassing questions 21-25, is 2.73. Most items scored above this midpoint, indicating that AI chatbots effectively provide feedback and assess students' English oral skills. However, item 25 ($M=2.47$) scored slightly below this midpoint. This suggests a reduced intensity in perception regarding AI chatbots in giving terrible criticism during English language learning for enhancing English oral proficiency. Overall, the mean scale midpoint across all five dimensions is 2.80, indicating a predominantly positive perception of AI chatbots among undergraduate students regarding their effectiveness in enhancing English oral proficiency. These findings are in accordance with other research examining the perceived effectiveness of AI chatbots in enhancing English oral proficiency (Hakim, & Rima, 2022; Fryer *et al.*, 2019; Han, 2020; Han *et al.*, 2022). However, the results also highlight specific areas where adjustments could enhance user experience and effectiveness. These include mitigating feelings of nervousness, providing greater control over learning, ensuring mutual understanding between students and chatbots, diversifying conversation topics, maximizing enjoyment, and refining feedback mechanisms.

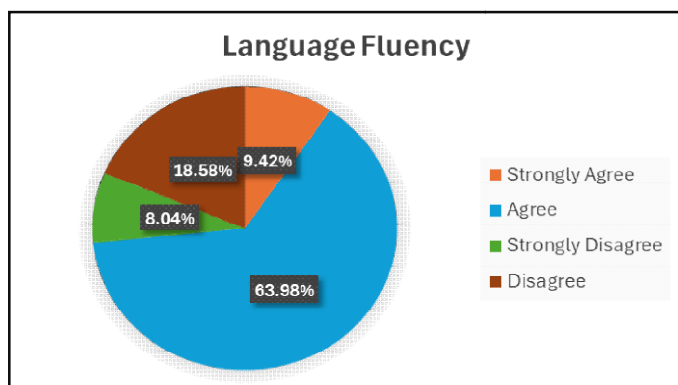


Figure 1: Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots significantly promote the language fluency of UG students.

Based on the above percentage analysis, it is found that 9.42% of the participants have strongly agreed that AI chatbots play a crucial role in enhancing UG students' language fluency, and 63.98% have agreed as well, whereas 8.04% have chosen to disagree and 18.58% have strongly disagreed that AI chatbots play a crucial role in enhancing UG students' language fluency.

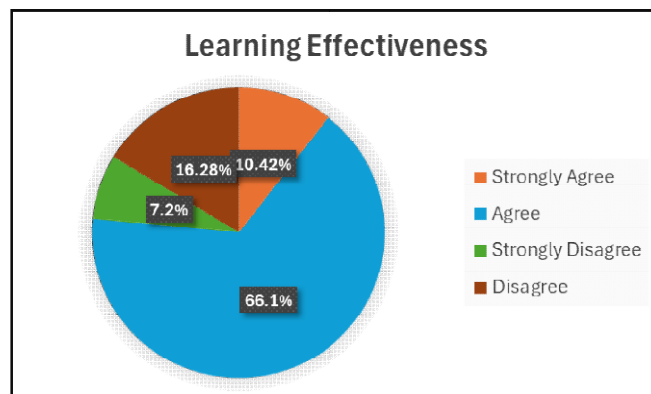


Figure 2: AI chatbots could facilitate self-directed learning to improve English oral proficiency.

According to the above figure, 10.42% of the participants have strongly agreed that AI chatbots could facilitate self-directed learning by overcoming language barriers to improve English oral proficiency, and 66.1% have agreed as well, whereas 7.2% have chosen to disagree and 16.28% have strongly disagreed that AI chatbots could facilitate self-directed learning by overcoming language barriers to improve English oral proficiency.

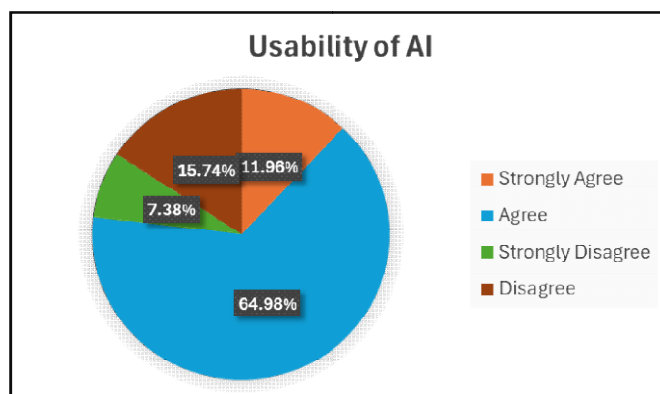


Figure 3. AI chatbots has the potential to enhance the English oral proficiency of UG students by providing an adequate variety of conversation topics

Based on the above statistical analysis, 11.96% of the participants have strongly agreed and 64.98% have agreed the potential of AI chatbots to enrich UG students' English oral proficiency by offering a diverse range of conversation topics, whereas 7.38% have chosen to disagree and 15.74% have strongly disagreed the efficacy of AI chatbots in this aspect.

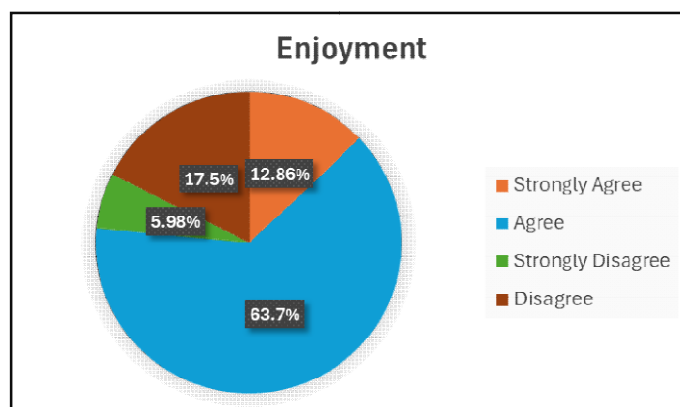


Figure 4. UG students prefer using AI chatbots to improve their English oral proficiency

Table 1. Results of Participants' Perceptions towards the Use of AI Chatbots

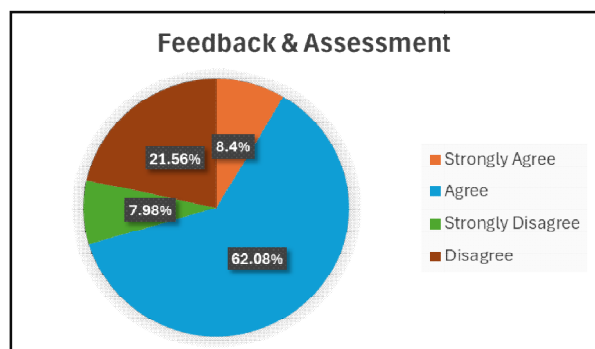
Statement	Mean	SD
1. Speaking in English with AI chatbots makes me feel nervous	2.50	0.76
2. AI chatbots can effectively improve my English oral proficiency.	2.88	0.66
3. After engaging with AI chatbots, my confidence in speaking English has increased.	2.81	0.74
4. AI chatbots can engage me effectively in English conversation practice.	2.81	0.66
5. AI chatbots helps me to improve my oral expression ability	2.79	0.70
6. Engaging with AI chatbots encourages me to improve my English pronunciation	2.82	0.71
7. The use of AI chatbots enhances my vocabulary knowledge.	2.88	0.64
8. The learning content of AI chatbots is very rich.	2.89	0.71
9. AI chatbots gave me greater control over my learning of the English language.	2.73	0.73
10. AI chatbots are effective tools for overcoming language barriers in oral communication.	2.76	0.70
11. AI chatbots is easy to use.	2.94	0.77
12. AI chatbots can understand me clearly.	2.76	0.73
13. The features provided by AI chatbots meet my expectations.	2.84	0.69
14. I find AI chatbots user-friendly for enhancing your English oral skills.	2.86	0.68
15. AI chatbots offers sufficient variety in conversation topics to improve your English oral proficiency.	2.79	0.70
16. Interacting with AI chatbots is interesting.	2.96	0.64
17. Using AI chatbots for speaking practice creates less stress compared to traditional classroom activities.	2.86	0.68
18. Chatbots with artificial intelligence are a useful tool for language acquisition.	2.97	0.63
19. I plan to keep using AI chatbots for learning English.	2.78	0.70
20. I prefer using AI chatbots over traditional methods for improving English oral proficiency.	2.70	0.81
21. AI chatbots are effective in providing feedback on my English speaking skills.	2.75	0.70
22. Receiving feedback from AI chatbots enhanced my oral ability.	2.76	0.75
23. AI chatbots accurately assess my English oral proficiency.	2.78	0.65
24. AI chatbots can identify and correct my pronunciation errors effectively.	2.82	0.68
25. AI chatbots give terrible criticism on your English speaking skills.	2.47	0.77
In Total Perception Scale	2.80	0.68

Table 2. Results of the correlation coefficient between the dimensions of usage of AI chatbots

Dimensions	Language Fluency	Learning Effectiveness	Usability of AI Chatbots	Enjoyment	Feedback & Assessment
Language Fluency	1				
Learning Effectiveness	.719**	1			
Usability of AI Chatbots	.686**	.827**	1		
Enjoyment	.586**	.748**	.740**	1	
Feedback & Assessment	.669**	.750**	.738**	.690**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

According to the statistical analysis shown above, 12.86% of participants strongly agreed that interacting with AI chatbots is interesting and prefer using them to enhance their English oral proficiency, and 63.7% have agreed as well, whereas 5.98% have chosen to disagree and 17.5% have strongly disagree that interacting with AI chatbots is interesting and prefer using them to enhance their English oral proficiency.

**Figure 5. AI chatbots effectively evaluate and provide feedback to enhance English oral proficiency**

The statistical data show that 8.4% of participants strongly agreed that AI chatbots can effectively evaluate and provide feedback to enhance English oral proficiency, and 62.08% have agreed as well, whereas 7.98% have chosen to disagree and 21.56% have strongly disagree that AI chatbots can effectively evaluate and provide feedback to enhance English oral proficiency. The majority of participants expressed agreement with the benefits of AI chatbots in improving English oral proficiency. The results of these findings were consistent with the previous research findings that participants had positive

attitude and satisfaction towards the usage of AI chatbots (Al-Abdullatif, 2023; and Hew *et al.*, 2022). The results of the correlation analysis reveals several noteworthy relationships among the dimensions of language fluency, learning effectiveness, usability, enjoyment, and feedback & assessment in the context of AI chatbots usage for enhancing English oral proficiency. Table 2 illustrates a strong positive correlation between the scores in Language Fluency and Learning Effectiveness ($r = .719$), indicating that improvements in language fluency tend to coincide with enhanced learning effectiveness. Similarly, there is a strong positive correlation between the scores in Language Fluency and Usability of AI chatbots ($r = .686$), suggests that higher levels of language fluency are associated with better usability of AI Chatbots. Furthermore, there is a very strong positive correlation between the scores in Learning Effectiveness and Usability of AI chatbots ($r = .827$), emphasizing that more effective learning experiences are often linked with better usability of AI chatbots. Enjoyment demonstrates moderate positive correlations with Language Fluency ($r = 0.586$). This indicates that enjoyment in using AI chatbots are associated with moderate language fluency. Moreover, Enjoyment demonstrates strong positive correlations with both Learning Effectiveness ($r = .748$) and Usability of AI chatbots ($r = .740$). These findings indicate that students who find interacting with AI chatbots enjoyable are likely to experience greater language proficiency and learning effectiveness. Lastly, Feedback & Assessment displays a strong positive correlation with Language Fluency ($r = 0.669$), Learning Effectiveness ($r = 0.750$), Usability of AI chatbots ($r = 0.738$), and Enjoyment ($r = 0.690$). This suggests that more positive feedback and assessment are associated with higher levels of learning effectiveness, better usability of AI chatbots, increased language fluency and heightened levels of enjoyment. These findings are consistent with previous research examining the perceived effectiveness of AI chatbots in enhancing English oral proficiency (Fryer *et al.*, 2019; Annamalai *et al.*, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study explores the perceptions held by undergraduate students regarding artificial intelligence chatbots and their influence on English oral proficiency, providing valuable perspectives on the effectiveness of these tools in enriching language learning experiences. The results indicate that AI chatbots possess the capacity to enhance language fluency, learning effectiveness, enjoyment and usability for undergraduate students seeking to enhance their English oral proficiency. The quantitative analysis revealed that 71.9% of participants displayed a strong positive correlation ($r = .719$) between language fluency and learning effectiveness, indicating that enhancements in fluency coincide with improved learning outcomes. Moreover, 82.7% of participants demonstrated a very strong positive correlation ($r = .827$) between learning effectiveness and the usability of AI chatbots, emphasizing the importance of user-friendly interfaces in optimizing learning experiences. While the majority of participants expressed agreement with the benefits of AI chatbots in language learning, areas for improvement were also identified. These include addressing feelings of nervousness, enhancing control over learning, and diversifying conversation topics to maximize enjoyment and effectiveness. By leveraging the insights gained from the quantitative data and novel outcomes of this study, educators and developers can further optimize the integration of AI technology in language learning settings, ultimately enhancing the language acquisition experiences of students across diverse disciplines.

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