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Exploring the Role of ChatGPT Voice Mode in Reducing Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Among Indonesian ESP Students

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Foreign language speaking anxiety poses a persistent challenge for Indonesian ESP students in hospitality programs. Traditional classroom settings often exacerbate this anxiety, limiting students' confidence and speaking fluency. This study investigates how ChatGPT's Voice Conversation Mode can create a low-pressure environment for practicing English-speaking skills, exploring students' perceptions and the technology's impact on their speaking anxiety.

Materials/methods. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving 15 undergraduate students from an English for Hotel course. Data were collected through 15 semi-structured interviews (approx. 12,000 words) and 83 reflection papers. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns related to students' experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses when using ChatGPT Voice Mode for speaking practice.

Results. The findings indicate that ChatGPT Voice Mode provides a "safe space" for speaking, reducing fear of judgment and lowering speaking anxiety. Students appreciated the flexibility of self-paced, private practice sessions that allowed for repeated attempts without social pressure. Themes such as emotional comfort, improved fluency through repetition, and ease of use emerged prominently. However, students also acknowledged limitations, including lack of emotional feedback and the "robotic" nature of AI interactions.

Conclusion. ChatGPT Voice Mode is an effective supplementary tool for reducing foreign-language speaking anxiety and fostering speaking confidence in ESP contexts. While it cannot substitute human interaction, its role in creating a non-judgmental practice environment holds valuable pedagogical implications.

1. Introduction

Undergraduate students majoring in hospitality are often required to develop strong English communication skills to prepare for careers in global service industries. However, many of these students experience foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) when engaging in oral English tasks, especially when anticipating interactions with international guests (Dewi & Wilany, 2022; Dzulkifli Isadaud et al., 2022). FLSA is a widespread challenge in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where effective oral communication is not only an academic objective but also a key professional competence (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018; Nurmasitah et al., 2024). Without addressing this anxiety, students may struggle with fluency, confidence, and the ability to perform well in real-time communicative scenarios (Bashori et al., 2022; Wang & Tahir, 2020). As Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) highlighted in their seminal work on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), such anxiety is one of the most persistent barriers to oral performance, a finding further supported by Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis.

Students who experience FLSA often display avoidance behaviors, hesitation, and self-consciousness during classroom speaking activities, such as presentations or role-plays, which significantly affect their communicative performance (Malik et al., 2021; Ölmezer-öztürk & Öztürk, 2021). While they might possess adequate knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, their inability to spontaneously articulate thoughts in English poses a serious obstacle to their professional readiness, particularly in hospitality roles that demand constant interaction with international clientele. In the Indonesian ESP context, this issue is particularly evident, where speaking anxiety frequently manifests as nervousness, speech pauses, and lack of self-confidence during English communication tasks (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Nurmasitah et al., 2024; Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022). Despite the critical importance of speaking skills in hospitality English, previous instructional approaches have primarily relied on traditional classroom activities, such as scripted roleplays or peer-to-peer discussions (Juwitawati & Pratiwi, 2018; Oflaz, 2019; Oguzhan, 2014). However, these activities often emphasize accuracy over fluency and provide limited opportunities for low-anxiety, high-frequency practice.

Recently, AI-powered conversational platforms have shown potential for supporting language learners through interactive, spontaneous dialogue practice. Among these, ChatGPT's Voice Mode offers a unique feature that enables learners to engage in real-time audio conversations, providing immediate and contextually relevant responses (Almehmadi, 2024; Owan et al., 2023). Unlike gamified applications that focus on points and rewards, ChatGPT Voice Mode emphasizes natural, unscripted interactions that mirror real-life speaking situations. This conversational feature allows students to practice speaking in a safe, non-judgmental environment, helping alleviate speaking anxiety and promoting oral fluency.

Although ChatGPT is increasingly used in academic settings for tasks such as writing assistance and content generation (Almehmadi, 2024; Pratama et al., 2025; Song & Song, 2023), empirical studies investigating its Voice Mode feature as a tool to enhance speaking proficiency and manage FLSA are still scarce. Prior research has primarily focused on chatbot applications in general EFL contexts (Kim et al., 2025; Mishra et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024), without specifically examining the psychological dimensions of speaking anxiety in ESP learning environments. Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a gap in research focusing on Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, where cultural and contextual factors compound the challenges of learning English as a foreign language.

Taken together, the literature highlights three interrelated gaps: (1) limited empirical evidence on ChatGPT's Voice Mode as a speaking practice tool, (2) insufficient attention to the psychological dimension of speaking anxiety in ESP contexts, and (3) a lack of regional focus on Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. Given the increasing need for effective speaking practice tools in ESP contexts,

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particularly in hospitality programs, it is essential to explore innovative technological solutions that address both linguistic and psychological aspects of language learning. This study aims to fill the research gap by investigating the use of ChatGPT's Voice Mode as a speaking practice medium for Indonesian ESP students. By focusing on learners' experiences and the influence of AI-mediated conversation on their speaking anxiety, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into integrating AI tools within specialized English language curricula.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Indonesian ESP students perceive the use of ChatGPT Voice Mode in their speaking practice?

2. In what ways does interacting with ChatGPT Voice Mode affect students' foreign-language speaking anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) in ESP Contexts

Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) is recognized as one of the most persistent affective barriers that hinder students' oral communication skills in a second or foreign language. E. K. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning, arising from the unique nature of the language learning process. E. K. Horwitz et al. (1986) first conceptualized language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. Later, E. K. Horwitz et al. (2010) emphasized that this anxiety arises from the uniqueness of the language-learning process and is often most evident in speaking activities. FLA typically manifests as tension, apprehension, and nervousness, especially when students are required to communicate in the target language in front of others (A. V. Horwitz, 2010; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022). Students with high levels of speaking anxiety often perceive themselves as inadequate communicators, overestimate their linguistic deficiencies, and fear negative evaluation from their interlocutors or audiences (Dornyei, 2007; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

The anxiety experienced by language learners is not only limited to the classroom environment but also extends to practical professional scenarios, particularly for students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs (Ayuningtyas et al., 2022; Čepon, 2016). In ESP contexts such as hospitality, tourism, or business, language performance is directly tied to professional competence. The demand of linguistic accuracy and professional appropriateness can intensify anxiety and reduce performance. As a result, learners may display fragmented speech, frequent pauses, and diminished self-confidence during professional roleplays or workplace simulations (Dewi & Wilany, 2022; Dornyei, 2007).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) provides a theoretical lens to understand these challenges. It posits that high levels of anxiety create an emotional barrier that prevents learners from effectively processing input. An anxious learner has a high affective filter, which impedes learning and oral performance. Later research supports this claim, showing that FLSA can cause mental blocks, avoidance behaviors, and reluctance to engage in spontaneous oral communication (Liu, 2023; Zhang, 2023). For ESP students, this issue is particularly critical: even when they possess adequate technical knowledge, anxiety prevents them from articulating ideas fluently, thereby undermining both academic success and career readiness.

2.2. AI Conversational Agents and ChatGPT in Language Learning

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language learning has introduced conversational agents as dynamic tools to support learners' speaking practice in more interactive and flexible ways

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(Andersson et al., 2024; George, 2023; Pratama et al., 2025). AI conversational agents, often referred to as chatbots, are designed to simulate human-like dialogues, enabling learners to engage in meaningful language interactions without the pressure of real human interlocutors (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; El Shazly, 2021). This technology offers students an opportunity to practice spoken language in a low-anxiety environment, where errors are tolerated and self-paced learning is facilitated (Almehmadi, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Among the leading AI-powered conversational agents, ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, has garnered significant attention for its advanced linguistic capabilities (Owan et al., 2023). Built on the Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) framework, ChatGPT is capable of generating coherent and contextually relevant responses by leveraging extensive training data that encompasses diverse linguistic patterns (Yenduri et al., 2024). Its adaptability across various domains has made it a versatile tool for tasks such as language translation, content generation, question answering, and interactive learning (Owan et al., 2023).

ChatGPT's unique advantage lies in its ability to engage in fluid, open-ended conversations that mirror human dialogue, thereby fostering a more naturalistic speaking practice for language learners (Kanoksilapatham & Takrudkaew, 2025). Moreover, ChatGPT's voice conversation mode introduces an auditory interaction feature that enhances its role in speaking practice (Zhou, 2023). By engaging with ChatGPT's voice mode, learners can develop fluency and communicative confidence without the immediate fear of negative evaluation or external judgment. Consequently, ChatGPT emerges as a promising AI-mediated platform that reshapes speaking practice by balancing linguistic accuracy with communicative efficacy.

However, despite these advantages, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, ChatGPT's recognition of accents and speech patterns is not always reliable, which can create misunderstandings or discourage learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Moon et al., 2025). Second, the system often lacks cultural sensitivity and emotional nuance, limiting its ability to replicate the empathy and social cues present in authentic human communication (Jordan, 2025). Third, ChatGPT provides limited corrective feedback: while repetition may reinforce learning, the absence of systematic error correction can slow progress in pronunciation and accuracy (Mishra et al., 2023). In addition, errors in speech recognition, delays in processing, or poor internet connectivity can negatively affect the user experience, particularly in regions with limited technological infrastructure (Almehmadi, 2024). Thus, while ChatGPT offers promising opportunities for language learning, its limitations highlight the need for cautious integration and complementary use alongside human-mediated instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive-phenomenological approach, to explore students' perceptions and lived experiences of using ChatGPT's Voice Conversation for English-speaking practice. Phenomenology was chosen because it focuses on capturing participants' subjective meanings and personal accounts in relation to a shared phenomenon. To analyze the data, a thematic analysis approach was adopted to identify and interpret patterns of meaning within the data. The qualitative design was deemed appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2015).

3.2. Research Context: ChatGPT Voice Conversation Usage

In this study, ChatGPT's Voice Conversation feature was used to facilitate students' English-speaking practice in a self-directed, interactive manner. Students accessed ChatGPT via the OpenAI

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mobile app on their smartphones, using voice input and output to engage in conversational English dialogues. The activity was conducted as part of their English for Hotel course, where students were encouraged to practice impromptu speaking, ask questions, and respond to ChatGPT prompts in real time. The use of ChatGPT's Voice Mode was intentionally designed to replicate a non-threatening conversational environment, where students could practice their speaking fluency without the fear of making mistakes in front of peers or teachers. Students were free to choose conversation topics relevant to their personal interests or to follow structured prompts provided by the instructor, such as practicing hotel guest check-in and check-out dialogues, handling guest complaints, providing information about hotel facilities and services, or delivering short service-oriented monologues, such as room introductions and concierge recommendations.The interaction sessions were self-paced, typically lasting around 15-20 minutes per practice session, and students were encouraged to practice at least three times a week during the data collection period. No formal assessment or scoring was involved in these sessions to maintain a low-anxiety learning atmosphere.

3.3. Participants

The participants in this study were 15 undergraduates enrolled in the English for Hotel course in the Hotel Management Study Program at an Indonesian university. All were sophomore students majoring in the Hospitality Industry. They were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criterion being their prior experience using ChatGPT's Voice Conversation for speaking practice. The sample comprised 6 male and 9 female students, reflecting the program's typical gender distribution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. This aligns with Creswell's (2015) guideline that phenomenological studies typically involve 5-25 participants, making 15 participants well within the recommended range. The aim was not statistical generalization but rather a rich, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, consistent with the goals of qualitative inquiry.

3.4. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using two qualitative instruments: a semi-structured interview guide and a reflection paper prompt sheet. The semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit in-depth insights into the students' experiences with ChatGPT Voice Mode. The interview questions focused on several key areas, including students' general impressions of using ChatGPT for speaking practice, perceived ease of use, and the emotional responses they experienced during the interaction, such as anxiety, nervousness, or comfort. Additionally, participants were asked about any perceived improvements in their fluency and speaking performance, and how ChatGPT compared with other AI-based language learning tools like Duolingo and ELSA Speak, especially in terms of pronunciation demands and anxiety triggers. The interviews also explored participants' willingness to engage with AI tools for future language-learning activities. The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, enabling a more flexible and comprehensive exploration of each participant's perspective. This instrument directly addressed both research questions: (1) students' perceptions of using ChatGPT Voice Mode and (2) its influence on their foreign language speaking anxiety. The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet classroom to minimize distractions. Each interview was carried out in English, with occasional clarifications in Indonesian when necessary to support participants' comprehension. The interviews lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent using a digital recorder. All recordings were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to the interviews, participants were asked to write a one-page reflection paper to provide further insights into their experiences. The reflection paper prompt sheet guided students to discuss their overall experience with ChatGPT's Voice Conversation, including the advantages and

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challenges they encountered. They were also encouraged to reflect on their emotional responses during the practice sessions, particularly focusing on feelings of comfort or anxiety. Furthermore, students were asked to describe any perceived impact on their speaking performance and to offer suggestions or expectations for future AI-assisted learning activities. The reflection papers were collected as typed submissions through the university's Learning Management System (LMS). Students were instructed to submit one reflection per week over the six-week period, resulting in a total of 83 reflections. Each submission followed a structured prompt sheet provided by the instructor but allowed flexibility for students to express their personal experiences and perspectives.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data, consisting of interview transcripts and 83 reflection papers, were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) data familiarization, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being imposed a priori. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by returning the preliminary findings to the participants for validation. All participants confirmed the accuracy of their statements and interpretations. Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were held with two fellow researchers to reduce potential bias in theme identification and interpretation.

4. Results

4.1. How Indonesian ESP Students Perceive the Use of ChatGPT Voice Mode in Their Speaking Practice

The first research question explored how Indonesian ESP students perceive the use of ChatGPT Voice Mode in their speaking practice. The thematic analysis revealed several key themes that encapsulate students' perceptions, including User-Friendliness and Accessibility, Building Speaking Fluency through Repetition, Limitations in Emotional Feedback, Technological Frustrations and Initial Anxiety, Comparison with Other AI Tools, and the Perceived 'Robot vs. Human' Interaction Gap. Each of these themes is elaborated below, illustrated with representative excerpts from the interviews and reflection papers.

A dominant theme emerging from the data was the user-friendliness and accessibility of ChatGPT's Voice Mode, which significantly shaped students' positive perceptions of the tool. Many participants highlighted the ease of navigating the interface and appreciated how minimal technical skills were required to engage in meaningful conversations. The fact that ChatGPT was accessible via smartphone apps further enhanced its practicality, especially for students juggling multiple academic and vocational responsibilities. Several students expressed that the simplicity of starting a voice conversation reduced their hesitation to practice speaking. One participant noted, *"I just open the app, press the mic, and start talking. It's very simple compared to other apps that have many menus and tests"* (I4). Another student reflected on the convenience of being able to practice anytime and anywhere, stating, *"I practice while commuting. I don't need a special time or place. It's like having an English friend in my pocket"* (R22). This accessibility was particularly meaningful in the context of the English for Hotel course, where students needed flexible opportunities to practice hospitality-specific dialogues. A participant mentioned, *"Sometimes I practice check-in conversations while walking to campus. It helps me get used to speaking hotel English in daily situations"* (I9).

In terms of technical usability, most students agreed that the voice recognition accuracy of ChatGPT was sufficient, although occasional misunderstandings occurred. These errors, however, were not seen as major barriers. One student explained, *"Sometimes it misunderstands my words, but I just repeat it. It's not frustrating because it listens patiently"* (R37). Another participant

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appreciated how the tool's design reduced the fear of formal evaluation, sharing, *"There is no score or grade after I talk. It feels relaxed, like practicing without a teacher watching me"* (I2). However, a few students noted initial adjustment challenges, particularly in adapting to the AI's conversational rhythm. For instance, *"At first, I spoke too fast and ChatGPT couldn't catch up, but after a few tries, I learned to pace my speaking"* (R15). The students perceived ChatGPT's Voice Mode as an accessible and non-intimidating tool that facilitated regular practice. Its availability on mobile devices and straightforward functionality enabled students to integrate speaking practice into their daily routines.

Another key theme that emerged was the role of repetitive practice with ChatGPT Voice Mode in students' development of speaking fluency. Many participants described the AI as a "patient conversation partner" that allowed them to repeat phrases, correct mistakes, and experiment with sentence structures without feeling rushed or judged. This repetitive interaction was perceived as essential for improving their fluency, especially for students who struggled with spontaneous speaking tasks. One student shared, *"With ChatGPT, I can repeat the same sentences over and over until I'm satisfied. No one gets annoyed. It helps me to memorize phrases naturally"* (I5). Another participant emphasized the importance of consistent practice, stating, *"I talk with ChatGPT almost every night before sleeping. The repetition helps my tongue to be more fluent"* (R41). Several students noted that the AI's neutral feedback encouraged them to take risks in speaking. For instance, *"I feel more daring to try difficult sentences because ChatGPT won't laugh or judge me if I make mistakes"* (I11). Students also appreciated how the AI's endless availability removed time constraints typical in classroom practice. One reflection read, *"In class, we only have a few minutes to practice. But with ChatGPT, I can repeat one scenario for 15 minutes until I feel fluent"* (R10). Additionally, students found that repetitive practice with ChatGPT enhanced their spontaneity in speaking, which is crucial for the hospitality industry. A student explained, *"Before, I needed to prepare sentences in my head. Now, after practicing with ChatGPT many times, I can respond more quickly"* (I8).

However, some students acknowledged that the lack of human-like emotional variation in responses limited the challenge in certain contexts. For example, *"ChatGPT always responds calmly, so I don't practice handling emotional guests. But it's good for basic fluency"* (R56). Despite this limitation, most participants agreed that the repetitive dialogue practice helped them internalize common expressions and improve their speaking flow. A student summarized, *"It's like having a 24/7 English speaking simulator. The more I talk, the more natural it feels"* (I13). The ability to practice frequently, repeat dialogues as needed, and refine their speaking without social embarrassment was highlighted as a significant advantage over traditional classroom methods.

4.2. The Influence of ChatGPT Voice Mode on Students' Speaking Anxiety

Related to the second research question, investigating the influence of ChatGPT Voice Mode on students' speaking anxiety, the analysis revealed several key themes illustrating how interacting with ChatGPT's Voice Mode influenced students' foreign-language speaking anxiety. The participants reported a noticeable reduction in their anxiety levels. It is attributed to factors such as the non-judgmental AI environment, the ability to practice at their own pace, and the gradual building of confidence through repeated self-practice.

A prominent theme that emerged from the data was how ChatGPT's Voice Mode created a safe and non-threatening environment for students to practice English speaking. Many participants described how the AI's neutral, non-judgmental nature allowed them to engage in speaking tasks without the typical fear of embarrassment or criticism. One student shared, *"I feel more comfortable talking to ChatGPT because it doesn't judge me. In class, I get nervous because my friends might laugh if I make a mistake."* (I2) This excerpt illustrates how social evaluation anxiety, often present in classroom settings, was significantly reduced when students interacted with ChatGPT. The absence of peer observation and immediate correction lowered the emotional stakes, making it easier for

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students to express themselves. Another reflection expressed a similar sentiment, *"ChatGPT is like a safe friend who listens patiently. I can speak slowly or make mistakes, and it doesn't react negatively."* (R12). Here, the participant likens ChatGPT to a "safe friend," emphasizing the AI's consistent and accepting interaction style. Unlike human interlocutors, ChatGPT's neutral responses allowed students to slow down their speech, take risks, and focus on articulating their thoughts without fearing ridicule or impatience. An introverted student elaborated, *"When I speak in front of people, I feel my heart race. But with ChatGPT, I feel calmer and more willing to try"* (I9). This reflection highlights how ChatGPT served as a low-pressure practice partner, particularly beneficial for students with performance anxiety. The predictable and private nature of AI interaction helped mitigate the physiological symptoms of anxiety, such as nervousness and rapid heartbeat, which often hinder spontaneous speaking in public settings.

Several students also mentioned the psychological comfort of practicing privately, as noted by a participant who stated, *"I could practice anytime, even when I was alone in my room. This made me feel safe to experiment with my English"* (R27). This autonomy over the practice environment further contributed to reducing anxiety, as students could control the timing and context of their speaking sessions. The findings indicate that ChatGPT's Voice Mode provided a psychologically safe space that significantly reduced students' anxiety about speaking a foreign language. ChatGPT Voice mode reduces the fear of negative social evaluation, allowing students to engage in speaking tasks with greater ease and confidence. This safe practice environment was particularly valuable for students who typically experience high anxiety in traditional classroom speaking activities.

A recurring theme in both interviews and reflection papers was that ChatGPT's Voice Mode provided a judgment-free environment that alleviated students' fear of peer or teacher evaluation. Many students described feeling emotionally comfortable practicing English privately with ChatGPT, which allowed them to speak more freely without the anxiety of making mistakes in front of others. One participant explained, *"I feel more relaxed when talking to ChatGPT because no one is listening or judging me. In class, I am always afraid of saying something wrong"* (I2). This highlights the emotional relief students experienced when practicing in a private, non-judgmental setting. The fear of negative evaluation, common in language-learning classrooms, was significantly reduced when students interacted with an AI partner, leading them to focus more on improving their speaking.

Meanwhile, another student emphasized, *"Practicing with ChatGPT is less stressful because it doesn't laugh or criticize if I make mistakes"* (R22). This excerpt underscores the emotional safety that AI tools like ChatGPT provide. The absence of human judgment created a supportive space where students could practice speaking without the social pressure that often triggers anxiety. Similarly, a participant noted, *"I can try to speak without worrying about my pronunciation being corrected by others. It helps me practice freely."* (I10). Here, the student appreciated the freedom to experiment with language without the fear of immediate correction or embarrassment. A reflection paper further illustrated this emotional comfort: *"When I practice with ChatGPT, I don't feel shy. Even if I repeat wrong sentences, I don't feel embarrassed"* (R56). The ability to make and correct mistakes independently, without peers' gaze, contributed to a more positive emotional experience during speaking practice. The data clearly indicate that ChatGPT's Voice Mode was a valuable tool for reducing students' fear of negative evaluation during speaking practice. This non-threatening environment encouraged more open practice and helped students overcome psychological barriers that often inhibit language production in peer- or teacher-evaluated settings. Consequently, the reduction in fear of judgment contributed significantly to lowering students' foreign language speaking anxiety.

Another major theme that emerged from the data was how repeated interactions with ChatGPT's Voice Mode helped students gradually build confidence in their speaking abilities. Many participants reported that the ability to practice independently, at their own pace, and as often as

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needed, empowered them to improve both their fluency and self-assurance in speaking English. One participant explained, *"At first, I was nervous to speak, but after using ChatGPT many times, I became more confident. It feels like my English is getting smoother"* (I5). This statement reflects how consistent and repetitive practice with ChatGPT reduced initial apprehension and gradually increased the student's self-confidence. Similarly, another student reflected on their progress, *"Practicing with ChatGPT helps me become braver to speak. The more I practice, the less I worry about making mistakes"* (R34). This excerpt demonstrates the positive cycle of practice and reduced fear of errors. The participant highlights how frequent exposure to speaking tasks with ChatGPT helped desensitize them to the fear of making mistakes, which is a common source of anxiety in language learning. Another participant emphasized the importance of practicing at their own comfort level, *"I like that I can repeat the conversation again and again until I feel confident. It's not like in class where time is limited"* (I11). This insight underscores the value of self-paced repetition, a feature that students found liberating compared to the constraints of classroom activities. The ability to revisit and practice dialogues multiple times allowed students to refine their speaking without external time pressure, thereby fostering greater confidence. A reflection paper further illustrated this point: *"When I talk to ChatGPT, I can repeat difficult sentences until I get it right. This helps me feel more sure about my speaking."* (R48). Here, the participant describes how the safe space for trial-and-error learning facilitated mastery of challenging language components. This iterative learning process was crucial in building their speaking confidence over time. One student succinctly summed up the impact of repetitive practice: *"ChatGPT makes me practice more. The more I speak, the more confident I feel."* (I13). The findings reveal that ChatGPT's Voice Mode provided students with a unique opportunity for self-regulated, repetitive speaking practice, which significantly contributed to their growing confidence in using English orally. The ability to practice without external judgment, at a self-directed pace, and with unlimited repetition empowered students to overcome their initial anxiety and develop greater fluency and assurance.

5. Discussion

Overall, this study revealed three major findings. First, ChatGPT's Voice Mode provided a safe, low-pressure environment that reduced students' fear of negative judgment and helped them build fluency through repetition. Second, students perceived the tool as accessible and user-friendly, offering a non-judgmental partner for autonomous speaking practice. Third, despite these affordances, participants also recognized limitations in the emotional, social, and technical dimensions of communication. Together, these findings demonstrate both the potential and the boundaries of AI-mediated practice in ESP learning contexts.

One of the key findings from this study is that ChatGPT's Voice Mode creates a low-pressure, repetitive speaking environment, which students identified as critical for building fluency. Fluency in this context refers not only to the speed and smoothness of speech delivery but also to the learner's ability to formulate responses spontaneously without prolonged hesitation or anxiety-induced blockages. Traditional classroom speaking activities, particularly in ESP courses such as English for Hotel Management, often involve high-stakes performance tasks (e.g., role-plays, presentations) that demand immediate accuracy and appropriateness in communication. However, for many learners, these environments offer limited opportunities for high-frequency, low-anxiety speaking practice, which is essential for developing procedural fluency (Dewi & Wilany, 2022; Dzulkifli Isadaud et al., 2022).

One of the most compelling findings of this study is how ChatGPT's Voice Mode helped students overcome their fear of being judged, which is a core trigger of foreign language speaking anxiety. Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), as conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), is largely driven by fears of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Among these, the fear of negative evaluation —the apprehension about others' evaluations and the

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possibility of embarrassment —is consistently identified as the most psychologically paralyzing factor (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018; Nurmasitah et al., 2024). When students are asked to perform speaking tasks in front of peers or instructors, they are subjected to social evaluative threat, which triggers self-monitoring, hyperawareness of errors, and fear of "losing face" (Bashori et al., 2022; Wang & Tahir, 2020). This hyper-awareness often leads to cognitive overload, in which the individual's mental resources are diverted from the task (speaking fluently and clearly) to worrying about mistakes and others' perceptions (Malik et al., 2021; Ölmezer-öztürk & Öztürk, 2021). The result is a vicious cycle of hesitations, speech breakdowns, and increased anxiety.

This study's findings reveal that ChatGPT's Voice Mode interrupts this negative cycle by removing the human audience, thereby eliminating the immediate threat of negative judgment. By interacting with a non-judgmental AI partner, students are afforded a psychological "safe space" where the fear of negative evaluation is no longer relevant. Without the fear of being scrutinized by peers or teachers, students reported feeling freer to experiment, make mistakes, and self-correct in real-time, which is essential for building communicative competence (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Nurmasitah et al., 2024; Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022). This aligns with affective filter theory, which posits that high levels of anxiety raise an emotional barrier that prevents meaningful input from being processed (Zhang, 2023; Liu, 2023). What this study adds is a nuanced mechanism: it is not merely the absence of formal evaluation that reduces anxiety, but specifically the absence of social judgment cues (facial expressions, tones of disapproval, peer comparisons) that allows students to perform more naturally. What this study adds is a nuanced mechanism: it is not merely the absence of formal evaluation that reduces anxiety, but specifically the absence of social judgment cues (facial expressions, tones of disapproval, peer comparisons) that allows students to perform more naturally.

Compared to AI tools like Duolingo or ELSA Speak, which provide real-time scoring and pronunciation feedback, ChatGPT's Voice Mode offers a conversation-driven, non-corrective interaction (Almehmadi, 2024; Owan et al., 2023). While structured feedback is beneficial for accuracy development, it can inadvertently replicate the pressure of being evaluated, especially for students already prone to anxiety. In this respect, the Voice Mode's lack of immediate corrections may paradoxically serve as an advantage for anxiety-prone learners. The emotional safety net provided by non-intrusive AI interactions facilitates risk-taking, which is crucial in language learning, where trial-and-error is part of skill acquisition.

Speaking in a foreign language often involves self-conscious identity threat, where the learner fears being perceived as incompetent or unintelligent due to language errors (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Nurmasitah et al., 2024). This is especially relevant in ESP contexts like Hotel Management, where professional image and communicative competence are highly valued (Juwitawati & Pratiwi, 2018; Oflaz, 2019; Oguzhan, 2014). By removing human listeners, ChatGPT Voice Mode neutralizes this identity threat. AI does not carry social expectations, personal biases, or critical expressions, which means the student's "face" remains intact regardless of performance quality. This removes the psychological load of impression management, freeing cognitive resources for the communicative task itself. Moreover, AI's consistent neutrality ensures that every interaction is emotionally safe, unlike peer or teacher interactions, which can be unpredictable in their emotional impact. This constancy may build self-confidence over time, as learners repeatedly experience successful, non-threatening speaking engagements, gradually reconditioning their emotional responses to speaking tasks (Almehmadi, 2024; Owan et al., 2023).

The findings contribute to the existing literature by suggesting that AI-mediated private practice can serve as an effective tool for emotional regulation in foreign language learning (Almehmadi, 2024; Pratama et al., 2025; Song & Song, 2023). This aligns with prior conclusions on AI's role in enhancing emotional wellbeing, but adds a speaking-specific dimension, emphasizing that fear of social judgment can be strategically mitigated through AI voice interactions. Furthermore, the results

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support the application of Self-Determination Theory, as the removal of external evaluation satisfies the need for autonomy and psychological safety, fostering intrinsic motivation to engage in repeated practice (Kim et al., 2025; Mishra et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024). However, this also invites caution. As noted in previous research, over-dependence on AI may limit learners' readiness to face real-life, socially evaluative speaking situations. Therefore, pedagogical approaches should integrate gradual exposure strategies, where students transition from private AI practice to guided peer interactions, ultimately building resilience for real-world communication (Dewi & Wilany, 2023; Nurmasitah et al., 2024).

However, the findings also underscore several limitations. Students reported that while ChatGPT offered conversational practice, it lacked the emotional feedback and empathy that characterize authentic human interactions. This limitation is significant in ESP contexts such as hospitality, where communication requires not only accuracy and fluency but also emotional intelligence and the ability to empathize with guests (Park & Kim, 2024). Without exposure to these affective dimensions, learners risk developing competence in transactional dialogue but not in socially or emotionally complex exchanges. Similarly, ChatGPT does not simulate non-verbal cues such as gestures, intonation, or body language, which are critical in professional service encounters (Han & Goldstein, 2023). While students gained confidence in speaking, the absence of these multimodal elements means that AI practice alone cannot fully prepare learners for face-to-face interactions.

Another limitation concerns corrective feedback. Unlike pronunciation apps such as ELSA Speak, ChatGPT's Voice Mode rarely provides systematic error correction. While this reduced the pressure of evaluation and encouraged risk-taking, it may slow learners' progress in accuracy and pronunciation over time (Mishra et al., 2023). Pedagogically, this suggests that ChatGPT should be complemented with teacher feedback or targeted pronunciation tools. Finally, technical constraints such as recognition errors, processing delays, or unstable internet connectivity occasionally disrupted students' practice. For learners in under-resourced settings, these barriers can create frustration or even disengagement (Almehmadi, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of ensuring technological readiness and support when integrating AI into ESP curricula.

This study provides empirical evidence of how the absence of human judgment in AI-mediated voice practice reduces speaking anxiety, offering a novel perspective on the emotional affordances of conversational AI in ESP learning. While prior studies have documented AI's utility in feedback provision and language production enhancement, this research highlights the affective dimension of "being heard without being judged", a crucial yet underexplored factor in foreign language speaking pedagogy. Given these insights, ChatGPT's Voice Mode should be conceptualized as a pre-stage practice tool rather than a replacement for human interaction. Teachers can design curricula where AI-mediated fluency practice precedes human-mediated pragmatic and emotional training. For example, students can use ChatGPT to automate routine service dialogues, then engage in roleplays with peers or instructors to layer emotional expressiveness and empathy onto these rehearsed scripts (Almehmadi, 2024; Owan et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2025).

The findings contribute to the existing literature by suggesting that AI-mediated private practice can serve as an effective tool for emotional regulation in foreign language learning. This aligns with Rezai et al.'s (2024) conclusion on AI's role in enhancing emotional wellbeing, but adds a speaking-specific dimension, emphasizing that fear of social judgment can be strategically mitigated through AI voice interactions. Furthermore, the results support the application of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as the removal of external evaluation satisfies the need or autonomy and psychological safety, fostering intrinsic motivation to engage in repeated practice. However, this also invites caution. As Pang et al. (2024) noted, over-dependence on AI may limit learners' readiness to face real-life, socially evaluative speaking situations. Therefore, pedagogical approaches should

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integrate gradual exposure strategies that guide students from private AI practice to guided peer interactions, ultimately building resilience for real-world communication.

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6. Conclusion

This study explored how Indonesian ESP students perceive the use of ChatGPT Voice Mode for English-speaking practice and examined its influence on foreign-language speaking anxiety. The findings revealed that ChatGPT Voice Mode provided a psychologically safe space for students to practice speaking without the fear of negative judgment from peers or instructors. The AI's non-judgmental nature reduced anxiety triggers commonly associated with performance evaluation, fostering a more relaxed and self-directed learning environment. Additionally, students reported improvements in speaking fluency through repetitive practice and valued the user-friendly and accessible interface of ChatGPT's Voice Mode. However, some participants highlighted limitations, such as the lack of emotional feedback and the perceived "robotic" interaction gap compared to human conversations. Despite these drawbacks, the tool was appreciated as a low-stakes platform that helped students gradually build confidence in their speaking abilities. The findings underscore the potential of AI-based conversational tools like ChatGPT to complement traditional language instruction, particularly in addressing affective barriers such as speaking anxiety. By providing a private, low-pressure practice space, ChatGPT's Voice Mode can play a pivotal role in promoting oral proficiency among ESP learners. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes the importance of balanced integration between AI and human-led pedagogical strategies to maximize learning outcomes and ensure ethical use. Future research could further explore hybrid learning models that combine AI interaction with guided instructor feedback to enhance both linguistic competence and communicative confidence in real-world professional contexts.

7. Suggestion

Based on the findings, it is recommended that educators integrate AI-assisted speaking activities, such as ChatGPT Voice Mode, into ESP courses with structured prompts relevant to professional contexts, while ensuring human feedback to address nuances AI cannot capture. To further reduce students' speaking anxiety, reflective practices focusing on emotional regulation should be incorporated. Training students on the critical and mindful use of AI tools is essential to prevent over-reliance and foster autonomous learning. Encouraging regular, self-paced practice with AI, combined with guided teacher support, can enhance fluency and confidence. Future research should explore blended models that balance AI interactions with human-led communicative tasks to optimize language learning outcomes.

Declarations

Author Contributions.

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Shella Gherina Saptiany: Conceptualization, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing, Original Draft Preparation.
Rudi Hartono: Supervision, Methodology Validation, Review and Editing.
Januarius Mujiyanto: Theoretical Framework, Data Interpretation, Review and Editing.
Katharina Rustipa: Writing, Review and Editing, Final Manuscript Validation.
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