The Influence of the ChatterKid App on the English-speaking Skills of Tertiary Students

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ABSTRACT

Educators around the world have employed different technology-based learning tools to smooth the studying experience of learners in various fields. English teaching is no exception because English is an international communication tool that is used in many countries and communities. English speaking is considered to be one of the most challenging skills that requires mastery to be fluent in English. Numerous studies have examined the advantages and drawbacks of using technology to teach English-speaking skills. However, the number of studies focusing on the ChatterKid app is limited. Based on the mentioned facts, this study was implemented to evaluate the influence of using the ChatterKid app on students' speaking skills at Thai Nguyen University of Education in Vietnam. Ninety first-year students participated in this quasi-experimental study for 12 weeks. The tests and questionnaire were applied to collect data; SPSS analyzed the data to draw the conclusion for the study. The findings indicated that the ChatterKid app significantly improved the speaking level of students, especially fluency, and students had positive attitudes towards the use of this app.

Keywords: English-speaking skills, ChatterKid, English, attitude

Introduction

English is an international communication tool that should be fostered by tertiary students worldwide. Many universities include English as a compulsory subject in their curriculum for all majors; students must reach a certain level of English to be eligible for graduation. Speaking is considered the most difficult skill for learners when learning English; however, this skill is the most important because it creates and maintains face-to-face communication. Tertiary students encounter various difficulties when mastering their English-speaking ability (Phuong & Ngoc, 2023), which requires finding more effective teaching and learning methods to help students become fluent in English speaking.

These days, the use of technology in education is no longer a new field among teachers and students who accept that technology provides a productive learning environment and practical experiences (Qizi & Qizi, 2024). Numerous technology tools are introduced to support the learning and teaching process; with reasonable applications of these tools, users can ease their process of learning English in general and speaking English in particular. Technology

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integration in English learning helps students improve testing scores and provides opportunities to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking in an effective environment (Rintaningrum, 2023). In addition, using apps enhances students' speaking level (Luu et al., 2021; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Besides their effectiveness in improving students' speaking performances, studies reveal positive attitudes among students towards the use of technology tools in speaking classes because these tools help to reduce stress and increase motivation and confidence (Asratie et al., 2023; Sosas, 2021; Hezili, 2018; Le & Doan, 2023; Nguyen, 2021).

ChatterKid is an easy-to-use app that allows users to take photos and record their voices to make a short animation video (Ralph et al., 2023). Users can also choose the pictures in the app storage to make their videos with various decorations. Although this app can be used in both visual and oral channels, the number of studies exploring the effect of this app on students' speaking skills and attitudes towards this app is very limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the effect of ChatterKid on the speaking performance of students at Thai Nguyen University of Education and examine students' attitudes towards using this app.

The results of the study can be beneficial for teachers and students because they can choose ChatterKid as a powerful learning tool to develop students' speaking ability; moreover, this tool is also useful to create a joyful and productive learning environment for students because it motivates students to talk in freedom of pressure or anxiety. In addition, the study also brings to other researchers a new research field that can examine various aspects of language learning.

Literature review

Speaking performance

Speaking performance in certain aspects refers to the ability to start and maintain a conversation. This study's speaking performance includes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management. According to Aziz and Kashinathan (2021), grammar is the process of organizing words into sentences with no mistakes. Speakers with a broad knowledge of grammar can speak English more easily. Vocabulary is the core aspect of every language skill because speakers cannot say anything if they have no vocabulary. Pronunciation refers to the ability to pronounce a word with no mistakes. Speakers can be understood easily with good pronunciation. Fluency is the speaker's ability to speak smoothly without difficulty finding words or ideas. Discourse management is the ability to develop ideas fully and successfully with clear organization.

Technology in English-speaking teaching and learning

Technology has proven its role in the process of learning and teaching the English language, especially speaking skills. The use of technology not only promotes the interaction between teachers and students but also creates opportunities for students to develop their skills. Technology provides teachers with effective tools to teach and students with an autonomous, healthy learning space, leading to improved outcome results (Mustafa, 2018). Alsuhaim (2017) confirmed that the application of technology provides students with a productive and effective learning and practicing environment. The integration of modern technology in English-speaking classes helps increase students' speaking performance (Khanh, 2021). Together with the advancement of technology, various technological tools are introduced to assist students in English-speaking development, namely communication software, video conferencing, podcasts, artificial intelligence apps, and online learning platforms, which provide students with plenty of choices for their study process. ChatterKid is an app that allows users to add voice

and text to images. Users can take or upload photos to edit videos on this app through five easy steps, which are instructed in a short video appearing when opening the app. When an image is successfully added, students can create an open mouth on the image. When recording the voice, the mouth on the image starts talking as a lively animated film. The final version of a video can be shared in different ways. Although the maximum length of each video created on ChatterKid is thirty seconds, students can combine many videos into a longer one.

Students' attitudes towards the application of technology in speaking class

Asratie (2023) concluded that students revealed positive attitudes towards the use of educational technology and teaching tools. Students perceive the application of technology in English-speaking classrooms as a means of proving their motivation, interacting with teachers and peers, and helping them develop their speaking performance. There is a need to encourage the use of technology in English-speaking classes because of its benefits (Khan et al., 2021; Hamouda, 2020).

Many scholars have tried to explore the influence of technology on students' speaking ability and their attitudes about the use of technology in their study process. Lai et al. (2021) implemented a study to examine the influence of Flipgrid on students' speaking skills. Eighty Vietnamese students in Ho Chi Minh City, divided into two groups, participated in the study setting with the application of Flipgrid for one group. The findings indicated the development of students' speaking skills when using the Flipgrid app to study English speaking, which implied the use of apps for learning English speaking. Bui et al. (2023) investigated the learners' aims and attitudes toward using mobile phone apps to learn English in Vietnam. With the participation of 123 Vietnamese students from universities in southern Vietnam, the study indicated that students had positive attitudes when using smartphone apps, which implied more use of smartphone apps in English learning in Vietnam. Ngoc and Thanh (2023) conducted a study about non-major students' perceptions of applying Elsa Speak to improve English pronunciation. The study was carried out at Can Tho University with a total of 180 participants. The findings indicated that a majority of students revealed positive perceptions regarding the process of practicing pronunciation through the Elsa Speaking App. In addition, using this app also results in an increase in students' learning outcomes, which emphasizes the integration of artificial intelligence in language education. Thuong and Tham (2023) explore the attitudes of 101 first-year students majoring in English in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings were that students had positive attitudes towards mobile applications and would like to use these apps to study English listening skills. Duong and Suppasetseree (2024) explored the development of 30 Vietnamese students' speaking skills when using artificial intelligence voice chatbots to practice speaking. The results showed that students had significant growth in their speaking skills, including grammar, hedging words, vocabulary, and structures, which left a gap in exploring the effects of other voice chatbots on students' English-speaking skills.

Research Questions

To fulfill the aims of this study, there are two research questions posed as follows:

1. How does the use of the ChatterKid app affect the English-speaking performance of first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Education?

2. What are the attitudes of first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Education towards the use of the ChatterKid app in English-speaking classes?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The context of the study was at the Thai Nguyen University of Education, where English is a compulsory subject; students must pass three courses, namely English 1, English 2, and English 3, to graduate. The course book used in these courses was Life A2-B1, which includes 12 units; students study 4 units in each course. When finishing the English 3 course, students are expected to reach the B1 level. The study was implemented in 12 weeks in the first semester, from September to November 2023.

90 first-year students, comprising 53 females and 37 males, participated in this study. The students who majored in mathematics were randomly divided into classes A and B (hereby named the Control and Experimental groups, with 45 students in each) by the Department of Education at the beginning of the semester. It could be said that there were no significant differences in the study context and background of the two classes, which were the reasons why the researcher chose these students to be the participants in this study. The researcher asked for the agreement of the participants and the university before conducting the study.

Design of the Study

This is a quasi-experimental study using the ChatterKid app for the experimental group. The researcher was also the teacher of these two classes to guarantee that the design of the study was strictly followed. The data gathered from the pre-test, the post-test, and the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively by SPSS (Independent Samples Test for test results and One-sample T-test for the questionnaire results) to answer two research questions.

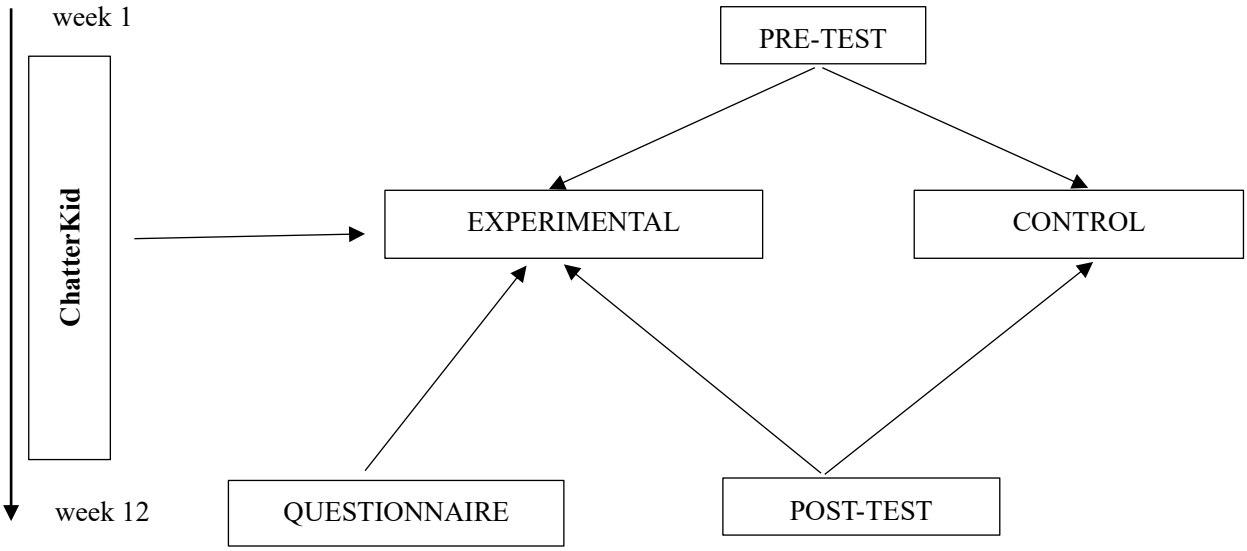
Data collection & analysis

In the first week of the study procedure, the researcher instructed the use of Chatterkid students in the Experimental group and had students complete a short demo video to ensure all students knew how to use the app. From the second week, the students in the experimental group were required to make a video (students must record their voices and answer the given topics) on the ChatterKid app and submit the video to the researcher through Google Classroom every week. The files on Google Classroom were set open, and students were encouraged to watch others' videos and give comments. Students in both groups attended the English 1 course, which was scheduled by the university (3 periods each week; students had the same learning contents and experienced the same teaching method during the study). The requirements of each video were designed based on the topics that students studied in class each week. The study topics that appeared in this study included lifestyle, competition, transport, and changes. The requirements for video making could be taken from the course book or designed by the researcher, for example: "What is your eating habit?".

Figure 1 illustrates the study's procedure. In week 1, the students in both groups were required to sit the pre-test; during the next 11 weeks, the students in the experimental group used the ChatterKid app to fulfill the researcher's tasks. In week 12, the post-test was used for both groups, while the questionnaire was delivered to the students in the Experimental group via the Google form to collect data.

Figure 1

The study procedure



The tests were adopted from VSTEP speaking tests with an evaluation of five aspects: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management; the band score ranged from 1.0 to 10. This form of the test has been used to evaluate the speaking outcome of students in all 3 English courses at the university for three years; therefore, students were familiar with this form of the test. The examiner was an invited teacher who completed the VSTEP speaking and writing marking course to guarantee the validity of the study results. The tests were employed to collect data that answered the first question of the study. The tests include three separate parts and last about 12 minutes. The first part is social interaction, with 3–6 questions the examiner asks and the student answers. The second part is solution discussion; in this part, the student is provided with a situation and three different suggested ways to tackle the situation. The student has to choose the most suitable solution to the situation and reasons for not choosing other options. The last part is topic development. The student talks about a given topic and can use the suggested ideas to develop an answer. The examiner can ask the discussion questions at the end of part 3. The questions for the test are taken from the question banks of the university, which guarantees that the level of difficulty of the pre-test and post-test are the same and that the questions cover the study contents. The format of the test was announced to the students at the beginning of the study. The tests were set in a private room, and the scores of students were recorded on specialized record papers. The personal information of the students was kept secret as per their expectations.

The questionnaire was adapted from the questionnaire of Asratie et al. (2023), who conducted a study about the effects of three educational technology tools on students' speaking performance. The questionnaire comprised 11 items, separated into two parts: the first part was about students' interest in using the ChatterKid app in learning speaking; the second part was about the stances of students about the effectiveness of the ChatterKid app in learning speaking. In the reliability test, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.71, which is a good value, according to Taber (2018).

Findings and discussion

Test results

Table 1

The comparison of speaking performance between the two examined groups

Group Statistics					Independent Samples Test		
						Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	Control group	45	1.68	0.58	Equal variances assumed	0.68	0.72
	Experimental group	45	1.63	0.58	Equal variances not assumed		0.72
Post-test	Control group	45	2.83	0.44	Equal variances assumed	0.78	0.000
	Experimental group	45	3.21	0.46	Equal variances not assumed		0.000

The statistical results (Table 1) show that in the pre-test, the speaking performance of the Control group (M=1.68, SD=0.58) and the Experimental group (M=1.63, SD=0.58) was not significantly different. The results of the Independent Sample test ($p=0.72>0.05$) confirmed the similarity in the speaking performance of the two examined groups.

In the post-test, it is noticeable that the test results of the Control group (M=2.83, SD=0.44) and the Experimental group (M=3.21, SD=0.46) had a statistical gap. Regarding the Independent Sample test, Levene's Test had p-value=0.78>0.05, while the t-test for Equality of Means had p-value=0.000<0.05. These results indicated that the speaking level of the experimental group was considerably higher than that of the control group, which implied that the application of the ChatterKid app helped improve the speaking level of the students. This finding was reinforced by Luu et al. (2021), Alsuhaim (2017), Khanh (2021), and Rintaningrum (2023), who stated that the employment of technology could enhance the speaking performance of the students. In addition, this finding was in line with the statement of Lai et al. (2021), which emphasized the growth of students' speaking skills when using apps to study speaking English in the Vietnamese context.

Table 2

The comparison of the speaking skills between the two examined groups

Group Statistics					**Independent Samples Test**		
						Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Grammar	Control group	45	2.58	0.62	Equal variances assumed	0.000	0.18
	Experimental group	45	2.738	0.45	Equal variances not assumed.		0.18
Vocabulary	Control group	45	2.98	0.54	Equal variances assumed	1.00	0.70
	Experimental group	45	3.02	0.54	Equal variances not assumed		0.70
Pronunciation	Control group	45	2.78	0.60	Equal variances assumed	0.01	0.09
	Experimental group	45	2.98	0.50	Equal variances not assumed		0.09
Fluency	Control group	45	2.87	0.66	Equal variances assumed	0.02	0.000
	Experimental group	45	3.89	0.96	Equal variances not assumed		0.000
Discourse management	Control group	45	2.84	0.74	Equal variances assumed	0.60	0.09
	Experimental group	45	3.11	0.71	Equal variances not assumed		0.09

The comparison of the speaking skills between the two investigated groups is demonstrated in Table 2. It could be said that although the Experimental group performed better in Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Discourse management, the difference between the two groups

in these skills was not significant. However, Fluency showed a striking prominence when the outcome of the Experimental group (M=3.89, SD=0.96) was significantly higher than the achievement of the Control group (M=2.87, SD=0.66) and the p-value of Levene's Test and the t-test for Equality of Means was 0.016 and 0.000 (<0.05) respectively. This result revealed that the use of the ChatterKid app improved the fluency of students, which is in line with the finding of Asratie (2023), who concluded that the use of technology learning tools improves the students' speaking performance, including fluency. Moreover, the findings are in accordance with the study results of Duong and Suppasetseree (2024), which confirmed the use of apps could increase students' speaking sub-skills in Vietnam.

In short, after 12 weeks of the study, the ChatterKid app showed a significant role in developing students' speaking performance, especially their fluency. This could be explained by the fact that the ChatterKid app created a speaking environment for students outside the classroom, and with continuous practice week by week, students accumulated enough input to enhance their output.

Questionnaire results

Table 3

Students' interest in using The ChatterKid app

Items	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
I enjoy using the ChatterKid app for my speaking practice.	45	4.78	0.47
Using the ChatterKid app enhances my speaking performance.	45	4.49	0.55
I would prefer to use the ChatterKid app to complete speaking tasks.	45	4.53	0.59
I am better at speaking English when I use the ChatterKid app.	45	4.36	0.53
Using the ChatterKid app helps me to have more accurate pronunciation.	45	4.31	0.67
I would like to use the ChatterKid app in speaking classes.	45	4.44	0.62

Table 3 demonstrates students' high level of interest when using the ChatterKid app to study English-speaking skills (all items had M>4.0). Specifically, students had enjoyment using the ChatterKid app for their speaking practice (M=4.78, SD=0.47). Students confirmed that using ChatterKid enhanced their speaking performance (M=4.49, SD=0.55). They wanted to use the ChatterKid app (M=4.53, SD=0.59). They also believed that they became better English speakers when using the ChatterKid app (M=4.36, SD=0.53). Students showed a positive point of view when asked if using ChatterKid helped them have more accurate pronunciation (M=4.31, SD=0.67). In addition, students looked forward to the ChatterKid app in speaking classes (M=4.44, SD=0.62). The findings implied that the use of the ChatterKid app brought a positive experience to students, which is in accordance with Qizi and Qizi (2024), Asratie et al. (2023), Sosas (2021), whose confirmation was that the employment of technology provided students with a productive and low-stress learning environment. The findings also matched the confirmations of Bui et al. (2023), Ngoc and Thanh (2023), and Thuong and Tham (2023), which stated that Vietnamese students had positive attitudes when using technology for their studies.

Table 4

Students' viewpoint on the effectiveness of the ChatterKid app

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The ChatterKid app improves your English grammar.	45	4.33	0.71
The ChatterKid app improves your English vocabulary.	45	4.11	0.68
The ChatterKid app develops your English pronunciation.	45	3.93	0.72
The ChatterKid app increases your English fluency.	45	4.42	0.58
The ChatterKid app enhances your English discourse management.	45	4.02	0.72

Table 4 was about the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the ChatterKid app. Students agreed that their English grammar had improved when using ChatterKid (M=4.33, SD=0.71). Students had similar attitudes about the effectiveness of this app on their vocabulary (M=4.11, SD=0.68). Students perceived that ChatterKid increased their English vocabulary with M=3.93, SD=0.72. The items with M=4.42 and SD=0.58 implied that students demonstrated an agreement that ChatterKid developed students' English fluency. Discourse management was also believed to be enhanced (M=4.02, SD=0.72). These findings align with the statement of Luu et al. (2021) and Duong and Suppasetseree (2024), which exhibited that the employment of technology in English classes helped develop students' speaking skills.

The questionnaire's findings indicated students' positive attitudes towards using the ChatterKid app to study English-speaking skills. These attitudes could be understood by the fact that with ChatterKid, students can make videos from their self-taken photos and make these photos unique with various decoration lists, which brings enjoyment to their studying process. In addition, this app allows students to speak in their own environment, easing anxiety when speaking in front of classmates and teachers.

Conclusion

To evaluate the influence of ChatterKid on the English-speaking performance of first-year students who are studying at Thai Nguyen University of Education and exploring students' attitudes towards the use of ChatterKid in English-speaking classes, the researcher conducted a 12-week study to seek answers to the questions raised at the beginning of the study. Considering the first research question, the results indicated that students' speaking performance significantly increased when comparing the test outputs of the Control group (M=2.83) and the Experimental group (M=3.21). In addition, the findings revealed fluency was the skill that had considerable development compared to other investigated skills, with the M of the Control group = 2.87 and the Experimental group = 3.89. In relation to the second research question, the students who used the ChatterKid app to learn English-speaking skills had positive attitudes towards the use of this app. The students had a high level of interest (all investigated aspects > 4.0), and the rate of effectiveness of this app in increasing their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management was significantly high (M ranging from 3.9 to 4.4). The results indicated that ChatterKid should be used as an English-speaking learning tool to help students improve their speaking performance with enjoyment and comfort.

The researcher realizes that certain limitations of this study should be mentioned to improve future studies. Firstly, the number of sample subjects in the study was small, which did not allow the researcher to analyze the influence of ChatterKid on a larger scale. Secondly, the topics that students practiced in this study were limited to the B1 level, possibly preventing them from expanding their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse management. Hence, other researchers should conduct studies on a larger scale and on more varied speaking topics. Thirdly, more aspects, such as motivation and autonomy, should be investigated when using technology-based learning tools to study English. Lastly, studies that suggest more ways of applying technology to teaching English should be conducted in the future.

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Biodata

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