Research Article

AI-ASSISTED TOOLS INFLUENCING MATTAYOM 6 STUDENTS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONFIDENCE AT PAK KHAT PITTAYAKHOM SCHOOL BUENGKAN THAILAND*

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Abstract

This study examined Mattayom 6 students' perceptions and experiences of AI-assisted speaking practice and English-speaking confidence at Pak Khat Pittayakhom School, Buengkan, Thailand. The study aimed to explore students' perceived confidence in speaking English after using AI-assisted tools, identify factors within AI-assisted speaking activities that students perceived as contributing to confidence, examine students' attitudes and experiences regarding AI-supported conversational English practice, and provide context-specific recommendations for integrating AI into Thai secondary-school speaking instruction. A qualitative-dominant mixed-methods case study was conducted over five weeks. The broader AI-assisted speaking activities involved approximately 260 students across seven Mattayom 6 classrooms; 151 students completed a questionnaire and 33 students participated in semi-structured

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group interviews. Limited classroom observation notes were used as contextual support. Quantitative data were summarized using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, with internal consistency estimates calculated as a supplementary check. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically. Students generally perceived AI-assisted speaking practice positively. The strongest result concerned classroom speaking confidence: 82.1% agreed or strongly agreed that regular AI use had made them more confident speaking English in class (M = 4.40, SD = 0.83). Students also valued AI for useful hints and support (M = 4.31, SD = 0.87), learning new words and phrases (M = 4.27, SD = 0.94), and helpful correction of English mistakes (M = 4.25, SD = 0.93). Qualitative findings indicated that students valued AI as a low-pressure rehearsal partner that allowed repeated practice, vocabulary and sentence support, and feedback without immediate social judgment. However, confidence and willingness to communicate were less strong in spontaneous or outside-classroom situations. The findings suggest that AI-assisted tools are most appropriately used as teacher-guided preparation, rehearsal, and feedback resources that lead students toward authentic communication with teachers and peers rather than replacing human interaction.

Keywords: AI-assisted learning, English-speaking confidence, ChatGPT, Thai EFL learners, Speaking practice, Educational technology

Introduction

English-speaking confidence is an important component of successful communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In Thailand,

students may study English for many years while still experiencing hesitation, anxiety, and limited willingness to speak in real communicative situations. Large classes, teacher-centered instructional practices, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for extended oral practice can restrict students' opportunities to develop confidence through meaningful interaction (Khamkhien, 2010; Noom-ura, 2013; Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015). For Mattayom 6 students, this issue is particularly important because they are approaching the end of secondary education and may need English for university study, further training, employment, and communication beyond school.

The Thai educational context also places emphasis on communicative competence and technology integration. The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) emphasizes the development of foreign-language communication for real-life situations rather than knowledge of grammar and vocabulary alone. Broader national development agendas have also emphasized digital skills, innovation, and English proficiency as elements of human-resource development (Buasuwan, 2018). These priorities create a relevant context for examining whether emerging digital tools can complement classroom speaking instruction. Recent developments in artificial intelligence have expanded the possibilities for language practice. AI chatbots such as ChatGPT can engage learners in flexible, open-ended dialogue and can provide conversational prompts, vocabulary, sentence models, explanations, corrections, and repeated practice. Recent research has identified both opportunities and challenges associated with AI-supported language learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Du & Daniel, 2024). AI-powered conversation tools may be particularly useful for learners who hesitate to speak

because they can offer a low-pressure environment in which students can rehearse language before interacting with other people.

At the same time, practicing with AI is not equivalent to communicating with people. Real communication can involve unexpected questions, social pressure, interpersonal relationships, and the need to respond spontaneously. A learner may therefore feel more comfortable when practicing with AI without necessarily becoming equally confident in real-life communication. AI responses may also be too long, too difficult, or unsuitable for a learner's speaking level, and students may become dependent on generated language if they copy responses rather than adapt and produce their own language. Teacher guidance is consequently important.

Although evidence concerning AI-assisted language learning is growing, much of the research has focused on higher education, adult learners, or contexts outside Thailand. Sirirojjananan (2023) identified a need to understand Thai high school students' perceptions of ChatGPT in EFL classes. There remains a need for context-specific evidence concerning how Thai secondary students experience AI-assisted speaking practice, what features they perceive as supporting confidence, and whether perceived benefits extend from structured classroom practice to less predictable communication outside school. The present study addresses this gap by examining Mattayom 6 students at Pak Khat Pittayakhom School in Buengkan, Thailand.

The study does not treat AI as a replacement for teachers or human communication. Instead, it examines AI as a supplementary resource within teacher-designed speaking activities. This distinction is central to interpreting the findings: the value of AI lies not simply in its availability, but in how it is

integrated into pedagogically meaningful tasks that move learners from supported rehearsal toward human interaction.

Objectives

1. To explore Mattayom 6 students' perceptions of their confidence in speaking English after using AI-assisted tools.

2. To identify specific factors within AI-assisted speaking activities that students perceive as supporting their speaking confidence.

3. To examine students' overall attitudes and experiences regarding the use of AI tools for conversational English practice.

4. To provide context-specific recommendations for integrating AI-assisted tools into Thai secondary school English speaking curricula.

Literature Review

Krashen's (1985) theory provides a useful perspective for interpreting students' descriptions of reduced fear and greater comfort during AI practice. The Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that emotional factors such as anxiety and confidence can influence learners' engagement with language input. In the present study, students described AI as a practice environment in which they could make mistakes without immediate judgment from classmates or teachers. This does not demonstrate language acquisition directly, but it helps explain why students may perceive AI practice as less threatening.

Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis emphasizes the role of producing language. Students in the present study described using AI to repeat conversations, prepare answers, and extend short responses. AI therefore functioned as a rehearsal partner that created additional opportunities to formulate language before classroom communication.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective is relevant because students used AI for vocabulary, sentence models, explanations, and corrections. These forms of support can be understood as scaffolding that helps learners complete language tasks. The study nevertheless emphasizes that AI support should be temporary and guided so that students develop their own language rather than simply copying generated answers.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) further emphasizes that effective technology integration depends on the interaction of technology, pedagogy, and content. In this study, AI is therefore conceptualized as a pedagogical resource whose usefulness depends on teacher-designed tasks, appropriate prompts, monitoring of AI responses, and alignment with English-speaking objectives.

The conceptual framework positions teacher-guided use of AI-assisted conversational learning tools as the central instructional condition. AI-supported rehearsal, vocabulary and sentence support, and feedback are expected to contribute to perceived speaking confidence, reduced anxiety, willingness to communicate, and perceived speaking improvement. The framework also recognizes that transfer to authentic communication is shaped by classroom and social context. Thus, AI-supported practice is conceptualized as a bridge toward human communication rather than an endpoint.

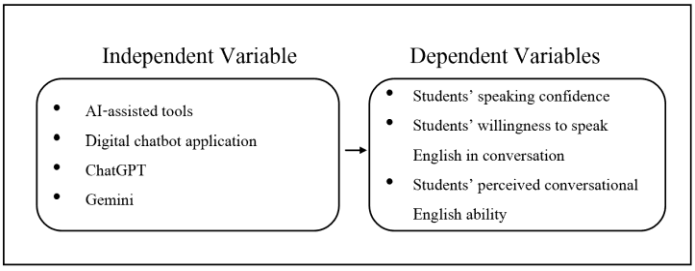


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The study used a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods case study design. Qualitative evidence from group interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses was used to understand students' experiences, while descriptive quantitative results provided a numerical summary of their perceptions. Limited classroom observation notes were used as contextual support rather than as a separate outcome measure.

The study involved seven Mattayom 6 classrooms: M6/1, M6/2, M6/3, M6/4, M6/5, M6/7, and M6/9. Approximately 260 students participated in the broader AI-assisted speaking activities. The questionnaire was completed by 151 students. Group interviews involved 33 students from a planned sample of 35.

Table 1 Questionnaire and Group Interview Participation

Method	Planned	Actual	% Planned
Questionnaire	151	151	100.0
Group interviews	35	33	94.3

The AI-assisted speaking activities were conducted over five weeks and were integrated into regular conversational English lessons. Activities included role-plays, topic-based chats, and reflection tasks. ChatGPT was the main AI-

assisted tool. Students used AI for preparation, vocabulary checking, sentence construction, rehearsal, and feedback before or during classroom speaking activities.

The questionnaire was administered after the intervention and used five-point Likert-type items addressing speaking confidence and anxiety, willingness to communicate, AI tool engagement, AI feedback and scaffolding, and perceived speaking improvement. Open-ended responses provided additional qualitative evidence. Semi-structured group interviews explored students' use of AI, confidence, useful features, feedback, and transfer to classroom speaking.

Quantitative responses were summarized using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Results were reported descriptively. Internal consistency estimates were also calculated as a supplementary check of the questionnaire constructs. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Patterns were compared across data sources to support interpretation.

Table 2 Internal Consistency Estimates for Questionnaire Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Speaking Confidence and Anxiety	0.725
Willingness to Communicate	0.867
AI Tool Engagement	0.913
AI Feedback and Scaffolding	0.925
Perceived Speaking Skill Improvement	0.834

The coefficients ranged from 0.725 to 0.925. The highest value was for AI Feedback and Scaffolding (0.925), followed by AI Tool Engagement (0.913),

Willingness to Communicate (0.867), Perceived Speaking Skill Improvement (0.834), and Speaking Confidence and Anxiety (0.725). These results support the descriptive use of the questionnaire constructs.

The study should be interpreted as evidence of students' self-reported perceptions and experiences. In particular, the before-and-after confidence comparison was retrospective: students reported their earlier confidence at the time of the post-intervention survey. Therefore, the change from M = 3.24 to M = 3.60 is presented as a perceived pattern rather than as a statistically tested causal pre-post effect.

Results

The results showed generally positive perceptions of AI-assisted speaking practice, especially for classroom confidence, feedback, and language support. However, not all outcomes were equally strong. Willingness to volunteer in class and willingness to use English outside the classroom were more moderate.

Table 3 Speaking Confidence and Anxiety (N = 151)

Item	M	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree %
More confident speaking English in class	4.40	0.83	82.1
More confident speaking outside classroom	3.91	1.06	64.2
Less anxious about making mistakes	3.90	1.15	64.9

Not afraid to speak in front of classmates/teacher	3.81	1.20	59.6

The strongest confidence result was classroom speaking. The mean was 4.40 (SD = 0.83), and 82.1% selected Agree or Strongly Agree. Confidence outside the classroom was lower at M = 3.91 (SD = 1.06), indicating that students perceived stronger support in structured classroom situations.

Table 4 Retrospective Speaking Confidence (N = 151)

Measure	**M**	**SD**	**Low confidence (1-2), n (%)**
Confidence before using AI	3.24	1.46	50 (33.1%)
Confidence now	3.60	1.24	28 (18.5%)

The retrospective confidence rating increased by 0.36 points, from 3.24 to 3.60. The proportion reporting low confidence decreased from 33.1% to 18.5%. These figures are consistent with students' interview descriptions of feeling more prepared and comfortable after AI-assisted practice, but they should not be interpreted as proof of causal improvement.

Table 5 Willingness to Communicate Results (N = 151)

Item	M	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree %
Speak English with classmates/teacher more often	3.99	0.99	65.6
Volunteer to speak or answer in English more often	3.42	1.28	44.4
More willing to use English outside classroom	3.63	1.19	51.0

Willingness to communicate was strongest for speaking more often with classmates or the teacher (M = 3.99). Volunteering to speak or answer during class was lower (M = 3.42), suggesting that perceived confidence did not always lead to spontaneous participation.

Table 6 AI Feedback and Speaking Improvement

Item	M	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree %
AI corrected English mistakes helpfully	4.25	0.93	78.8
Learned new words or phrases from AI	4.27	0.94	75.5
AI gave useful hints/support	4.31	0.87	77.5
ChatGPT helpful for improving speaking skills	4.36	0.88	82.8

Students strongly valued AI as a language-support resource. The highest result in this group was useful hints or support (M = 4.31, SD = 0.87). The perceived usefulness of ChatGPT for speaking skills was also high (M = 4.36, SD = 0.88).

Students also reported generally positive attitudes toward continued use. The original study found that 74.8% agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to continue using AI for English practice, and 74.2% would recommend AI chatbot practice to other students.

Discussion

The findings suggest that AI-assisted practice was most useful as a low-pressure rehearsal environment. The high classroom-confidence rating and students' descriptions of reduced fear of mistakes are consistent with the affective-filter perspective (Krashen, 1985). Repeated practice also aligns with the role of language output and scaffolding described by Swain (1985) and Vygotsky (1978).

However, the lower willingness to volunteer in class and the more moderate results for communication outside the classroom show that confidence with AI-supported practice did not automatically transfer to every real-life speaking situation. This supports the view that willingness to communicate depends on both confidence and the social context (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Therefore, AI is best positioned as a supplementary tool that prepares students for human interaction rather than replacing it.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, AI-assisted tools should be integrated into Thai secondary school English speaking curricula as guided preparation, rehearsal, and feedback tools. They should not be used as replacements for teachers, classmates, or real human communication.

AI-assisted practice should also be connected to meaningful classroom communication. Students may first use AI to learn vocabulary, organise their ideas, check sentences, and rehearse responses. They should then use the prepared language in pair work, group discussions, role-plays, presentations, or conversations with teachers and classmates.

In conclusion, AI-assisted speaking practice supported students' perceived English-speaking confidence by providing a safer practice environment, repeated opportunities for rehearsal, language support, and corrective feedback. Its strongest influence was found in structured classroom speaking activities. However, AI did not completely remove students' shyness or guarantee confidence in real-life communication.

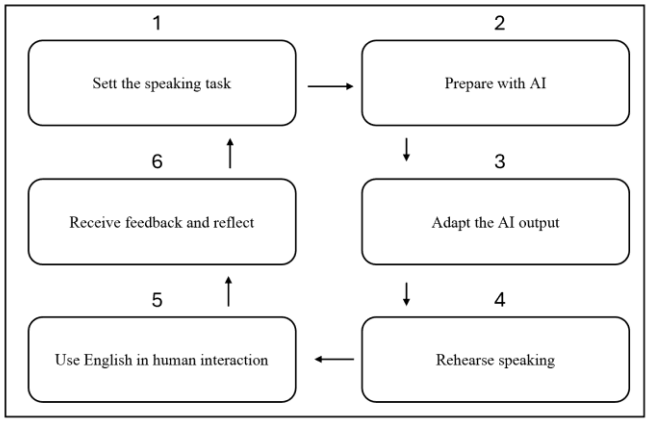


Figure 2 Recommended Teacher-Guided AI-Assisted English Speaking Cycle

The study concludes that AI-assisted tools can support Mattayom 6 students' English-speaking confidence when they are used as guided preparation, rehearsal, and feedback tools in English speaking lessons. Students perceived AI as helpful because it reduced fear of mistakes, gave them more chances to practice, supported vocabulary and sentence building, and helped

them prepare for classroom speaking activities. Therefore, AI should be integrated carefully through teacher-designed activities that move students from AI-supported practice to real human communication. In this way, AI can become a useful support for English speaking confidence in Thai secondary classrooms, especially when combined with teacher guidance, peer interaction, and meaningful speaking tasks.

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