

Exploring EFL Students' Use of AI Tools in Speaking Classes: Purposes, Motivations, and Perceived Benefits

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), speaking performance, learner perceptions, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Despite the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, empirical evidence on how EFL learners use AI tools to improve speaking skills remains limited. This study examines the specific AI tools, usage purposes, motivations, and perceived benefits among university EFL students. A quantitative survey was administered to 155 freshmen at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. The findings revealed that generative AI chatbots (notably ChatGPT and Gemini) were widely adopted, primarily for idea generation, vocabulary enrichment, and translation. Learners were motivated by perceived usefulness, ease of use, and reduced speaking anxiety. Major reported benefits include enhanced confidence, expanded vocabulary, and greater learning flexibility. These findings offer practical insights for integrating generative AI tools into tertiary EFL speaking curricula.

Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has remarkably transformed educational practices across different sectors, including language education. In this era of digital transformation, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning practices have undergone a paradigm shift driven by the emergence of, and preference for, AI tool integration (Wang et al., 2025; Khailifa & Ginting, 2024). AI-powered technologies such as generative chatbots, speech recognition systems, virtual assistants, and AI-based pronunciation applications have become increasingly accessible and popular among EFL learners (Holmes et al., 2019; Kasneci et al., 2023). These tools can provide instant feedback, personalized learning support, and numerous opportunities for interactive communication practice, creating new possibilities in EFL contexts (Kasneci et al., 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Jiang, 2022).

Among the four language skills, speaking is among the most challenging for EFL learners, with difficulties related to vocabulary expansion, error control, confidence building, and

opportunities for extensive practice (Horwitz et al., 1986). Unlike traditional settings, learning environments that integrate AI tools offer additional support to address limitations in time, practice opportunities, feedback, and linguistic accuracy (Holmes et al., 2019; Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023). An AI-supported learning environment may also provide learners with more flexible, low-pressure, and independent learning experiences (Godwin-Jones, 2019). From a practical classroom perspective, however, regular EFL lessons often make it difficult to provide extensive, individualized speaking practice, especially when teachers must divide limited class time among a relatively large number of learners. As a result, students may have limited opportunities to engage in sustained speaking practice and receive immediate, individualized feedback. AI tools may therefore provide a practical way to supplement classroom speaking activities by letting students practice independently beyond the limited interaction time available in class.

The increasing popularity of such tools has attracted considerable attention from researchers in the field. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of AI-assisted learning, including increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater accessibility to linguistic practice (Kohnke et al., 2023). However, much of the existing research has primarily focused on writing instruction, grammar correction, or general perceptions of AI education, leaving the specific dynamics of speaking practice comparatively underexplored. Relatively limited attention has been paid to how EFL learners specifically use AI tools to support speaking practice, particularly in tertiary educational contexts (Wang et al., 2025; Khailifa & Ginting, 2024). Furthermore, few studies have examined the specific AI tools students use, their purposes, the motivations behind their adoption, and the perceived benefits of AI-integrated speaking practice (Wang et al., 2025; Wen, 2024).

This gap is particularly evident in the Vietnamese EFL contexts, where AI technologies are rapidly becoming integrated into students' academic and personal learning activities. For teachers and institutions, this emerging classroom reality raises a practical question: if AI tools are to supplement speaking instruction, which tools are students actually using, what are they using them for, and what motivates them to adopt them? Without a clearer understanding of students' current use and perceived benefits, teachers may find it difficult to identify appropriate AI tools or design speaking activities that meaningfully incorporate them into students' learning routines. Investigating students' experiences and perceptions may therefore provide valuable insights for teachers, institutions, and curriculum designers seeking to integrate AI effectively into speaking instruction.

This study, then, aims to explore EFL students' use of AI tools in speaking lessons among freshmen at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade. Specifically, it investigates the types of AI tools students use, their purposes for using those tools, the motivations influencing their selection, and the perceived benefits of AI-assisted speaking practice.

Literature review

AI Integration as a Pedagogical Tool

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought about marked changes to

educational methods, particularly in language teaching and learning. In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), AI tools such as chatbots and speech recognition technology are increasingly popular (Holmes et al., 2019; Kasneci et al., 2023). These innovations provide learners with immediate, automatic feedback, tailored learning experiences, and interactive communication opportunities often unavailable in traditional classrooms (Holmes et al., 2019). As a result, AI not only supplements but also, to some extent, reshapes pedagogical approaches in language education.

Previous research indicates that AI plays an important role in fostering learner autonomy, one of the key principles in language learning theories. By providing real-time access to language input, corrective feedback, and conversational practice, AI tools enable learners to take greater control over their learning and thus encourage the development of learner autonomy (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). Furthermore, AI chatbots such as ChatGPT may enable learners to develop their language competence independently, at their own pace, and at their convenience, thereby promoting self-directed learning and reducing overreliance on teacher-centered instruction (Kasneci et al., 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2019). While a body of previous research has primarily focused on improving writing skills and other general aspects of English, there is a growing interest in the role of AI in enhancing oral communication skills, particularly in the context of EFL, where opportunities for real-world speaking practice are often limited (Kohnke et al., 2023).

Of all language skills, speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging for EFL learners to acquire. The difficulties may include the fear of making mistakes in front of others and limited interaction in classroom contexts, leading to reduced participation in classroom activities and slow improvement in communication competence (Kasneci et al., 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2019). However, AI tools, especially chatbots like ChatGPT, have emerged as a promising and relevant solution to such problems. By providing real-life conversation simulations, limitless opportunities for speaking practice, context-sensitive responses and feedback, and a low-pressure practice environment, they offer non-judgmental interaction, which may help EFL learners reduce speaking anxiety and enhance the willingness to communicate (WTC) (Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023). Additionally, the integrated speech recognition technologies in these chatbots can also assist EFL learners with their communicative error identification and correction by giving instant feedback on their pronunciation, fluency, and language use accuracy in real time (Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023). Regardless of these benefits, current research on AI applications in education has significantly focused on writing support, leaving speaking relatively underexplored. This gap indicates the need for more empirical studies that examine how EFL learners engage with AI chatbots like ChatGPT in speaking contexts.

EFL Learners and Their Usage of AI Tools

Understanding EFL learners' purposes for using AI tools is significantly important for determining and evaluating their role in language learning and acquisition. Previous studies indicate that language learners use AI technologies for various purposes, including academic, supportive, and compensatory functions (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Academically, AI tools are used for conversation-simulated practice, presentation preparation, and pronunciation

improvement. In terms of supportive functions, those tools are preferred for their idea suggestion and generation, as well as language arrangement and revision when learner encounter linguistic difficulties. Besides, AI chatbots can serve as compensatory tools by facilitating them in lexical, grammatical, or emotional aspects, thereby promoting active participation in speaking tasks in the classroom context (Godwin-Jones, 2019). These diverse uses align with the concept of self-regulated learning, which argues that learners use available learning resources to achieve their learning goals (Zimmerman, 2002).

Regarding the emotional aspects of EFL learners, motivation plays a crucial role in shaping their engagement with AI usage and language learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2024) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989)—two prominent theoretical frameworks in the field—provide insights into this phenomenon. SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2024) focuses on three primary psychological needs of humans, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It is used to explore the students' feelings of having the right to choose without being forced on what to do, adequate capability of AI use, and building connections while using AI. According to Khailifa & Ginting (2024), AI tools may empower EFL learners to take greater control of their own learning with targeted support, fostering learner autonomy and linguistic improvement. Furthermore, EFL learners' motivation can be classified as intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to engage in learning for its own sake, including personal interest or enjoyment. Extrinsic motivation, on the contrary, involves external rewards such as grades or assessment outcomes. AI chatbots may enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by making the learning process more interactive and enjoyable and improving academic performance (Khailifa & Ginting, 2024; Bhar, 2026).

TAM (Davis, 1989) further explains learners' preference for AI tools owing to their perceived usefulness (PU) as well as perceived ease of use (PEOU). In other words, when EFL students believe AI tools benefit their linguistic improvement, they may use them more over time. Additionally, when learners find learning to use these AI tools simple, they tend to integrate them more into their learning routines. PU and PEOU are among the most important factors affecting EFL learners' perceptions of using AI in their language learning process (Mudawy, 2025). This author argues that AI tools can meet learners' tailored needs and offer user-friendly interfaces, enhancing their confidence and positive attitudes toward the tools they prefer for academic success. Besides, AI tools are acknowledged to offer consistent engagement to EFL learners (Wen, 2024). This suggests that the perceived convenience and timely responses these tools offer may be key reasons learners maintain their practice routines.

Perceived Benefits and Concerns in Using AI Tools

With regard to the perceived benefits of AI integration into language learning and practice, several studies have indicated that AI tools are promising. One acknowledged advantage is enhanced fluency (Wang et al., 2025; Wen, 2024; Mudawy, 2025). AI chatbots can offer EFL learners limitless opportunities for speaking practice and repetition, which the classroom setting fails to provide due to the constraints of time. AI use can also boost learners' confidence and academic improvement by providing instant and context-sensitive feedback. They help learners precisely identify the specific areas of language that need improvement with real-time and individualized responses, unlike those in traditional classroom settings, where feedback tends

to be delayed or generalized (Kohnke et al., 2023). They also create a safer, less-pressured environment where learners can build competence at their own pace without worrying about being laughed at or criticized in front of a crowd (Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023). As a result, learners can take greater control of their learning process, thus promoting learner autonomy. For example, with the assistance of ChatGPT, EFL learners can practice anytime and anywhere, rather than being limited to classroom contexts only, fostering independent learning habits (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

Despite their potential, AI tools raise several concerns in educational contexts. Heavy reliance on AI chatbots may significantly reduce authentic interaction among individuals, hindering the development of EFL learners' communicative competence (Wang et al., 2025). Evidence shows that AI chatbot feedback is useful for segmental features such as pronunciation but fails to provide insight into complex linguistic areas such as discourse, raising concerns about contextual appropriateness (Wang et al., 2025). AI hallucination also poses risks for those who lack the literacy to evaluate the output since the system predicts trends and generates incorrect or irrelevant information (Ebadi et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). In addition, ethical concerns such as academic integrity and overreliance on AI are increasing. The growing unethical use and AI-related plagiarism indicate the need for new academic regulations.

Although existing literature has already demonstrated the potential of AI tools in language education, certain gaps remain. Specifically, much of the current research focuses heavily on AI assistance in writing skills, leaving speaking in tertiary classroom contexts underexplored. Additionally, previous studies rarely integrate several aspects of AI use in learning, such as purposes, motivations, and perceived benefits. Moreover, research on EFL learners' perspectives in a specific context, such as Vietnam, remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL students' use of AI tools in tertiary-level speaking classes by examining their purposes, motivations, and perceived benefits through four research questions (RQs).

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What AI tools do EFL students use to support their speaking practice?

RQ2: For what purposes do EFL students use AI tools in speaking lessons?

RQ3: What motivations influence students' use of AI tools for speaking practice?

RQ4: What perceived benefits do students report from using AI tools for speaking improvement?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The participants of the study were 155 tertiary-level EFL students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade. They were chosen for the study using convenience sampling, as they belonged to the available classes of the researchers and were readily accessible. The participants were non-English-major freshmen enrolling in a General English course called

English 1. Their proficiency level was similarly pre-intermediate (approximately B1 according to CEFR), determined by a placement test at the beginning of the English course.

All participants were familiar with using at least one AI tool in their learning routines to support their English speaking improvement, as determined through a quick survey before the beginning of the study. Following the ethical guidelines observed in other studies, participants were clearly informed of the study's purposes, along with their rights to withdraw from the study at any time they wished. In addition, participation was completely voluntary and was not expected to affect their course results. Freshmen were selected instead of other groups of the research population because they experience a significant transition in linguistic communicative demands and learning styles and depict higher levels of speaking anxiety (Ding & Yusof, 2025).

Design of the Study

This study employed an exploratory-descriptive quantitative research design to examine EFL learners' use of AI tools in speaking lessons and practice. This approach was chosen because it is relevant and feasible for addressing all four RQs. First, it could provide a systematic description of the observable patterns, such as specific AI tools used, the purposes of AI tool use, and usage frequency. Moreover, the questionnaire could provide descriptive information about learners' reported motivations for using those AI tools and their perceived benefits of integrating the tools into their learning routines. By adopting this design, the study may offer a more detailed interpretation of how AI tools have been reshaping the speaking learning environment. In addition, because the findings are context-dependent, this design was particularly appropriate for investigating the diverse ways EFL learners interact with AI tools.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to address the research questions (RQs) in this study. The items in the questionnaire were developed based on the existing literature on AI integration in language learning, especially the established theoretical framework of SDT (Ryan & Ryan, 2024) and TAM (Davis, 1989), and then were reviewed to ensure that they were relevant to the research questions and the constructs investigated in the study. The questionnaire consisted of five sections with items about demographic information (5 items), types of AI tools used (1 item), purposes of AI tool use (8 items), motivations for AI use (14 items), and perceived benefits (10 items). Items for investigating purposes, motivations, and the perceived benefits were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 meaning "strongly disagree" to 5 meaning "strongly agree."

Data collection & analysis

Before completing the questionnaires, the participants were clearly informed of the purposes of the study. Then, over approximately 4 weeks, they were asked to observe and record relevant information about their use of AI tools in their learning routines. This observation and note-taking process was not considered a separate data collection procedure, but rather a self-monitoring aid intended to help participants recall their AI tool use more accurately. This was particularly important, as respondents in longitudinal studies tend to experience memory fade and selective recall bias (Cohen et al., 2018). The self-monitoring activity therefore served as a memory aid, helping participants record relevant information closer to the time of use rather

than relying solely on their recall at the end of the 4-week period.

The study used a questionnaire as the data collection tool because it allows efficient collection of standardized, quantifiable data from a relatively large number of participants within a limited timeframe. Accordingly, in the final week, the questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms to collect data. The link was shared through chat groups created at the beginning of the 4-week period. During the data collection process, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured. After collection, the data were analyzed using the SPSS app to seek answers to each RQ through descriptive statistics.

Results/Findings

Types of AI Tools Used by EFL Learners (RQ1)

After being collected, data from 155 tertiary-level EFL learners at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT) were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including usage frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to answer the RQs. First, RQ1 aimed to find out the specific types of AI tools that the students use to support their English speaking practice and improvement. Data illustrating details for it were shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of AI Tools Used (N = 155)

AI Tool Type	Frequency	Percentage
ChatGPT	130	83.9%
Gemini	115	74.2%
Google Translate	84	54.2%
Voice Assistants (Google Assistant/Siri)	32	20.6%
Speech Recognition tools	24	15.5%
AI pronunciation apps (e.g., ELSA Speak)	21	13.5%

The results indicate that AI chatbots (ChatGPT & Gemini) were the most commonly used tools among the selected participants. According to Table 1, ChatGPT was chosen by 130 students, accounting for 83.9%, which made it the most popular among the 6 suggested options. Gemini follows closely with 115 votes (74.2%), considered the second most popular choice for students.

In contrast, speech recognition tools and applications that seem less user-friendly or require a fee (ELSA Speak) were the least preferred options for speaking learning and practice (15.5% & 13.5%, respectively). Additionally, the relatively high use of Google Translate (54.2%) suggests that, during speaking tasks, students are greatly dependent on idea and vocabulary translation support. Students' dependence on AI support was also demonstrated through their

frequency of using AI tools for the purpose of speaking practice, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Frequency of AI Tool Use (N=155)

Frequency	Percentage
Daily	20.6%
Several times a week	38.7%
Around 3 times a week	23.9%
Once or twice a week	16.8%

Results show that AI tools were used frequently and had become an integrated part of most participants' learning routines. Specifically, over one-third of participants (38.7%) reported using AI tools for speaking practice several times a week, and about one-fifth used them daily for learning, depending partly on their English learning schedules and routines.

Purposes of Using AI Tools in Speaking Lessons (RQ2)

RQ2 explored the specific purposes for which the participants used AI tools in their speaking lessons. Descriptive statistical data from 155 participants across eight research items, including means and standard deviations (SD), as shown in Table 3, were utilized to seek the answers.

Table 3.

Purposes of AI Tool Use (N=155)

Purposes	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
to practice speaking	3.79	1.128
to improve my pronunciation	3.85	1.045
to find vocabulary items for speaking	4.35	.952
to generate ideas for speaking	4.23	.950
to prepare for speaking presentations	4.05	.999
to check grammar in speaking responses	4.19	.979
to translate speaking ideas into English	4.17	.891
to improve speaking fluency	3.99	.957

The findings indicate that using AI tools to enrich their lexical resources and to generate speaking ideas are the two most common purposes of AI use, with the highest means of 4.35 and 4.23, respectively. In addition, all means are above the neutral midpoint of 3.0, suggesting that all purposes are moderately preferred and performed. The lowest SD of .891 suggests that the respondents were relatively consistent in their preferred use of AI tools, which was for idea

translation into English. On the contrary, the lowest mean of 3.79, along with its highest SD, suggests a polarization across the population. Although they seemed to agree on the usefulness of AI in speaking practice, they were much less enthusiastic about this purpose compared to idea generation or vocabulary enrichment.

Motivations for AI Use (RQ3)

RQ3 investigated the motivations behind students' use of AI tools during speaking practice. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale to collect data from 155 participants across 14 items. The items were adapted from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2024) and TAM (Davis, 1989). The descriptive statistics used to answer the RQ are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Motivation Factors for AI Use (N=155)

Items	Mean	SD
AI tools help me improve my speaking skills	3.76	.994
AI tools make speaking practice more effective	3.90	.968
AI tools enhance my performance in speaking tasks	3.89	.872
AI tools are useful for my speaking development	4.14	.922
AI tools are easy to use for speaking practice	3.92	1.019
I find it easy to interact with AI	4.06	1.027
Learning to use AI for learning purposes is simple	4.09	.907
I enjoy using AI for speaking practice	3.74	1.020
Using AI tools makes speaking practice more engaging	3.94	1.008
I use AI to improve my speaking results	3.83	1.050
I use AI tools because my teacher encourages it	3.64	1.050
I feel more confident when practicing speaking with AI	4.03	.967
I feel less nervous speaking with AI tools than with people	4.17	.932
I am more willing to speak and to practice speaking when using AI tools	4.08	.967

As data in Table 4 suggest, the participants identified speaking anxiety reduction as the primary motivation behind their use of AI tools (mean = 4.17, SD = .932). Additionally, the lowest SD of .872 indicates that the respondents had the strongest agreement on the belief that AI integration was useful for the speaking performance enhancement. Similarly, that AI support was useful for their speaking development was considered the core reason for students' use with high consensus (mean = 4.14, SD = .922). In contrast, using AI owing to their teacher's encouragement seemed to be a secondary motivator since its mean was the lowest of all (mean = 3.64). Correspondingly, this urge also served as an inconsistent driver due to the item's

highest SD of 1.050, suggesting that this may motivate some students but not others. Interestingly, both extrinsic motivation factors (items 10 and 11) had a similarly high SD, indicating that some of the respondents did not care about the extrinsic rewards related to their speaking development.

Perceived Benefits of AI Use (RQ4)

RQ4 explored students' perceived benefits of AI integration into their learning routines and speaking development. Descriptive statistics of 155 participants across 10 research items were collected using a 5-point Likert scale and then analyzed using SPSS. Means and standard deviations, as shown in Table 5, were used to answer the RQ.

Table 5.

Perceived Benefits of AI Tool Use (N=155)

Item	Mean	SD
AI tools help me improve my speaking fluency	3.76	.994
AI tools help me improve my pronunciation	3.90	.981
AI tools help me expand my vocabulary for speaking	4.23	.872
AI tools help me speak more confidently	3.92	.973
AI tools provide useful feedback for my speaking improvement	4.00	1.000
AI tools allow me to practice speaking anytime and anywhere	4.18	.963
AI tools help me to become a more independent language learner	3.87	1.067
AI tools improve my overall speaking performance	3.70	1.094
AI tools help me organize my ideas more clearly when speaking	4.05	.935
AI tools help me communicate more effectively in English	4.01	.940

The findings suggest that, among the perceived benefits, flexibility and accessibility got the second-highest rating (mean = 4.18, SD = .963). The participants also strongly agreed that AI tools were of great help in expanding their lexical resources (mean = 4.23, SD = .872). However, while students felt positive about the utility of AI for idea organization and instant feedback (means of roughly 4), they remained somewhat cautious about its support in enhancing the overall speaking performance (mean = 3.70). Regarding AI's potential to foster learning autonomy, the respondents held a relatively positive attitude, notwithstanding a polarization (mean = 3.87, SD = 1.067). Interestingly, students' perceived benefit of increasing confidence was higher than that of fluency (means of 3.92 and 3.76, respectively), indicating that AI tools may offer great help in reducing their affective filter (speaking anxiety) although their technical ability may fail to catch up, which is in line with the motivation factor in the previous section.

Discussion

The results of this study show that applying AI tools to oral skill practice is beneficial and essential for development. Overall, the findings align with previous studies in education, emphasizing AI's growing impact on language learning.

First, regarding the types of AI tools used, the results showed that generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT (83.9%) and Gemini (74.2%) were the most widely used tools among the selected students. This finding aligns with Kohnke (2023), who noted that conversations with AI chatbots are increasingly popular because of their potential benefits, including immediate interaction and feedback, language support, and idea organization (Holmes et al., 2019). Compared to the pronunciation apps (e.g., ELSA Speak) and speech recognition systems, chatbots appear more flexible and multifunctional. In terms of interaction flexibility, they can provide adaptive responses based on the user's suggestions (Wafa & Sulistyaningsih, 2025; Bhar, 2026), along with a sense of free talk or open-ended dialogue (Wen, 2024). Furthermore, chatbots generally demonstrate greater multifunctionality, with broader skill coverage and affective support (Wang et al., 2025). These factors may explain AI chatbots' popularity among tertiary-level EFL learners.

At the same time, students' high preference for the translation tool (Google Translate at 54.2%) proves their marked dependence on technologies for idea and language translation support, consistent with the proposed purpose of AI use (mean = 4.17) and in line with claims in previous research (Wen, 2024; Wafa & Sulistyaningsih, 2025; Pangestu & Suwartono, 2024). In contrast, specialized applications for language learning, including ELSA Speak (13.5%—the lowest percentage of choice) and speech recognition tools (15.5%), seemed much less favorable. TAM (Davis, 1989) and SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2024) may also explain this, as these tools have lower PU (Perceived Usefulness) and PEOU (Perceived Ease of Use) than generative AI chatbots. In other words, chatbots are more multifunctional and have more user-friendly interfaces, making them more outstanding than other similar technologies (Wang et al., 2025; Wen, 2024).

Second, results on the purposes of AI integration into learning routines revealed the primary uses: seeking lexical resources (mean = 4.35), generating ideas (mean = 4.23), checking grammar accuracy (mean = 4.19), and translating ideas or language items into English (mean = 4.17). These reveal a consistent pattern that students value AI tools for their cognitive preparation, bridging the gap between their intended message and their linguistic capability. This supports Godwin-Jones' (2019) argument that technologies may provide supportive and compensatory functions, ultimately fostering learner independence and autonomy (Zimmerman, 2002; Khailifa & Ginting, 2024). In addition to that, the strong emphasis on idea generation (mean = 4.23) and translation (mean = 4.17) reflects students' lack of confidence in spontaneous speaking in real-life contexts (Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025), as well as their need for linguistic support before oral production (Wen, 2024; Wafa & Sulistyaningsih, 2025; Pangestu & Suwartono, 2024).

Within the TAM framework (Davis, 1989), the high ratings correlate with PU, supporting the view that AI adoption is promising for enhancing message preparation. The proposed purposes indicate that EFL learners use AI to reduce the cognitive overload associated with target-language production, thereby improving the quality of speech delivery (Bhar, 2026; Pangestu & Suwartono, 2024). From an SDT (Mudawy, 2025) perspective, students' purposes of AI tool use may reflect their inner struggle with linguistic competence. Students may feel they lack the right words or adequate vocabulary for the given oral tasks, leading them to believe their speaking improvement is closely linked to tool integration. This is also consistent with the corresponding motivation for AI use (mean = 4.14).

Third, the motivational results suggest that students were moderately influenced by PU and PEOU, which TAM strongly supports (Davis, 1989). According to the model, users are more likely to use the technological tools when they perceive them as useful (PU) and easy to use (PEOU). This aligns with findings on students' motivations, indicating that AI tools are useful for their speaking development (mean = 4.14), easy to use (mean = 4.06), and simple to learn (mean = 4.09). At the same time, the results also revealed that impacts on affective factors, such as reduced anxiety (mean = 4.17), increased confidence (mean = 4.03), and WTC (mean = 4.08), were the primary motivations for students' use of AI tools. This aligns with previous studies showing that AI integration may create a low-pressure environment that encourages WTC in English. On the contrary, traditional learning settings often trigger a high affective filter, where fear of judgment from others hinders speech development (Jiang, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023).

These findings also align with SDT (Mudawy, 2025), which emphasizes the need for a safe learning environment for skill acquisition and autonomy development. Surprisingly, reasons for using AI tools related to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations appear to be secondary drivers, as all ratings are lower than those for other items, including speaking enjoyment (mean = 3.74) and teacher encouragement (mean = 3.64). These means are also the lowest of all, along with the highest SD of 1.050, indicating that some respondents really did not care about the internal or external rewards when opting for AI support. This does not conflict with SDT (Mudawy, 2025) or previous findings, given participants' positive attitudes toward using AI in speaking practice (all means were above 3.5).

Finally, students perceived various benefits from the integration of AI tools into their learning routines. Specifically, EFL learners viewed the chosen technological tools as digital thesauruses that helped them enrich their lexical resources (mean = 4.23, SD = .872). This aligns with Godwin-Jones's (2019) compensatory functions in language learning, which suggests that EFL learners may use technology to look up vocabulary and seek idea suggestions, thereby fostering engagement and self-regulated learning over the long term (Zimmerman, 2002). At the same time, flexibility and accessibility were strongly agreed to be a significant advantage of integrating AI support in speaking practice (mean = 4.18, SD = .963). This is also consistent with students' preference for available generative AI chatbots (83.9% and 74.2%, respectively) and arguments on the same benefits of AI assistance (Wafa & Sulistyaningsih, 2025; Bhar, 2026).

Interestingly, students reported feeling more confident (mean = 4.03) and less nervous (mean = 4.17) when interacting with AI than with real people in practical contexts. However, the rating for the corresponding perceived benefit was not very high for enhanced speaking confidence (mean = 3.92). This confirms that the benefits that AI tools bring about during the speaking practice process seem merely psychological and immediate. This highlights the importance of emotional safety and the reduction of the affective filter during oral practice. Ultimately, findings related to learner autonomy present another complex picture. While students agreed that technological integration may create an ideal environment for autonomous learning anytime and anywhere (mean = 4.18), the perceived benefit of becoming an independent language learner was still quite controversial (mean = 3.87, SD = 1.067). This does not contradict previous findings on autonomy (Zimmerman, 2002; Khailifa & Ginting, 2024) but shows that the sense of autonomy AI encourages remains logistical rather than cognitive.

Conclusion

Overall, by investigating EFL learners' use of AI tools in speaking classes, focusing on the types of tools, students' purposes, motivations, and perceived benefits, the study highlights the growing role of AI in EFL speaking learning and instruction. Based on data collected from 155 freshmen at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, the findings revealed that using available generative AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini outperformed other technological tools in educational settings. Additionally, students reported using AI tools mainly for vocabulary expansion, grammar checking, idea generation, and language translation. In terms of motivations, students were influenced by PU and PEOU (TAM) and by the promise that AI-supported speaking practice could reduce the affective filter (SDT). Furthermore, students perceived numerous benefits of using AI, including vocabulary development, flexibility, and idea organization. The findings suggest that AI integration can create supportive and accessible learning environments that better encourage independent speaking practice both inside and outside the classroom.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, EFL learners should develop a strategic plan to use AI tools to support their speaking development, rather than relying solely on classroom or AI interactions. Instead, they should combine AI-assisted and real-life interaction to gain valuable support while developing authentic speaking competence. Second, teachers are encouraged to integrate AI tools into speaking instruction in a more meaningful and appropriate way to better support students' speaking improvement. At the same time, they should guide students in critically evaluating AI-generated responses and using them responsibly, maximizing benefits while minimizing potential risks. Finally, institutions should consider offering more support for applying AI to language learning by organizing teacher training sessions or developing clear guidelines for integrating technology into language curricula.

Along with the presented findings, several limitations should also be acknowledged. First of all, this study only relied on self-reported questionnaire data, posing a risk of data bias and subjectivity. Second, the use of the convenience sampling technique with the participants coming from only one university limits the generalizability of the findings. Last but not least, the study focused on students' perceptions rather than measuring the actual improvements in learners' oral performance, indicating the need for further research on this issue. Additionally, future researchers may also investigate teachers' perceptions of the same matter or compare the use of AI tools across varied educational levels and learning contexts, which this study fails to cover. Since general technologies evolve rapidly, more longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how EFL learners' attitudes and uses change over time.

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Biodata

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