

Introducing Chatbots in EFL Speaking Classes: Exploring Students' Familiarity, Usage, and Attitudes

تقديم Chatbots في فصول التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: استكشاف معرفة

الطلاب واستخدامهم ومواقفهم

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Abstract:

Globalization and advanced technology have changed our lifestyle, including our teaching and learning modes; in this digital era, students and teachers are in need of tools that can empower their performance to cope with this revolutionized era. Chatbots are one of the most important advanced applications, which stimulate human interactions with natural language processing. Accordingly, this descriptive research aimed to report EFL university students' perceptions of the use of AI chatbot agents to develop students' speaking skills. To this end, the researchers conducted a questionnaire for EFL second-year students in the English department at Abbes Laghrour and Khenchela University. The results of this investigation showed that nearly all the learners have positive attitudes toward the importance of AI Chatbots in enhancing their English speaking performances (accuracy, pronunciation, and accent). In conclusion, the researchers suggested a need for AI chatbot integration to increase their students' motivation level.

Keywords: Chatbots, EFL, Perceptions, Speaking, Students.

ملخص:

لقد غيرت العولمة والتكنولوجيا المتقدمة أسلوب حياتنا بما في ذلك أساليب التدريس والتعلم لدينا، وفي هذا العصر الرقمي، يحتاج الطلاب والمعلمون إلى الأدوات التي

يمكنها تمكين أدايمهم للتعامل مع هذا العصر الثوري. تعتبر Chatbots واحدة من أهم التطبيقات المتقدمة التي تحفز تفاعلات الإنسان مع معالجة اللغة الطبيعية.

وبناء على ذلك، هدفت هذه الدراسة الوصفية إلى استكشاف تصورات طلاب جامعة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تجاه استخدام وكلاء Chatbots AI لتطوير مهارة التحدث لدى الطلاب. ولهذا الغرض قام الباحثون بإجراء استبيان لطلاب السنة الثانية في اللغة الإنجليزية قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بعباس لغرور جامعة خنشلة. أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن غالبية الطلاب لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه دور روبوتات الدردشة المدعومة بالذكاء الاصطناعي في تحسين أدايمهم في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية (الدقة والنطق واللهجة). في الختام، اقترح الباحثون الحاجة إلى تكامل Chatbots المدعم بالذكاء الاصطناعي لزيادة مستوى تحفيز الطلاب.

كلمات مفتاحية: Chatbots ، انجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، طلبة ، مهارة التحدث، التصورات.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, Proficiency in English is essential due to its prevalence in international communication among a significant number of people. Being capable to speak fluently in English facilitates access to educational opportunities, global collaboration, and worldwide possibilities for employment. Consequently, developing students' speaking skills in English as a foreign language classes must be one of the major concerns and aims of both teachers and students. Speaking can refer to different understandings; each reflects a scholar's perspectives and viewpoints. Using Language in a conventional manner; articulating sounds; possessing and employing linguistic skills; conveying thoughts verbally; delivering a discourse. In summary, speaking skill is the capacity to apply linguistic knowledge in real communication. Speaking also refer to the utilization of verbal communication to transmit a message across diverse circumstances. Harmer (2015) summarized that it is the ability to communicate effectively and calls for more than merely an understanding of linguistic elements. However, the

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capacity to understand language and information while on the go is also required. Speaking abilities considered as significant component of the language education curriculum, thus rendering it a crucial subject for evaluation. Speaking is defined as the ability to articulate utterances that convey ideas, opinions, wishes, or desires, facilitate negotiation and problem-solving, and foster the establishment and maintenance of. Speaking is simply a productive and creative skill: the ability to communicate through spoken utterances.

Teachers in EFL settings focus on developing students' speaking skills in order to enable them to express the foreign language fluently and accurately either in the classroom settings or with native speakers. Speaking is one of the skills that necessitate more exercise and effort. To speak a foreign language well, students need to develop their language knowledge, vocabulary, accuracy, pronunciation, and accent. Speaking is the most used skill that determines how far they have acquired English. However, EFL students face problems and issues in developing their speaking skills. Among the reasons behind the students' speaking obstacles are poor pronunciation, poor performance, colloquial language, intonation, and stress.

Normawati et al. (2023) addressed the main challenges in speaking English, such as lack of grammar, vocabulary knowledge, and pronunciation. However, the major causes of students' 'speaking deficiency' as mastering grammar, limited vocabulary knowledge, negative feedback, and low self-confidence. Classical classes fail to meet learners' requirements for enhancing their speaking skills due to insufficient engagement and the ineffective speaking styles of certain instructors. Accordingly, EFL teachers suggested that bringing technology to their classes would have significance positive impact on their students' FL performance.

Seeing that, Asif et al. (2023) supported the implementation of technology in English learning benefits learners through the fulfillment of essential outcomes and reinforces connections with other components and an integrated approach to modern media systems. *Artificial intelligence* is a

computer or robot that mimics human intelligence. Chen et al. (2020) assert that artificial intelligence evokes the image of a supercomputer, a device characterized by substantial computational capacity, adaptive actions, encompassing sensor use, and other attributes that enable it to exhibit human-like cognitive and functional abilities, thereby enhancing its interaction with individuals. Henceforth, this advantageous impact of AI assistants can effectively enhance undergraduate' communication skills. Also, Fabricio and Alvarado (2023) asserted that AI technology may enhance learners' speaking and listening abilities. Moreover, software that identifies speech sounds would provide instant self-feedback on intonation and pronunciation, thus aiding practice to improve competency.

In this context, it is evident that AI's capabilities, facilitating semi-live conversations and generating verbal responses to learners' inquiries, would substantially enhance the development of a student's speaking and listening skills.

Among AI creative tools, Chatbots, As for Chatbots (short for "chatting robots", Chatbots are capable of responding to students' messages with tailored replies, evaluating their performance, and offering recommendations for enhancement. The findings indicate that learners were at ease with the methodology and believed it may facilitate language acquisition. Regular interactions with Chatbots enhanced students' linguistic confidence, bolstered their auditory skills, and heightened their motivation for language acquisition.

Chatbots are artificial intelligences platforms and applications utilized the input and output levels within educational contexts to augment learners' diverse language competencies, embracing both receptive and productive skills. Kim et al. (2019) summarized a plenty widely used Chatbot for developing English, such as ELIZA, ALICE, Cleverbot, Elbot, Talk to Eve, Replika, Lyra, Andy English Bot, Poket Friend, Mondly, and Duolinguual (Cited in Duong & Suppasetserree, 2024, p.296).

Machine communication systems that engage in genuine dialogue with human users are known as Chatbots (Shawar & Atwell, 2005). Fryer

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and Carpenter (2006) outlined the advantages of using Chatbots in educational settings; they offer a comfy environment to reduce anxiety levels, and they level up students' motivation levels. Moreover, they allow the students to exercise their listening and reading skills in addition to their speaking. Another advantage is that they are able to repeat the content for the students' endless times. They also provide immediate and accurate feedback.

It is important to acknowledge that many studies and research have demonstrated the efficiency of artificial intelligence in improving pedagogy in general and students' speaking skills in particular. Consequently, we ascertain that the notion of artificial intelligence and its proficiency in rapidly addressing intricate issues across various domains of human existence, as well as emulating human cognition, particularly in educational roles, has facilitated the efficacy of distance education as a useful educational approach. This paper aims to explore EFL students' familiarity, usage, and attitudes toward employing Chatbots to improve their English speaking abilities. Consequently, the present work tries to address the following enquiries

- What are students' perceptions towards using Chatbots to enhance their speaking skills?
- To what extent can the use of AI Chatbots improve EFL students' speaking skills?

2. Literature Review

Li & Chen (2017) examined the efficacy of AI-based pronunciation tutoring applications in enhancing students' English speaking; the results indicated that the experimental group's students exceeded their schoolmates in the reference group in their accuracy, pronunciation, and fluency. Also, these findings recommend the use of Chatbots to develop other language skills. In Zou et al. (2020), the students had positive attitudes toward AI-assisted mobile apps to strengthen their ESP speaking skills.

Stöher El et al. (2024) descriptively analyzed students' perceptions about the use of AI Chatbots in higher education across genders, academic levels, and fields of study. The findings validated the importance of AI

chatbot agents in developing students' academic levels. Asif et al. (2023) surveyed 60 EFL university students in Ghazi, Pakistan. The data analyzed through SPSS 26.0 results indicated that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes toward the role of Chatbots in their English language process. Moreover, they claimed that the integration of these AI chatbot agents increased their motivation levels.

Shei et al. (2024) scoped a review of Empirical studies on University student's perceptions towards the use of AI Chatbots; the findings revealed that the preponderance of the studies were conducted in Asia, and A large number of students agreed adequately to the incorporation of chatbots in their curriculum. Other findings suggested the positive influence of the Chatbots on student motivation and self-confidence. It also facilitated the enhancement of their understanding of learning.

With the same regard, Zhang& Huang (2024) questioned the impact of employing Chatbots “LLMs” to enhance students' vocabulary knowledge. The finding revealed that the students in the experimental group surpassed the participants in the placebo sample in terms of vocabulary knowledge. Also, the findings indicated that chatbots facilitated communication and interactions by alleviating students' anxiety levels. Similarly, Duong and Suppasetser (2024) conducted a quasi-experiment. The students who developed their English speaking skills with the AI significantly surpassed the control group in speaking proficiency, utilizing grammatically acceptable sentences and advanced vocabulary. Additionally, the findings suggested that teachers can use a variety of AI Chatbot tasks to improve their students' English speaking. Kuswiyanti et al. (2023) reported the employment of AI to improve students speaking skills at the university level. The data was gathered via observation, a questionnaire, an interview, and a test. The findings validated the improvement of students' fluency, language use, vocabulary, and completion of the speaking task regarding the use of the Chatbots.

Makhlouf (2021) investigated the effect of Artificial intelligence “Elsa Speak” on ESP students at Abaha University, Saudi Arabia on

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developing their speaking skills. The researcher opted for a quasi-experimental design; the information was gathered by speaking pre and post-tests and speaking rubrics. The findings revealed an improvement for the experimental group with a reference to their fluency and language use. The findings also highlighted the effectiveness of "Elsa Speak" in increasing students' self-confidence and autonomy.

However, a descriptive study by Yin and Satar (2020) reported learners' perceptions of incorporating chatbots into their second language learning classes. The researchers split up 8 Chinese students based on their language level. The data was analyzed through content analysis. The outcomes revealed that the low-level learners expressed positive perceptions as they benefitted from and engaged in Chatbot interactions. However, the high-level students expressed dissatisfaction.

Among the previously mentioned studies, little research aimed at investigating the role of AI on EFL students' language learning in the Algerian context, such as Guemide & Sahraoui (2023) expel, or the importance of AI tools in enhancing EFL university language performance. Another study reported EFL university teachers' attitudes towards the use of AI for educational purposes (Benaicha & Semmoud, 2024). The findings of both studies suggested positive attitudes toward AI integration in the EFL context. Additionally, Boumaza (2024) investigated first-year EFL students' perceptions of using AI to develop their oral communication skills. The outcomes imply that the use of AI tools aids students to develop their speaking, listening, and motivation. Accordingly, this current paper makes the first attempt to survey EFL students' perceptions of using Chatbots to improve English speaking skills in Algeria.

3. Methodology

This paper is a descriptive design, quantitative approach seeking to explore EFL university students' perceptions about using Chatbots to enhance English speaking. The participants were 40 randomly selected EFL second-year students at Abbes Laghrour Khenchela University's English department. At the start of the academic year 2024 /2025, the researchers approached the participants via a Google form questionnaire.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Students Demographic Information

In this section, the participants were required to provide information concerning their gender and age. According to table “1”, the majority of the students were females with a percentage of (88%); while (22%) of the participants were males. Regarding their ages, the majority of the participants (85%) were between 20 and 22 years old. However, (15%) of the students represented the students older than 22 years.

Table 1. Students Demographic Information

Gender	Age
88% Female	85% between 20 to 22 years
22% Male	15% older than 22 years

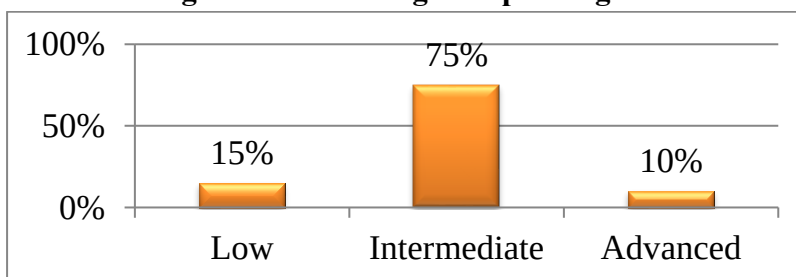
4.2 Students Familiarity and usage of Chatbots to improve English Speaking skills.

In this second section, the learners were required to answer 6 questions to provide information about their familiarity with and use of the Chatbots for improving their English abilities.

Question 1: What is your English speaking level?

The figure below reveals that the majority of the participants (75%) were considered intermediate-level students, while only (10%) had an advanced level of English speaking. (15%) of the students had low levels. Consequently, a minority of the participants had advanced English speaking levels.

Fig.1. Students' English Speaking Level



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Question2. Do you have difficulties in practicing your English speaking skills?

Noticing the table below, nearly all the students (90%) declared that they encountered issues in developing their speaking abilities, and a very few students with a percentage of (10%) stated that they did not experience issues in practicing their English speaking skills.

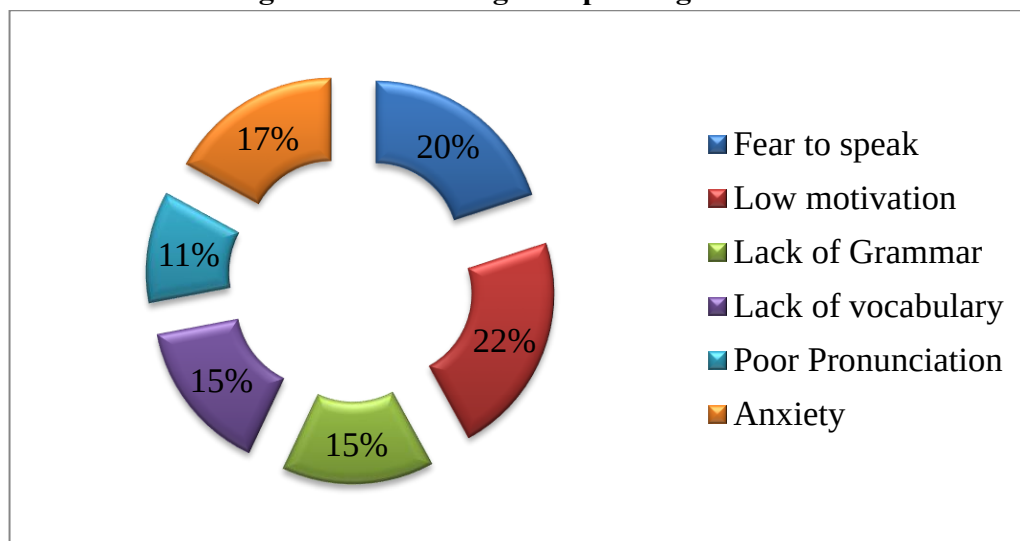
Table 2. Students' Speaking Difficulties

Yes	No
90%	10%

Question 3: What are the causes behind your speaking problems?

In this section, the researchers aimed to identify the issues that students encounter when speaking English. The answers revealed that there were varied causes, as (22%) opted for low motivation, (20%) settled on fear of speaking, and (17%) decided on anxiety. The same percentage (15%) of the students went for lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, the minority of the respondents (11%) had poor pronunciation.

Fig.2. Causes of English Speaking Difficulties



Question 4: Are you familiar with AI Chatbots?

As table “3” displays, the researchers tried to assess students’ familiarity of the Chatbots, nearly all students (90%) declared their familiarity of these agents. Even so, (2%) of the students denied that.

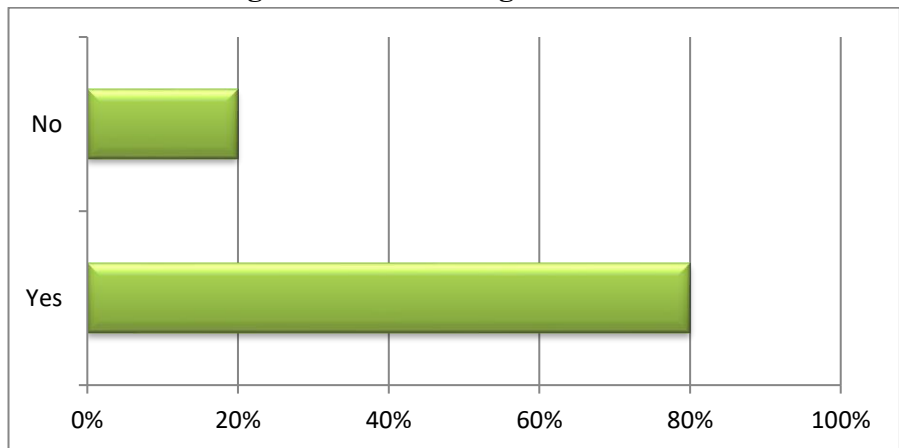
Table 3. Students’ Familiarity of Chatbots

Yes	No
98%	2%

Question 5: Do you use Chatbots to enhance your English speaking skills?

In the figure below, that (80%) of the participants employ Chatbots to practice their English speaking. Therefore, (20%) negated their use for the artificial agents.

Fig. 4. Students’ Usage of Chatbots

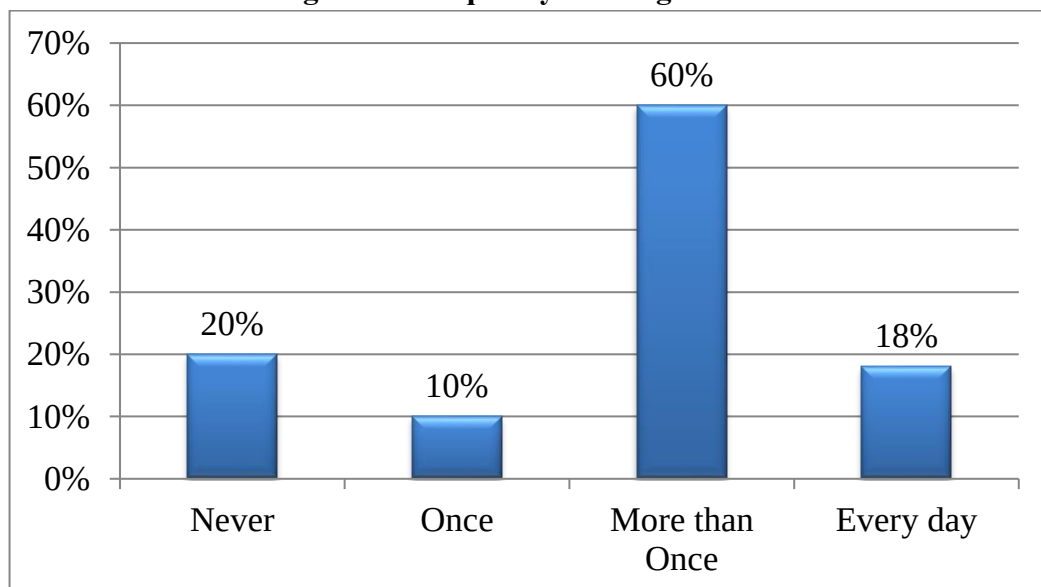


Question 6: How many times a week, you use Chatbots?

Figure “3” shows that more than half of the students with a percentage of (60%) asserted that they use the Chatbot three times a week, while others claimed that they use it daily (18%), and it became a regular task. (10%) of the participants use the Chatbots once a week. However, (20%) of the students never use these aids.

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Fig.3. The frequency of using Chatbots



4.3 Section Three: Students' attitudes about the role of Chatbots on developing Students English Speaking Skills

In this section, the participants were asked to assess their attitudes toward addressing the Chatbots to develop their English speaking skills. The findings in the table below display that nearly all the participants (80%) agree that integrating the Chatbots into their classes facilitates learning the English language. In statement number three, the majority of the students (78%) agree that the Chatbots enable them to engage in conversations. This finding goes with the results of the ninth statement as (78%) of the students agree that the Chatbots allowed them to discuss a variety of topics. Also, the findings of the fifth statement suggested that (77%) of the participants used the Chatbots to answer complicated questions.

The main part of the students (80%) of the students claimed that the Chatbots supported and encouraged them to speak. The same percentage (79%) of the participants concur that the Chatbots helped them to improve their grammar and vocabulary knowledge. For statements 13 and 12, the respondents agree that the Chatbots provided a personalized and customized learning experience. Henceforth, (79%) of the students asserted that the

Chatbot agents provided effective, immediate feedback. Almost all the students (80%) declared that the use of Chatbots can elevate their motivation level. However, almost all the participants (78%) agreed that practicing their English skills through the Chatbots reduced their anxiety levels. (79%) of the students declared their positive opinions on developing their accents and pronunciation. The responses to the last statement were significantly close since (51%) of the participants negated that the Chatbots cannot redeem humans. At the same time, nearly half of the participants (49%) agree that Chatbot will not replace humans.

Table 4. Students' Views about the role of Chatbots on developing Students English Speaking Skills

The Statements	D	N	A
1.Chatbots facilitate English learning.	/	20%	80%
2.Chatbots assistants increase your motivation.	2%	18%	80%
3.Chatbots assistants help you engage in conversations.	2%	20%	78%
4.Chatbots assistants support you to speak.	/	20%	80%
6.Chatbots assistants helps in managing stress, anxiety.	1%	20%	89%
7.Chatbots answer complex questions.	2%	21%	77%
8.Chatbots help you enrich your vocabulary knowledge.	1%	20%	79%
9.Chatbots help you enrich your grammar knowledge.	1%	20%	79%
10.Chatbots enhance your accent, and pronunciation.	1%	20%	79%
11.Chatbots discuss different topics.	2%	20%	78%
12.Chatbots provide efficient and immediate feedback.	2%	19%	79%
13.Chatbots provide personalized, and customized learning experience.	2%	19%	79%
14.Chatbots can replace human.	51%	/	49%

Note: D for disagree, N for Neutral, A for Agree

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5. Discussion

This study descriptively surveyed EFL students' perceptions of the use of Chatbots to improve their ability to speak. Henceforth, 40 second-year EFL students were asked to describe their familiarity, use, and attitudes towards the role of Chatbots in improving their English speaking skills. This present research revealed the familiarity and extensive employ of the chatbots among the students, and the majority of the participants, were aware and expertise with. The reponses also indicated that the EFL students employ the Chatbots more than once a week; this chronic use indicated that their motivation levels were increasing to enhance their English speaking abilities. Moreover, the analysis of the questionnaire revealed that the participants maintained an acceptance towards of implementing Chatbots to develop their speaking.

These findings resemble the outcomes of Lee and Maeng (2024), who declared positive perceptions towards the importance of integrating Chatbots in their language learning classes. Also, this vividly shows the power of the Chatbots in enhancing students' pronunciation and accent. Since these aids provide digital dictionaries to check pronunciation, they also handle a large number of different accents. "Statement twelve" emphasized that the majority of the students (79%) stated that the Chatbots provide immediate, personalized, and effective feedback. The reception of AI feedback enhanced students' linguistic proficiency and facilitated their understanding of speaking skills

Concerning developing students' vocabulary knowledge, Chatbots are applications that offer a great number of synonyms, new lexis, and word meanings in English. However, the participants mainly agree that it presents the learning of vocabulary in an indirect way through interactive conversations, without mainly putting the emphasis on enriching students' vocabulary as the acquisition of the language process. An important point is that the findings of this study support the findings of Ghaithi (2024) that validate the positive impact of using Chatbots on improving students' grammatical competence. Eventually, the Chatbots employ authentic materials, language, and contexts.

Regarding students' motivation, the findings show positive views on the role of Chatbots in leveling up students' motivation. These findings align with other study findings that emphasize the significance of using AI Chatbots to boost students' motivation levels (Saragih et al., 2021). It has been reported that these applications/tools have a positive impact on learner motivation and self-confidence and decrease learners' anxiety. Interaction is an essential component of efficient learning. AI Chatbots are designed to be interesting and interactive, enhancing the learning experience for students. They can create fun educational experiences that support FL acquisition. AI chatbots maintain student motivation and engagement by rendering learning enjoyable and interactive.

The results indicated the effectiveness of these assistants in stimulating real-life conversations, and students will be free to ask questions and carry out conversations. Actually, they provide a supportive environment by encouraging the students to engage in different conversations about different scenarios. Accordingly, they develop their pronunciation and accent. In the same vein, the students had a strong willingness to replace humans with Chatbots in terms of developing their English speaking skills. Consistently, EFL instructors need to be more aware of and prepare their students for a balanced blend of education using AI tools and their human experience.

6. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

The conclusions of the current study put forward a number of pedagogical implications of using Chatbots in EFL classes. Henceforth, Chatbots are creative aids that should be integrated into EFL teaching and learning contexts, on condition that both teachers and students use them as supportive material for a balanced blend of classrooms. Chatbots offer a customized learning experience based on students' levels and needs. Chatbots can transform the learning experience into an interesting and motivational one. Chatbots offer immediate feedback, natural language processing, and repeating information. They are available 24 hours/7 days, increase motivation, reduce anxiety, and boost self-confidence (Zhang, et al,

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2020).

As technology keeps evolving, teachers and students should effectively cope with it in order to be able to maximize its benefits and minimize its cons. Teachers must create a classroom environment that enables the use of Chatbots with their control and management. Design classroom activities based on AI chatbot integration. Nevertheless, the incorporation of AI also presents considerable ethical dilemmas. A primary concern is data privacy, as the utilization of AI technologies necessitates the collection and analysis of substantial volumes of user data, underscoring the risk of inappropriate use or susceptibility to privacy violations, which could adversely affect students and their rights.

All in all, this study attempts to clear up the significance of AI Chatbots in improving EFL students' speaking skills from students' perceptions. The findings revealed the students' willingness to operate the Chatbots for learning purposes. Nowadays, students spend the majority of their lives on their phones and other technological devices. Shortly, they should be called digital learners. Chatbots offer a wide range of possibilities to redefine the teaching of English in foreign settings, especially for acquiring speaking skills.

Additionally, the consistent use of these intelligent agents will provide an opportunity for learners to develop and increase their autonomy. However, this study revealed that EFL students face numerous issues in developing their speaking skills, issues that are related to linguistic reasons such as lack of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Psychological issues, such as anxiety, low motivation, and fear of speaking. The Chatbots provide solutions for all these issues and problems. Accordingly, EFL teachers should integrate these effective and creative applications to achieve their goals and teaching outcomes.

Ultimately, this study showed that EFL second-year students recommended the urgent need to use Chatbots in their EFL learning process. More specifically, they aim to enhance their abilities and chances of speaking English accurately and fluently. For future studies, they should prioritize previously addressed features of AI Chatbots, such as leveling up

students' motivation, reducing anxiety, authentic context, and language learning to enhance students' FL skills competencies.

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