

برنامج Chat GPT كشريك في التحدث وعلاقته بتقليل قلق التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت

سهى حميد عبيد

وزارة التربية | مديرية تربية صلاح الدين | ثانوية تكريت للمتميزين الذكية | العراق | صلاح الدين

البريد الإلكتروني Email : [Suha.hameed777@gmail.com](mailto:Suha.hameed777@gmail.com)

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### كيفية اقتباس البحث

عبيد ، سهى حميد، برنامج Chat GPT كشريك في التحدث وعلاقته بتقليل قلق التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، حزيران 2026، المجلد: 16، العدد: 6.

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## ChatGPT as a Speaking Partner and Its Association with Reduced Speaking Anxiety among Online EFL Learners

### ChatGPT as a Speaking Partner and Its Association with Reduced Speaking Anxiety among Online EFL Learners

**Suha Hameed Obaid**

Ministry of Education\ Salah Al Deen Education Directorate\ Tikrit  
Clever high school for distinguished Students

**Keywords :** Chat GPT; EFL learners; online learning, speaking practice, foreign language anxiety.

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#### ملخص

من أبرز الصعوبات النفسية التي يواجهها المتعلمون في تطوير مهاراتهم الشفهية، لا سيما في سياقات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت، ندرة التفاعل الشفهي الفوري، وإمكانية نشوء فجوة نفسية بين المتعلمين، مما يُؤدّد لديهم خوفاً من ارتكاب الأخطاء عند التفاعل مع الآخرين. ومع التطور السريع في مجال الذكاء الاصطناعي التوليدي، يُعدّ Chat GPT خياراً مناسباً كأداة تفاعلية تُتيح للمتعلمين ممارسة التحدث بشكل فردي، دون أي ضغوط، وبكميات كبيرة، وفي بيئة مريحة. تناولت هذه الدراسة استخدام Chat GPT كشريك في المحادثة بهدف تخفيف قلق التحدث لدى المشاركين في دورة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت. استخدمت الدراسة تصميمًا شبه تجريبيًا لمجموعة واحدة مع اختبار قبلي وبعدي، وشملت 42 متعلمًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من المستوى المتوسط، شاركوا في برنامج تدريبي على التحدث مدعوم بـ Chat GPT لمدة ستة أسابيع. باستخدام نسخة محدثة من مقياس قلق التحدث في الصف، تم توزيع استبيان لقياس ثقة التحدث، إلى جانب سجلات تأمل أسبوعية

ومقابلات شبه منظمة لجمع البيانات. أظهرت النتائج الكمية انخفاضاً ملحوظاً (متوسط القلق من 3.71 إلى 2.84 على مقياس من خمس نقاط) في قلق التحدث لدى المشاركين بعد التدخل [p > 0.05].

## Abstract

One of the most enduring affective difficulties that learners encounter in developing oral production skills, especially within EFL online learning contexts, is that instant spoken interaction is scarce and psychological distance between peers can develop, which invites a fear-of-making-mistakes syndrome when interacting with others. The rapid advancement in generative artificial intelligence makes Chat GPT a good candidate to be used as an interactive tool providing learners with no-stakes, high-volume, low-pressure, individual-focused speaking practice. This study examined the use of Chat GPT as a speaking partner in an effort to mitigate participants' speaking anxiety while taking part in an online EFL course. The study used a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design and involved 42 intermediate-level EFL learners who took part in six weeks of Chat GPT-supported speaking intervention. Using an updated version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, a speaking-confidence questionnaire was administered alongside weekly reflection logs and semi-structured interviews for data collection. The quantitative results demonstrated significant decreases (Mean anxiety 3.71→2.84 on a five-point scale) in participant speaking anxiety following the intervention [p

## 1.Introduction

It is generally accepted that speaking, although crucial for many learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), has been identified as one of the most debilitating skills in learning EFL. From an oracy perspective, it involves exercising vocabulary alongside grammatical and pronunciation norms in the effort to achieve fluency while simultaneously transacting meaning as a listener, a wild endeavour for many. On the other hand, speaking normally takes place in real time, while reading or writing is not limited by the on-time delivery consequences of statements before others hear them, and often allows for at least some extent of revision. Consequently, the fear of making these mistakes leads many EFL learners to experience embarrassment or negative evaluation without communication breakdowns. However, these are also linked with emotional barriers that may come in the way of learners actively engaging in speaking without feeling embarrassed and might even hinder



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their overall language development. It has been well-recognized as a salient affective factor in second and foreign language acquisition (SLA/FLA) for many years. Foreign language anxiety was conceptualised as a situation-specific form of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986) related to situations such as communication apprehension, test-taking anxieties and fears over negative evaluation. Speaking anxiety is particularly notable among these dimensions, because speaking usually places learners out in the open and under immediate scrutiny. Students with anxiety may refrain from raising their hands or participating in oral practice but respond by saying canned expressions, limiting the length of responses to ones that they have memorised (Chan & Wu, 2019), and shying away from communicative tasks. The problem of limits during speaking practice is complicated, as online EFL learners have little chance for spontaneous oral production and find it uncomfortable to speak via technology.

In recent years, online EFL learning has seen tremendous growth, providing flexibility and accessibility in different geographical regions and educational contexts. But then, online courses also create problems for speaking growth. They watch classes with cameras turned off, refrain from participating via microphones and have minimal interaction with peers or instructors. Phrased differently, learners must be encouraged to practice speaking outside the specific hours allocated for class meetings. Traditional answers (e.g., conversation partners, language clubs, or teacher-led speaking levels) are beneficial but not always accessible, especially to individuals who learn strictly online or no longer have access to an English-speaking network.

There are new developments in artificial intelligence that are starting to provide opportunities for learning a language. A generative AI chatbot can do all of these things—simulate interactive conversations, respond to learner input, generate prompts, provide corrective feedback and level different proficiency levels. Chat GPT can be accessed privately, multiple times and at your own pace, unlike traditional speaking practice. In particular, these features are helpful for the anxious EFL learners who require a less-pressure environment before speaking to teachers or peers. Unlike many language teachers, Chat GPT expresses no impatience or ridicule and passes no social judgments, so learners may feel freer to experiment without fear of hurting someone's feelings as well.

In this study, Chat GPT as a speaking partner in an online EFL course is investigated, and it further examines whether or not frequent interaction with the virtual character can decrease students' speaking anxiety. During a period of six weeks, this study targeted an experimental group at the

intermediate level who used Chat GPT for guided speaking tasks. It investigates both quantitative changes in anxiety level and qualitative perceptions regarding the changes in learners' confidence, willingness to speak, and practice speaking due to Chat GPT.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

However, a significant number of the learners in teaching settings experience speaking anxiety, leading to having little voice and involvement in oral communication tasks. This is especially evident in online EFL courses where learners often find it hard to get time to speak and socialise. Online facilitators can teach classes with it, but most online platforms do not offer sufficient practice options for speaking individually. When learners are hesitant about committing a mistake in front of their colleagues, they can stay muted while classes unfold online and miss the opportunity to practice fluency as well as to build trust.

On the other hand, Chat GPT is well-known, and learners are starting to use it a lot as language support. Yet, there is a clear need for structured work on possible applications of Chat GPT as an actual speaking partner to lessen the level of anxiety from EFL course participants in online classes. Writers about the use of Chat GPT in education often emphasise writing, academic integrity or learning support, but almost never its possible affective role to help speaking. Thus, the current study is designed to solve this problem: While online EFL learners frequently suffer from speaking anxiety and receive little low-pressure practice in speaking, it remains an open question as to whether such fears can be mitigated through interfacing with a structured conversational partner like Chat GPT.

### **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this research is to examine whether participants in an online EFL course practice speaking with Chat GPT can alleviate their learning anxiety. The study investigates changes in learners' speaking anxiety after a 6-week Chat GPT-supported speaking intervention and explores how learners perceive the use of Chat GPT as an agent for increased confidence to speak orally.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

The study aims to accomplish the following:

Before employing Chat GPT as a speaking partner, the assessment of speaking anxiety in online EFL course participants should be conducted.

1. To investigate how participants perceive Chat GPT as a low-stakes conversation partner.

2. To find out what features of Chat GPT participants think may help them with their speaking anxiety.





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3.To understand the complications and limitations of conversation with Chat GPT for practising English speaking.

### 1.4.Research Questions

To answer the research questions outlined, this study is directed by

1.How much speaking anxiety do online EFL course participants have when they are using Chat GPT as a speaking partner?

2.Is there a significant difference in speaking anxiety scores between participants before and after the Chat GPT-supported speaking intervention?

3.What perceived roles does Chat GPT have in being associated with reducing the speaking anxiety of participants?

4.What practice features of Chat GPT-supported speaking do participants like the most?

5.What challenges do participants face with Chat GPT?

### 1.5.Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis is tested in the study:

Chat GPT can significantly be associated with decreasing the speaking anxiety of participants in an online EFL course. Our null hypothesis is stated as follows:

There is no statistically significant difference in online EFL course-taking participants' speaking anxiety before and after using Chat GPT as a virtual speaking partner.

### 2.Significance of the Study

This work is beneficial for EFL teachers, online course designers, as well as learners and researchers in the field of technology-enhanced language learning. For teachers, the study is informative for using Chat GPT as a supplement rather than replacing human interaction in speaking instruction. It presents a useful framework for online course designers to integrate AI-supported speaking tasks in virtual learning spaces. Also, in practical terms, the study identifies Chat GPT as a means to deliver private and repetition-based speaking practice that fosters confidence amongst learners. The study adds to scholarship on AI in language teaching, especially with the affective facet of speaking anxiety.

Another reason why the study is important relates to a real challenge in EFL learning: students who have a good grasp of grammar and vocabulary, but are reluctant to speak. The present study investigates what it means to train Chat GPT as a speaking partner and whether the interaction in an AI-mediated manner helps overcome the seeming contradiction between the two speaking partners in terms of language, knowledge, loyalty of some type, yet independence manifested through religion and traditional values/oral performance. Each will be specified



later; these are translated from my example on infidelity. However, if not careful, Chat GPT may act as a crutch for learners to gain the confidence required before pulling the trigger of human-to-human communication.

### **3.Scope of the Study**

The subjects of the current study are intermediate-level EFL learners who have registered in an online English-speaking course. The intervention consisted of six weeks, during which participants were instructed to conduct structured speaking tasks using Chat GPT. The research focused on speaking anxiety, speaking confidence, and learner perceptions. It was not intended as a measure of total oral proficiency development along all scales/realms of speaking competence, though the perceived fluency and confidence experience of the participants was examined. The results are specific to the study sample and context, so generalisation of findings to all EFL learners should be made judiciously.

### **4.Definition of Key Terms**

**Chat GPT:** Chat GPT in this research paper is a generative AI chatbot, which learners have been interacting with to serve as a speaking partner in practising English. It was used by the participants for generating questions, responding to prompts, simulating conversations and also providing feedback on their answers or practice speaking tasks.

**Speaking Anxiety:** Speaking anxiety comprises an array of learners' nervousness, fear, tension or discomfort associated with oral English use in communicative/evaluative situations.

**EFL learners:** EFL learners are individuals who learn English in a context where the English language is not used in their daily lives.

**Online EFL course:** An online English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course is a skill offered digitally, remotely, presenting the basic knowledge of using English overseas.

**Speaking partner:** A speaking partner is an interlocutor or a conversation support tool that works on oral communication.

### **5.Literature Review**

#### **5.1.Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety**

Foreign language anxiety is a well-known phenomenon in the realm of language education. Horwitz et al. (1986). Language anxiety as a specific anxiety (1999, in press). As part of high-stakes contexts, the anxiety learners feel when attempting to understand and produce or perform a foreign language. Speaking anxiety is one of the highest forms of this type, as oral communication involves performance in real time and exposes learners to potential judgment by others.

There are many reasons behind speaking anxiety, which include poor vocabulary, imperfect pronunciation of words or sounds and fear of





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making a grammatical error, preparation issues, lack of self-confidence that stems from previous experience alone, like being scorned by your authority figure or peers. According to Young (1991), language anxiety is connected with learner beliefs, teacher beliefs related to practices and procedures carried out in classrooms, as well as the type of testing methods used by teachers throughout their lessons. The anxiety in speaking classes is raised when learners are asked to speak unexpectedly, corrected harshly, compared with more fluent classmates or assessed publicly.

MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) have stated that anxiety could be an influential factor on cognitive processing in language learning. For anxious learners, concentration and retrieval of vocabulary can be a challenge, followed by organisation or even speech production. In other words, anxiety not only impairs emotions, but it can also diminish speaking itself. For instance, when students are anxious, they may have a clear idea of what to say but do not manage to produce the right words. In the long run, chronic anxiety may result in evasion, silence and loss of motivation.

### **5.2. Panic of talking or performance anxiety in Online EFL Courses**

Online EFL courses are the most flexible mode of delivery, and they provide language instruction to learners regardless of where they live. Yet, attending online classes does NOT bring a solution for speaking anxiety at the same time. Other students may feel less pressure to perform in an online environment, but this can also lead to passivity for some who are able to hide behind silent mics or turned-off cameras. Teachers can limit students' speaking time individually in virtual classrooms. Discussing in groups can be limited by the lack of internet, uneven participation or unwillingness to speak from learners.

The online environment may also diminish natural communication cues, including eye contact and body language, as well as on-the-spot support from peers. Learners might feel anxious about their pronunciation, surrounding noise, technical issues or being recorded. Some of these problems could make speaking anxiety worse. Thus, specific approaches are needed in the context of online EFL courses to promote oral contribution and create safe speaking practice environments.

### **5.3. Artificial Intelligence in EFL Learning**

The existence of artificial intelligence has made its way into the language education sphere via chatbots, automated feedback systems, pronunciation tools, in addition to translation purposes, as well as adaptive learning platforms. Artificial Intelligence tools provide immediate feedback and relevant practices that align with individual



needs. Due to their ability to converse with users, AI chatbots are particularly well-suited for EFL contexts as they offer learners interactive input and output.

Research has also indicated the capacity of AI-driven conversational tools to facilitate speaking practice via increased English exposure, interaction and lowered fear of negative evaluation. Chatbots represent low-stakes practice opportunities for learners who may not feel comfortable practising with a human interlocutor. This could encourage learners to be more accepting of straying off script and getting used to using the language in a typical communication scenario.

#### **5.4. Chat GPT as a Speaking Partner**

Chat GPT has the ability to produce flexible, context-sensitive and extended responses, which is a major departure from many of its predecessors. You can role-play conversations, ask follow-up questions for elaboration, correct what you say if needed, simplify words and phrases when they are too difficult to understand or explain new vocabulary word by word until each one is very clear how it works... And adapt a topic based on your interests. When it comes to speaking practice, by reading the way Chat GPT answers aloud, dictating responses into speech-to-text tools like Otter.ai or even taking advantage of voice conversation features where they are integrated in (or have access otherwise) inside systems, is a great tool for this—you can also make scripted dialogues that get generated and then turned around.

Chat GPT can play the role of a speaking partner and, as such, helps in alleviating anxiety. Here are a few ways to help with your anxious speech problems: First, it offers privacy. With others not able to hear their mistakes, learners can practice without. Second, it allows repetition. That way, the learners are able to repeat their tasks several times until they reach a level of confidence. Third, it provides learner control. Learners set the topic, difficulty, speed, and feedback format. Fourth, it is an outside-of-class timeslot which increases pattern-practice. Fifth, it can answer patiently and non judgmentally.

However, Chat GPT also has limitations. At times it can give broken explanations, sounding awkward or analyse the writing too generally. Real communication encompasses emotion, body language, cultural nuance and random social interactions that it can never fully replace. For one thing, if tasks are unguided by the teacher, learners can become too reliant on AI. Chat GPT must also be utilised as an additional activity within a solid pedagogical context.





## **6.Theoretical Framework**

**Design Conceptual Framework** The underpinning three main theoretical foundations of this study are foreign language anxiety theory (Krashen, 1981; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), affective filter theory (R. C. Anderson et al., 2016), and sociocultural orientations to second language acquisition theories, such as collective self-efficacy or identity beliefs. (12).

To start, the study is informed by Horwitz et al.'s (1986) foreign language anxiety theory, which distinguishes three components of English learners. Chat GPT is hypothesised to have the potential to decrease fear of negative evaluation through creating a nonjudgmental and private speaking context in this study.

Secondly, the research is related to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. In this view, low anxiety and high motivation and confidence are the conditions under which learners acquire language best. Anything that reduces the anxiety of accessing Chat GPT can help learners be open to input and subsequently output.

Third, the study is connected to culture (sociocultural theory), such as interaction/ mediated learning and scaffolding. Chat GPT is a mediating tool that can guide learners with prompts, samples, corrections and scaffolding in conversation. Chat GPT is not a human teacher, but it can provide organised interaction in which learners practice using language within their zone of proximal development.

While recent studies have investigated the potential of Chat GPT in EFL learning, most research has either reported on writing support (e.g., Huang et al. 2023; Poudel & Dey, 2023), learner perception and academic honesty (i.e., Crossley 2022); others general language skills or integrated with translation-related activities like using L1 to enhance cognitive engagement during reading tasks whereas few have been done that specifically look at CHATGTP based speaking assessment practices regarding English as a foreign/second Language Acquisition process. However, limited studies have explicitly examined Chat GPT as a speaking partner in reducing speaking anxiety for EFL learners studying with online courses. Also, most online learners do not get enough speaking opportunities outside class. This study aims to fill in this gap by investigating both statistical shifts of speaking anxiety as well as qualitative perceptions following Chat GPT-based focused practice.

## **7.Methodology**

### **7.1.Research Design**

**Design** We used a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design and complementary qualitative data. This design was chosen because the



study aims at measuring changes, if any, in participants' speaking anxiety before and after a Chat GPT-supported speaking intervention. Qualitative data were also collected to explore the participants' experiences of, perceptions about and challenges with an intervention.

#### Participants

The participants comprised 42 male and female intermediate-level EFL learners required to take part in a six-week online English-speaking course. They were chosen through purposive sampling as they participated actively in the course and possessed basic digital literacy skills. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 31 years ( $M = 23.6$ ). Among the respondents, 25 were females, and 17 were men. All participants (head trauma sufferers, e.g. athletes) reported that their native language was not English and they did/do reside in a country where residents were less than the majority of native-English speakers at the time this study occurred.

Prior to the intervention, participants filled in a background information sheet. The majority of participants stated they experienced nerves speaking English in front of someone else. A number reported that they comprehended written English better than oral and only spoke when necessary. This resulted in a passerby group that is fitting for examining the impact of Chat GPT on speaking anxiety.

#### 7.2. Instruments

This study used four different instruments.

An adapted Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale was used to assess participants' speaking anxiety pre-test and post-test of the intervention. The scale was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCA (Horwitz et al., 1986). (1986) modified for online EFL speaking concepts. The scale comprised 24 items scored on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The higher the scores, the more speaking anxiety there was.

Secondly, one of the speaking-confidence questionnaires is adopted to assess self-perceived confidence in using the English language (confidence), intention to engage in an oral discussion or interaction with others (engagement) and something comfortable learning from natural conversations, further as someone working in business uses conversational habits, including holding on to a storyline; interpersonal skills: Students FULL Group source. There were 12 items in the Likert-scale form.

Third, weekly reflection logs were collected. After each Chat GPT speaking input, participants wrote short reflections. They reflected on





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how they felt before and after the speaking practice, any challenges that they faced, and whether or not Chat GPT made them feel more confident. Fourth, 12 people participated in semi-structured interviews following the intervention. The interviews probed participants on their impressions of Chat GPT, the difference in levels of anxiety witnessed and characteristics that were found to be helpful or limiting.

### 7.3. Reliability and Validity

In addition, to guarantee reliability, the adapted speaking anxiety scale was given as a pre-test on 10 EFL learners who did not take part in this study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the entire scale was 89, indicating high internal consistency. The speaking-confidence questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .86. This was followed by experts assessing the content validity of its items, during which two EFL instructors and one applied linguistics researcher examined them.

### 7.4. Intervention Procedures

The intervention lasted six weeks. They took part in one regular online EFLRA speaking class weekly, and performed two more Chat GPT-supported talking practice sessions outside the classroom. The durations of each Chat GPT session were about 20–30 minutes. To encourage more stylised use of the tool, participants were set weekly tasks.

Participants underwent training in the use of Chat GPT responsibly for speaking practice in Week 1. They learned how to ask Chat GPT for a speaking partner, request corrections if they made mistakes while communicating with it, or ask simple questions from the chatbot and practice role plays. They were also told that Chat GPT could be wrong and that some needed guidance from a teacher.

Participants then practised self-introducing and exchanging personal information in Week 2. They told Chat GPT to interview them and give soft feedback.

The main activities included in Week 3 were daily-life conversations, such as ordering food, asking for directions or describing routines.

In Week 4, they applied opinion-based speaking tasks such as agreeing and disagreeing with statements and also expressing preferences.

Week 5: Practising academic and professional speaking situations (e.g., short presentations, job interview questions, explaining study goals).

Week 6: Final speaking simulation using Chat GPT as an examiner or conversation partner. After the treatment, participants took a posttest questionnaire and final reflection.

Prompts from Participants Using Chat GPT

Respondents were instructed to use prompts like the following:



Give me basic inquiries about what a day in my life looks like. For each answer, only fix the most significant issue and encourage me.

e.g., “Act like I have a job interview with you. Use intermediate English and ask one question at a time.

F: Ask Me Questions About What I Think About Online Learning. Be gentle and correct all my mistakes in grammar or vocabulary.

“Help me practice speaking for two minutes about my favourite hobby. Based on fluency, vocabulary and clarity, we give a score.

### **7.5.Data Collection Procedures**

The groundwork consisted of three phases of data collection. Three measures were administered before and after the intervention: (1) the pretest speaking anxiety scale, as well as a measure of estimating their own confidence in anticipated speech performance. Second, participants performed weekly Chat GPT speaking tasks and provided logs highlighting their reflections. Third, the posttest questionnaires were completed by participants in week 6, and selected participants took part in participant interviews.

Participation was driven voluntarily, and participants were also told that their responses would only be used for research purposes. Their names were coded to maintain anonymity.

### **7.6.Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed via descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test. Brackets [-] were used to calculate means and standard deviations for the pretest and posttest speaking anxiety scores. The significance of the difference between pretest and posttest scores was determined using a paired-samples t-test.

The study analysed qualitative data from reflection logs and interviews thematically. The researcher read through the responses multiple times, coded for prevalent ideas and categorised these codes into higher-order themes. The predominant themes were then contrasted with the quantitative findings to give a more comprehensive interpretation of the results.

## **8.Results**

### **8.1.Overview of Quantitative Results**

The quantitative data were analysed to see whether the speaking anxiety of participants was changed after six weeks of Chat GPT-supportive spoken practice. The means of the adapted Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale scores obtained in pretest and posttest were calculated by running descriptive statistics. Next, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to see if the difference between pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant.





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The results indicated that using Chat GPT as a speaking partner reduced participants' speaking anxiety. Participants' speaking anxiety score before the intervention was 3.71 on average, suggesting a relatively high level of speaking anxiety prior to the treatment process. After the intervention, the mean score is  $(10-2.84)=7.16 \Rightarrow \text{SYMPTOMATIC}(\downarrow)$ , which indicates moderate anxiety. The decrease indicates that participants were less anxious when speaking English (after practising with Chat GPT).

### Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Anxiety

**(Table 1): Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Anxiety Scores Before and After the Intervention**

Measurement	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pretest speaking anxiety	42	3.71	0.52	2.68	4.72
Posttest speaking anxiety	42	2.84	0.57	1.76	4.08

The mean baseline score of speaking anxiety is 89.04, which was reduced by -0.87 points after the intervention, as shown in Table 1. The standard deviation was also quite similar for both measurements, and therefore, the improvement in anxiety was concentrated not just on a handful of subjects but over much of the group.

### Paired-Samples *t* Test

A paired-samples *t*-test was performed to compare speaking anxiety scores of participants before and after the Chat GPT-supported Speaking intervention. The difference between pretest:  $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .52$  and posttest was measured by a scale from 0 to for the test of Gujarati language,  $t(41) = .84$ , which was statistically significant,  $p < .001$ . The effect size was large, Cohen's  $d = 1.52$ , indicating the reduction in speaking anxiety was a robust impact of the intervention.

**(Table 2): Paired-Samples *t* Test for Speaking Anxiety Scores**

Comparison	Mean Difference	SD Difference	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Pretest-Posttest	0.87	0.57	9.86	41	< .001	1.52

### Posttest

The null hypothesis was rejected. The results support the research hypothesis that there is a statistically significant reduction in online EFL course participants' speaking anxiety after using Chat GPT as a speaking partner.

### Speaking Confidence Results

In addition to measuring speaking anxiety, the study examined changes in participants' self-reported speaking confidence. The speaking-confidence



questionnaire showed an increase in confidence after the intervention. The mean confidence score increased from 2.63 before the intervention to 3.58 after the intervention.

**Table**

3

*Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Confidence Scores*

Measurement	N	Mean	SD
Pretest speaking confidence	42	2.63	0.61
Posttest speaking confidence	42	3.58	0.54

This increase was statistically significant as shown by a paired-samples t test,  $t(41) = 10.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.61$ . The finding implies that the Chat GPT tool-assisted speaking practice not only alleviates anxiety but also makes participants more confident in using English.

**Item-Level Changes in Speaking Anxiety**

Item-level comparisons indicated that the largest decreases were observed for items pertaining to fear of mistakes, fear of negative evaluation and hesitant speaking. As an example, the item It makes me nervous to have to speak English in front of others dropped from a mean of 4.12 to 3.05. Here are a few examples from our results: The statement I fear my English may be wrong fell almost an entire point (from 4.01 to 3). «I am afraid that people will laugh at my mistakes with the English language, dropping off by more than one whole point, nearly half of its original value! Table of results for first part: The item, I only speak English when absolutely necessary and/or if physically forced to do so went from 3.78→2.86.

**Table**

4

*Selected Item-Level Changes in Speaking Anxiety*

Item	Pretest M	Posttest M	Mean Difference
I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of others.	4.12	3.05	1.07
I worry that others will laugh at my English mistakes.	3.96	2.71	1.25
I avoid	3.78	2.86	0.92





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Item	Pretest M	Posttest M	Mean Difference
speaking English unless I am required to do so.			
I feel confused when I cannot find the right words while speaking.	3.88	3.02	0.86
I feel more comfortable practising English alone before speaking with others.	4.21	4.35	-0.14

The final item rose slightly because many respondents reported being more comfortable in private preparation. This result would not be inconsistent with a net decrease in anxiety; rather, it indicates that learners preferred to practice privately first before giving presentations publicly.

### Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data were analysed thematically (by-weekly reflection logs and semi-structured interviews). Results: Four themes were identified: 1) nonjudgmental practice environment, 2) increased speaking frequency, and improved ability to choose the right words with useful immediate feedback, scaffolding practices and limitations of AI-based spoken output conversation.

#### Theme 1: Chat GPT Provided a Nonjudgmental Training Space

The most non-repetitive pattern was that Chat GPT provided participants with a sense of safety when practising English. For instance, many participants described that they were less fearful of making mistakes because Chat GPT avoided emotional criticism and social comparison with classmates. This alleviated the level of embarrassment, a top contributor to dread in speaking.

As one participant said, "When I speak with classmates, there is too much thinking...in mistakes. Using Chat GPT, I would not feel embarrassed to



take a second stab at it. Another participant noted, “You can think of it as an exercise before the real class. It is easy, I am not pressured because no one is watching me.

These replies provide further evidence that Chat GPT served as a low-stakes simulation to try out language prior to engaging in real-world human conversation.

Theme 2: From those themes, the speaking frequency now speaks for itself with Chat GPT.

Chat GPT was also found to encourage participants to a greater degree in practising. The available tool allowed learners to practice outside class, without the opportunity cost of waiting for a teacher or partner. Some participants said they practised late at night, right before class or during free time.

"A participant shared in a weekly reflection: `Before this course, I only spoke English during class. I now practice on Chat GPT two or three times a week. “The other person said, “It helped me in building the habit. Even a short practice made me feel better.

The study highlights that accessibility and convenience were key in lowering anxiety. What practising more often seemed to do was make the speech itself feel less foreign and intimidating.

Theme 3: Chat GPT offered personalised feedback and scaffolding.

The feature participants appreciated most was prompting/correcting/examples/alternative expressions in Chat GPT. Numerous learners requested Chat GPT to fix their grammar, recommend improved vocabulary or format their responses better. Several participants pointed out that privately receiving feedback was more comfortable than being publicly corrected by a teacher in front of classmates.

According to one participant, “I liked it when Chat GPT would correct only the major errors. When I failed to correct enough, it made me nervous, but a minimal correction helped. Another participant elaborated, “It was better sentences than I repeated out loud. This helped me to be more fluent in my speech.

Chat GPT, which may be presented as a speech buddy to students in practice speaking when responsive feedback is not preferred, is implicated because the findings indicate Chat GPT can facilitate low-pressure scaffolding for both learner responses and notice gaps without amplifying potential stress surrounding social anxiety.

Theme 4: Chat GPT Enabled Learners to Practice Interacting with Humans





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While participants engaged Chat GPT as a speaking partner, the study found that few people viewed it as replacing human communication. Rather, they looked at it as a tool for preparation. Explain Practice with Chat GPT to speak: Students expressed that practice using the work opportunity Chat GPT prepared them more effectively for speaking in front of teachers or interviewers.

The most common ones included: "After having some practice with Chat GPT, I answered more easily in the online class. A third added, "It was a boost of confidence before talking with real people. I need real conversation still, but Chat GPT helped me get started.

This theme resonates because it suggests that Chat GPT may find its best utility as part of a larger communicative ecosystem involving human beings.

### Theme 5: Limitations of Chat GPT as a Conversational Partner

Notwithstanding the positive findings, participants highlighted some limitations. To begin with, some participants mentioned that Chat GPT feedback was often too generic. Second, participants indicated that Chat GPT could not perfect pronunciation unless tools for voice or speech recognition were employed. Lastly, a few participants found that Chat GPT used less emotion than a natural human conversation. Fourth, some participants expressed concern about becoming too reliant on AI-generated answers.

As one participant put it, "Sometimes the answer from Chat GPT is perfect for my situation, but I can not speak in this way. A different participant stated, 'It's like helpful, but it's not the same as speaking to a human.

These limitations indicate that the usage of Chat GPT must be performed cautiously and ideally under the supervision of a teacher. It is not clear how you can overcome this gap entirely, as learners need guidance (both face-to-face and remote) around making use of AI feedback critically and transferring practice into authentic oral communication.

### 9. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether Chat GPT as a speaking partner could improve the speaking anxiety level among EFL learners in online courses. Results demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in speaking anxiety following the six-week treatment. Additionally, participants reported more confidence talking and that they were now willing to practice English.

Anxiety reduction is attributed to the low-pressure environment of Chat GPT-supported speaking practice. The causes of anxiety in the TOEFL context also include fear of negative evaluation, communication



apprehension and [120] a concern about making mistakes. By allowing learners to practice in private, and as often as they desire, Chat GPT alleviated some of those pressures. Chat GPT conversations did not expose learners to immediate peer judgment (as in classroom speaking tasks). This allowed participants to focus more on communication than on embarrassment.

The results support language anxiety theory as reflected by the notion that fear of negative evaluation can curb oral engagement. Even if the learners have more than enough knowledge of the language, they may not speak it any longer when a sense of being judged is present. Chat GPT helped to create a safer psychological space, which enabled participants to take greater risks and generate more language.

These findings also offer support to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. High levels of anxiety will prevent learners from adequately processing input and producing output. Chat GPT reduced anxiety levels, which may have lowered the affective filter and allowed learners to complete English-speaking tasks with greater ease. The increase in confidence also indicates that emotional preparedness is another layer of speakership to work on.

An important discovery is that Chat GPT made speaking more frequent. However, the majority of EFL learners do not meet English-speaking partners who practice regularly. Synchronous online courses are at risk of becoming even worse because class time is limited, so learners may just sit in an inactive way. To fill this gap, Chat GPT provided an opportunity for accessible speaking practice away from class. Practising over and over again seemed to make speaking more familiar, less intimidating.

Qualitative results also suggested that participants appreciated tailored feedback. Chat GPT also permitted learners to type in a request for softer corrections, easier questions or higher-level expressions. This allowed learners to control the level of challenge. Control is also important for anxious learners, as difficult speaking tasks introduced suddenly can be more stressful. It enabled learners to change the level and speed of interaction as per their desires.

But experts warn that this should not be read as a sign that Chat GPT can substitute for teachers or human speaking partners. Researchers did not confuse Chat GPT with empathy, real human interaction, or even accurate pronunciation feedback in certain situations. This further backs the need for AI tools to be used as supplementary learning material. The need for human interaction in terms of acquiring practical competence, emotional expression and reception, cultural knowledge or depth avoidance from





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someone else answerable to you (instead of an algorithm) is still very much needed.

The current results also fit available debates regarding AI-assisted language learning, doi:10.1037/car0000752. Although AI tools can deliver low-pressure practice with personalised feedback, just because you've got everything in a format that learners want does not automatically mean they have less anxiety. However, there are also some disadvantages, such as the confusion that learners feel from AI responses or Chat GPT being used improperly by simply copying model answers instead of generating their own. As such, the successful integration of AI systems is contingent upon thoughtful task design, effective teacher direction, learner instruction and responsible use.

### 9.1. Pedagogical Implications

This study has several implications for EFL teachers and designers of online courses: firstly, integration of Chat GPT as a pre-speaking preparation tool. Teachers can ask learners to practice with Chat GPT before entering live discussions, oral presentations or interviews. This might also enable anxious learners to rehearse concepts and feel confident.

Secondly, not to let learners approach Chat GPT in a free-flow manner, but rather give structured prompts. Moreover, it should provide opportunities to practice relevant speaking functions in a natural way, describing, narrating when talking about experiences or past events; comparing and contrasting ideas; explaining opinions on specific topics and responding to follow-up questions.

Thirdly, Chat GPT should be paired with reflection activities. During sessions, learners can write out short reflections that identify new words they have learned, mistakes and successes to look out for in the next lessons or whether their confidence has changed after each class. Reflection helps learners understand where they are in their learning process.

Fourthly, learners should be trained by teachers on how to request appropriate feedback. For instance, Chat GPT can be used to ask for correction of only serious mistakes instead of each mistake, which may help anxious learners. Excessive correction may increase anxiety.

Fifth, after practising in Chat GPT interaction with a human. While AI practice will help learners, if you want to really speak well, you should develop real speaking competence with a teacher or classmate.

### 9.2. Practical Model for Classroom Integration

Based on the findings, this study puts forward a relevant model for employing Chat GPT in EFL online speaking courses.



Preparation stage: Teacher presents the weekly speaking theme by providing helpful vocabulary and phrases.

AI Rehearsal stage: Learners rehearse alone using teacher-provided prompts with Chat GPT as a personal tutor.

Reflection stage: Learners write down some useful expressions, errors, and levels of confidence.

Peer interaction stage: Learners do pair or group speaking tasks during the online class.

Teacher feedback stage: Teacher reports back fluency, accuracy, pronunciation and communication strategies.

Follow-up stage: Learners come back to Chat GPT for further practice according to the teacher's feedback.

This model considers Chat GPT as a mediation stage from the time of private preparation to public communication.

### **10. Conclusion**

This study examined the use of Chat GPT as a speaking partner to alleviate speaking anxiety among EFL participants in an online course. Results indicated that the amount of speaking practice with Chat GPT significantly dropped each participant's related anxiety, while their confidence in their own ability to communicate orally increased. The findings also showed that Chat GPT was perceived as beneficial to participants because it created an environment free from judgmental comments, allowed for practice at any time and place, gave more tailored feedback compared with human interaction or presenters in class settings, and prepared individuals of every level better towards real communications.

It suggests that structured tasks and teacher-guided usage of Chat GPT can reduce L2 speaking anxiety in online EFL courses. The value of it is not in replacing human communication but in helping learners prepare for it. The platform provides anxious learners with a safe environment to practice, make mistakes and repeat their responses without the fear of embarrassment before speaking in front of others.

However, Chat GPT has limitations. It cannot substitute true human interaction, and its suggestions are sometimes incomplete or not researched. Hence, teachers need to be cautious in using Chat GPT, where it will work best with peer-based opportunities and training learners on how they might utilise AI morally, ethically, and purposefully.

#### **10.1. Recommendations**

In view of the study's conclusions, the researcher recommends:



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- 1.To enable online EFL teachers to deploy Chat GPT as one of the speaking partners for learners who suffer from speech anxiety.
- 2.Design speaking tasks in a structured way, with focused outcomes created from the course.
- 3.Instead of providing a passive template for learners to copy, teachers should give sample prompts designed for active speaking.
- 4.Promote the use of Chat GPT in rehearsal mode prior to live speaking activities.
- 5.Discussion with peers and feedback from a teacher are important in AI-aided speaking practice.
- 6.The learner receives feedback on how well their response matches the output of Chat GPT, and teachers should lead students in examining this.
- 7.Online EFL courses should be located with training in AI-literacy to help learners understand both the capacities and constraints of Chat GPT globally, which would provide a significant focus for future online delivery.
- 8.One of the course designers should reflect with reflection logs to enable learners to track their anxiety and confidence levels throughout.

### 10.2.Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The sample was not representative, given that it only contained 42 participants from a single online EFL course. So, the findings probably are not applicable to all EFL learners. Second, the lack of a control group means that causality cannot be inferred. While this is a very promising result, it cannot be said definitely that the decrease in anxiety was solely due to Chat GPT. Despite this, other factors such as more frequent course attendance or exposure to speaking tasks may have played a role.

Third, the research depended in part on self-reported data. Individual expectations or social desirability may have affected participants' responses to the questionnaire and reflection. Fourth, the fact that the intervention only lasted for six weeks limits any conclusions about anxiety reduction over many months. Fifth, the study was only centred on anxiety and confidence, but not on in-depth measures like pronunciation, accuracy or fluency.

Finally, since it did not include a control group. Owing to its one-group pretest–posttest design, the study could not exclusively ascribe changes in speaking anxiety only to ChatGPT-supported intervention. The improvement may have also been due to other factors: regular attendance in the course, repeated exposure to speaking tasks, users becoming increasingly less novel with online learning and their peers through interaction with others during classes over time (Chua et al., 2017),



teacher support or simply the learners gaining confidence from participating in English for a longer period of time. This means these results should be seen as tentative evidence that use of ChatGPT to practice speaking reduces the anxiety around speaking, but not regarded as conclusive evidence for a causal effect. Future studies should use a controlled or comparative design to investigate more thoroughly if ChatGPT is significantly better than the standard practice of speaking rehearsal alone, and/or regular online teaching.

### 10.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies will need larger samples with control or comparison groups. For instance, researchers could compare Chat GPT-supported speaking practice against peer speaking practice or teacher-driven speaking practice, or control with no additional L2 output (speaking) task whatsoever. Future studies may also investigate the long-term impact using delayed posttests weeks or months after the intervention.

Moreover, further studies should explore the influence of varied Chat GPT feedback on speaking anxiety. Someone else may be really keen on the simplest things, get corrected gently, but might not want feedback at all, while others expect something very detailed. In addition, it will be worthwhile for researchers to also investigate the impact of Chat GPT voice features, speech recognition tools and multimodal feedback on pronunciation development and speaking confidence. Finally, further research is needed to identify tasks educators can create that are ethical and effective in integrating AI into speaking practice across cultural or educational contexts.

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### Appendix A

#### Adapted Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale

Participants responded to each statement using the following scale:

1	=	Strongly	disagree
2	=		Disagree
3	=		Neutral
4	=		Agree
5		Strongly agree	

1. In our online class, speaking in English makes me feel nervous.
2. It is Concerned about grammar errors during speaking.
3. When people hear my mistakes in English, I get embarrassed.
4. I try to speak as little English as I can, except when it is unavoidable.
5. Sometimes I feel confused about not being able to find the words while speaking.
6. I feel nervous whenever the teacher wants me to respond aloud.
7. I am scared that my classmates speak English better than I do.
8. Public speaking, without preparation, makes me nervous.
9. I am afraid that people laugh at my pronunciation.



10. I get nervous when I have to speak in English, especially if it is before a group of people.
11. I write English better than I speak it.
12. My concern is that my answer will not be understood.
13. English: I get anxious if it is time-bound and have to speak quickly in English.
14. When you ask a question that I cannot understand, panic strikes.
15. For instance, in my online English classes, I do not switch the microphone on.
16. Being corrected in front of other people puts me on edge.
17. I lose my confidence if I make mistakes while speaking.
18. Talking in English is the most stressful thing I do as far as reading or writing.
19. I am afraid of my pronunciation when I speak English.
20. I am the one who feels nervous before oral speaking tasks.
21. Naturally, I want to rehearse by myself before talking to other people.
22. I worry when I talk to other English speakers who are more fluent than I am.
23. When I am forced to have an opinion in English, it is weird.
24. So, I worry about assessment when speaking.

#### **Appendix B**

##### **Sample Chat GPT Speaking Practice Prompts**

1. How do you determine if it is an anti-pattern? Type five easy questions for me about my day. Ask one question at a time.
2. Practice introducing myself for one minute. Just correct the most serious mistakes after I have answered.
3. Role-play: Come to a restaurant and role-play. You are edited for intermediate English, but give me useful phrases. Overall rejection message
4. Give me opinion questions for online learning. Help me answer more naturally.
5. Act as a job interviewer. Conduct mock interviews, asking some common interview questions, and rate my responses.
6. Assist me in preparing a short pitch on my future plans.
7. After every question I ask, give me follow-up questions so that I can answer them.
8. Would you now correct my grammar in a gentle way and propose, after each answer, one expression that would be better?
9. Spoon-feed me through three other ways to write the same!
10. Which is to help me speak English non-stop for three minutes in a row.

#### **Appendix C**

##### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How did you feel about your English before using Chat GPT?
2. How did you feel about practising English with Chat GPT?
3. Did speaking with Chat GPT help to reduce your anxiety on the same topic? How?
4. Which of Chat GPT's activities were most valuable to you?





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5. Improved Speaking About English: After the intervention, did you feel more confident when speaking English?
6. What form of Chat GPT feedback benefited you the most?
7. Was there any problem you encountered while using Chat GPT?
8. Can Chat GPT replace a human speaking partner? Why or why not?
9. Chat GPT and other large language models are quickly becoming tools that teachers use in an online speaking course.
10. Can you translate your sentences back into the target language and check that they make sense, using Chat GPT as a speaking companion? Why or why not?

