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ANALYSIS OF THE USEFULNESS OF CHATBOTS TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS IN EOIs

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Marta Graus Medina

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Tutora: Irene Solanich Sanglas

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the potential of AI chatbots as a tool to improve speaking skills among adult students at *Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes* (EOI), where the use of chatbots remains uncommon despite growing interest in AI tools for language learning.

A mixed methodology was used, combining assessments of a pre-task and a post-task oral test with surveys addressed to students and teachers. Seventeen fifth-year students participated in structured debates before and after eight weeks of autonomous interaction with an open-domain chatbot. The results show slight improvements in fluency and confidence, although progress in grammar and pronunciation was limited. Students who personalized their interaction with the chatbot optimized this resource more, highlighting the importance of user training.

The surveys revealed mixed opinions: some students positively valued the ability to practice without pressure, others found the conversations unnatural, and several initially skeptical adopted a more positive attitude after using the tool, suggesting greater potential for acceptance with proper training. Teachers were slightly open to using the tool but expressed reservations about the accuracy of feedback and technical limitations.

The study concludes that general-use chatbots can be useful complementary tools for oral practice if used regularly and strategically. However, they cannot yet replace face-to-face learning.

Key words: chatbot, EOI, speaking skills, English learning, AI

Resum

Aquest TFM explora el potencial dels xatbots amb IA com a eina per millorar la competència oral entre l'alumnat adult de les Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes (EOI), on l'ús de xatbots continua sent poc habitual, tot i l'interès creixent cap a les eines d'IA per a l'aprenentatge de llengües.

S'ha utilitzat una metodologia mixta que combina avaluacions d'una pre-tasca i una post-tasca orals amb enquestes adreçades a estudiants i docents. Disset estudiants de cinquè curs van participar en debats estructurats abans i després de vuit setmanes d'interacció autònoma amb un xatbot d'àmbit obert. Els resultats mostren lleugeres millores en fluïdesa i confiança, tot i que els avenços en gramàtica i pronunciació van ser limitats. Els estudiants que van personalitzar la interacció amb el xatbot van optimitzar més aquest recurs, fet que subratlla la importància de formar l'usuari.

Les enquestes van revelar opinions diverses: alguns estudiants van valorar positivament poder practicar sense pressions, d'altres van trobar les converses poc naturals, i d'altres inicialment escèptics van adoptar una actitud més positiva després d'utilitzar l'eina, fet que apunta a un major potencial d'acceptació amb una formació adequada. El professorat es va mostrar lleugerament obert a utilitzar l'eina, però va expressar reticències sobre la precisió del feedback i limitacions tècniques.

L'estudi conclou que els xatbots d'ús general poden ser eines complementàries útils per a la pràctica oral si s'utilitzen de manera regular i estratègica. No obstant això, encara no poden substituir l'aprenentatge presencial.

Paraules clau: xatbot, EOI, competència oral, aprendre anglès, IA

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1. Objectives and justification of the work

Technological advances in recent years have been a game-changer in language learning and teaching. But what caused the greatest impact was the introduction of computers and the Internet into our daily lives. That meant a shift from traditional to digital learning. Before computers, language learning relied mostly on textbooks, in-person classes, and audio tapes. With computers, interactive software and multimedia content became available, making learning more dynamic. The Internet allowed learners to access dictionaries, grammar explanations, and practice exercises instantly. Students of a foreign language could start using e-learning platforms to learn at their own pace. They could replay audio, complete quizzes, and track their progress over time, which was not possible in traditional classroom settings.

Gone were the days of photocopying the lyrics of the songs that came with the CDs, and trying to translate them with the help of the dictionary, to know what the songs of those favorite bands were about and, at the same time, learn expressions and vocabulary that was not taught in the school of languages. The much-prized letters to penfriends in foreign countries also became a thing of the past, giving way to online communication: email, forums, and chat rooms gave learners the chance to practice writing and speaking with native speakers.

The Internet enabled distance learning through video calls and online courses, allowing people to learn from teachers across the world without leaving their homes. This transformed formal education and self-study methods alike.

And the last great leap in the radical shift to online learning came with AI-powered and immersive learning tools. An immersive learning tool is a technology that creates a highly engaging and realistic environment for learners, helping them practice a language in a natural and interactive way. These tools aim to simulate real-life experiences, making learning more effective. Of these, focusing attention on the free tools available to learn an L2, one of the innovative resources that has attracted the most attention is chatbots.

The world of AI and chatbots is still completely unknown to a large majority of the population, even though more and more people are fascinated by the possibilities they offer to practice conversations, test listening skills, provide a relaxed environment for those who are nervous about speaking in public, etc.

Therefore, this is the reason why the interest of this Master's dissertation is researching the topic proposed, as AI-powered chatbots are a very new resource, with many possibilities that can bring great benefits to L2 learners. But at the same time, due to the fact that its incorporation in the world in general as a content generator is so recent, it is still unknown how it can be used to get the most out of it.

With all of the above, the objectives of this dissertation are the following:

1. Test if AI-powered chatbots are a good source for acquiring new vocabulary and expressions in L2 and for improving listening and speaking skills and fluency.
2. Capture the opinions and perceptions of *Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes* (EOI) students on their experience with the use of chatbots.
3. Analyze EOI English teachers' use of chatbots as a teaching resource to improve speaking and listening skills.

Many studies are coming out lately highlighting the virtues of using a chatbot to improve speaking skills.

Chatbots are computer programs that can carry out real-time conversations with learners as if learners are interacting with other individuals in the real world. (Fathi et. al., 2024). In this way, all English learners can have a native speaking assistant, at any time of the day or night, with whom they can have a conversation on any topic that suits them and without the shyness they may feel during language practice with a human partner.

But even though proving to be very useful in this aspect, chatbots are rarely used for adult English learners in EOIs to expand their knowledge and speaking skills, since AI is not well regarded by this age group. Many adults are reluctant to talk to a chatbot because they are unaware of its capabilities. And some of them even ignore that these kinds of speech assistants exist. Moreover, not all EOIs English teachers are familiar with this very current resource and do not contemplate or use it to encourage their students to practice speaking.

For this reason, the research evidence to be obtained is to demonstrate that AI chatbots are a very valid resource for generating conversations with which to improve speaking and listening skills, understanding messages and acquiring vocabulary and phrases. At the same time, it is believed to be an exceptional resource for improving fluency, since the student can hold a conversation without embarrassment. AI chatbots should be given more value and considered as a resource to be used in class or as extra practice at home.

2. Literature review

A chatbot, also known as conversational agent, is a dialogue software program that can interact with users and process their inputs using natural language, by applying the technology of natural language processing (NLP). In general, there are an infinite number of chatbots with specific characteristics, designed to work in a set area, operating on different platforms, with specific purposes. And educational chatbots are not exclusively used in the field of language learning. According to the study conducted by Kuhail, M.A. et al. (2023), a few other subjects were targeted by the educational chatbots, such as engineering, religious education, psychology, and mathematics.

If we talk about the use of chatbots in the context of a foreign language teaching, "Chatbot-supported language learning refers to the use of a chatbot to interact with students using natural language for daily language practice, answering language learning questions and conducting assessment and providing feedback." (Huang et al., 2021, p238). According to the same authors, teachers can create chatbots by themselves, without prior programming experience, that enable users to customize conversational contents by adding pre-set databases or allow users to drag and drop conversational flows. In other words, they can be customized to the teacher's taste in order to work on specific aspects or to obtain specific results. "The chatbot can be programmed with dialog targeted at the learner's level" (Brinegar, 2023, p.224). From the studies conducted by Kuhail, M.A. et al. (2023) we can see that there are some chatbots that operate as a teaching agent, that use various approaches: some of them recommend tutorials to students based upon learning styles, students' historical learning and pattern matching. They can even ask the students to watch educational videos followed by a discussion about the videos. "The teaching agent simply mimics a tutor by presenting scenarios to be discussed with students. In other studies, the teaching agent emulates a teacher conducting a formative assessment by evaluating students' knowledge with multiple-choice questions." (Kuhail, M.A. et al., 2023, section "Teaching agents", paragraph 1).

Nevertheless, the objective of this research is to test whether the use of bots is useful for improving speaking and listening skills, so a chatbot that conducts conversations, which can be minimally adapted to the learner's level of English, rather than a tutor leading a class, is required.

> "A dialogue system is a computer program that supports spoken, text-based, or multimodal conversational interactions with humans. Generally, a distinction is made between task-oriented and non-task-oriented dialogue systems. In task-oriented dialogues, the human user and the system engage in an interaction to accomplish some task. [...]. In non-task-oriented dialogues the human user and the system engage in general conversational interaction (also known as *chit-chat*)." (McTear, M., 2021, p.11).

So, in this author's words, a non-task-oriented dialogue system is needed for the purpose. And another requirement is that it must be free to use. So, the first issue to focus on in the research is which conversational agent is suitable to carry out this project.

The second issue is about how effective it is. Several research studies support the effectiveness of using AI chatbots to learn English, and two research articles are especially relevant to this study because both of them clearly state the advantages and disadvantages of this very new and unexplored resource that is welcomed by one sector of the population and rejected by another.

If the advantages are to be mentioned first, the evidence from the studies conducted so far appears to be conclusive:

> «Utilizing online platforms, EFL learners can go beyond the conventional restrictions of classes, such as small class size, short duration, and large numbers of learners, to receive constructive feedback through mediation, communicate and learn outside class, and improve their speaking skills continuously through interactive speaking activities.» (Fathi et al., 2024, section "Introduction", paragraph 2).

In a relaxed environment, such as at home, the learner can carry on a conversation with a chatbot that will not only provide information about what is being asked, but also carry on a dialogue, ask questions, and even correct grammatical errors.

On the other hand, these same studies and others also mention some disadvantages of using chatbots in language learning. Two of these disadvantages are exposed in the study conducted by Huang et al. (2021) and are the following: 'The novelty effect', that refers to the newness of a technology to students, which disappears or significantly declines over time after they become familiar with the technology. And the second worry is the limited capabilities of chatbots. For instance, if students misspell their inputs, they may receive irrelevant responses from the chatbot. Brinegar (2023), in the same way, also comments on some of the disadvantages of using chatbots, and they are, among others, the limited

knowledge that teacher candidates have of modern chatbots, or the use of chatbots by students, who may become too reliant on them, for example, for completing homework.

To optimize the use of a chatbot, it must be trained to work for the learner. It must be given some guidelines, such as, for example, to speak a little slower, to ask the learner follow-up questions after its interventions, etc. And to do that, it is essential to know the chatbots' environment and how they work.

With all of the above, it can be concluded that all these studies are very recent and some of them do not lead to any conclusion because further research is needed. The effects of chatbot-mediated interaction on speaking skills have not been fully explored. "Despite advances in technology, there are still many challenges that must be addressed to create chatbots that truly capture the context, style, emotion, and character of human conversations" (Lin et al., 2023, p.2). But this does not mean that they are not already an outstanding tool to be used to improve speaking skills, and should be considered as a cutting-edge resource available to everyone.

There is a need to further explore and improve the performance of chatbots to make them more useful and to improve their performance. That is why the research questions that will occupy the attention of this Dissertation are the following:

1. Will practicing some speaking activity with a chatbot provide information regarding the usefulness of AI for the purpose?

2. Although chatbots are proving to be a good resource for learning L2, why performing AI-assisted activities in class is still a very little exploited and accepted resource?

3. How can AI chatbots be performed to achieve objective number one?

3. Methodology

3.1 General information

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the usefulness of chatbots to improve speaking skills of adult English learners in an EOI. Specifically, the aspects of oral production under research are pronunciation and fluency, confidence in speaking, listening skills, vocabulary usage, and grammar accuracy.

With all the objectives set, and after having studied the considerations on qualitative and quantitative research exposed by Dörnyei (2007), it was believed that the best methodology to carry out the relevant research was a mixed-method. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, numerical conclusions could be drawn about the effectiveness of conversational chatbots based on a comparison of the results/marks of the same test before and after testing a group, that is tracking participants' speaking progress through oral tests or speaking assessments. And at the same time quantitative and qualitative information could be obtained concerning learners' opinions, motivation, and confidence. More precisely, to assess the users' opinion or perception, the idea was to prepare a survey with some questions that they had to answer (giving a score from 0 to 5) according to their point of view and according to how their experience had been. From this material, quantitative data were obtained. But there had to be as well in the survey a part of free opinion where they could express, in their own words and using the language they master and feel comfortable with, how they had felt using chatbots to have conversations about a proposed topic. "Qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38). And it is from this second part that the qualitative data were obtained.

At the same time, to answer research question number two, that is, to find out the knowledge that teachers have of modern chatbots and the use they make of it, if any, the opinion of the EOI teachers was also taken into account, not only that of the teacher in charge of the group studied. Thus, a survey was also prepared to assess the uses that EOI teachers made of chatbots.

All this research was carried out as an intervention project in the classroom with the following method and guidelines:

3.2 The participants

The EOI English students chosen to carry out the research were those in the fifth year. There are three main reasons for this: the first is that these students were the same ones to whom the classes would be directed during the intervention practicum internship. Secondly, they had a good enough level of English to be able to carry on a coherent and complex conversation with a chatbot and get more out of the activity. The third reason is that it was the largest group of all those studying at the EOI, so it was possible to count on a large number of participants. In total, there were 25 students. Of these, 6 could not participate in the research project because they missed either the first debate (pre-test) or the second debate (post-test), so a comparison of their results could not be made. Other 2 students did not want to participate, and the reason was unanimous and categorical: they were against Artificial Intelligence and did not want to make use of any chatbot.

The students had a heterogeneous profile: ages between 22 and 72 years old, various professions (although a significant percentage were retired people), 59 % men and 41% women, but with a similar social class, and a similar level of education.

They were informed that it was optional to participate, although they would still have to contribute to the pre-test and post-test debates, as they would be conducted as speaking activities in class. They were also made aware of the ethical considerations and personal information they would have to provide if they consented to participate. In addition, the confidentiality of the personal data they were asked to provide was assured, as well as the results that were extracted from the research. If they were interested, the results of both the pre-test and the post-test were provided to them for information purposes, but they were never taken into account as course grades.

3.3 Choosing the right chatbot

As mentioned above, a basic condition the chatbot had to fulfill is that it had to be free and available to everyone. With this condition, a considerable number of plans or programs were discarded, most of them task-oriented, that offer a chatbot service to improve L2 skills, that work in a very personalized way, that adapt to the study plans of each student, and that offer many variants and possibilities. Analyzing the dialogue systems offered today, it can be concluded that those that are task-oriented are paid, requiring a monthly or annual subscription (Ex: Talkpal, Duolingo Max, Replika) and, therefore, fall outside the parameters required to be used in this study.

Thus, the chatbot that was finally deemed the most appropriate for the purpose was ChatGPT. The main arguments justifying its choice are:

- Its ease of use: The home screen is very simple and intuitive. Moreover, users can tailor ChatGPT's interface to meet their specific needs, such as adjusting font size, color scheme, or contrast levels. This customization is crucial for users with visual impairments, dyslexia, or color blindness.

- The quality of the humanized voice. Anyhow, this chatbot only offers 10 minutes of humanized voice per month. Then the voice becomes more robotic, although the conversations are of the same quality.

- Its renown makes it familiar to everyone, even those who have never used it. "It can be argued that ChatGPT has contributed exponentially to increasing the popularity of AI chatbots." (Celik, 2025, p.2)

- The quality of answers: According to research carried out by Celik et al. (2025, p.5) ChatGPT has certain advantages over others due to its instant reply-encompassing creativity, emotional intelligence, and accuracy.

All these qualities have a positive influence on the chatbot being perceived as a more approachable tool. It must be remembered that the research participants using the chatbot have to feel comfortable and relaxed.

Other features of ChatGPT are:

-Although it is free to use, the user must register with an email account, as long as it saves the query history, configuration preferences, etc. And it is when the user registers that can choose whether the chatbot must have a male or female voice, from several different options (quiet voice, dynamic voice, etc.), and it can also be chosen whether the pronunciation must be British or American.

- It has the memory to remember what was previously asked. The transcript of all conversations carried out is saved in the application history, and can be consulted whenever required, but ChatGPT does not use this information to refine future responses and make them more personalized.

-Once the chat is over, the transcript can be accessed but cannot be seen while talking.

4. Data collection process and tools

Students were given a topic to talk about, which was general in scope, and related to technology. It was a topic on which they had already worked on vocabulary and expressions, and that saved preparation time. In this way, it was eliminated the bias that could be caused by proposing a topic of conversation completely unknown to some of the students or highly dominated by another sector.

Starting from this point, as a first intervention, all the participants had to speak about the topic 'Social media has a negative impact on mental health', lead a conversation, in the framework of an oral debate. Half of the group had to defend the proposed statement, while the other half defended the opposing arguments. The debate lasted for 30 minutes. Each of the learners had to make at least three interventions. In the event that a debater did not intervene sufficiently, questions were asked specifically to them to force them to intervene.

There was a first assessment (pre-test) of the performance of those students participating in the project. They were assessed according to an exhaustive rubric that covered not only the use of the English language, i.e., vocabulary, grammar, fluency, talk content or pronunciation, but also the way in which it was used, that is, body language, confidence in speaking or interaction. The score for each of these parameters ranged from 1 to 5, and each of them had the same value (see Appendix 3).

At this point, students had to train the chatbot for their convenience. For example, if they asked it to end its interventions with a follow-up question, it would be easier for them to continue the conversation, because it would be the dialogue system itself that would carry the weight of the conversation. It could also be asked to correct grammatical errors participants made during their oral interventions. They could also use the chatbot to ask questions about grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. that arose during the conversation. A document with basic instructions on how to register to ChatGPT and how to use it was shared with them (see Appendix 2).

Thus, the pre-test was followed by speaking practice. As mentioned above, participants had to establish conversations with the chatbot. Because it was not possible to control the time they spent practicing speaking, they were asked to do it as many times as possible. One requirement they were asked to make a large part of the conversations revolve around the topic of social networks and mental health.

Finally, eight weeks later, there was a second assessment (post-test), which was the same as the first one: They had to talk about the same topic ('Social media has a negative impact on mental health') for the second time. The conditions were the same: Again, the students were divided into two groups: some argued in favor and the others against the topic. The debate lasted 30 minutes, and the participants had to make a minimum of 3 interventions each.

The rubric used to make their second assessment was exactly the same as that of the first debate, in order to unify criteria and facilitate comparison of results.

Pre-test and post-test results of all those participants involved in both debates were compared to measure improvement. It was not so much the final score obtained by each participant in both tests that mattered, but rather the score obtained in each parameter of the rubric. From these results, quantitative data were obtained.

As a last step, since it was not only the tests results that mattered, but also the perception of the participants, i.e. how they have felt, how they have experienced the use of chatbots, what they believed, etc., participants' opinions were analyzed through a survey with 17 questions with numerical answers about engagement, effectiveness, limitations, satisfaction, etc. (range 0 to 5), and through a free-response question about how they felt using chatbots (see Appendix 4). Questions 1-17 provided quantitative data, while question 18 provided qualitative data to the research.

At the same time, to get an answer to why performing AI-assisted activities in class is still a very little exploited and accepted resource, the five EOI English teachers were given another survey designed to find out what use, if any, they made of chatbots as a tool for their students to practice speaking skills, as well as their intentions to use it in the future (see Appendix 5).

5. Results

5.1 Comparing pre-task and post-task results

The study aimed to evaluate the impact of chatbot interaction — specifically with ChatGPT — on the speaking performance of 17 students of English in an EOI engaged in a structured debate task. Each participant was assessed in two debate sessions: one before and one after using ChatGPT as a tool for speaking practice. During the intermediate period, students were instructed to interact with the chatbot to develop their oral skills.

Analysis of the post-intervention debate performances revealed that several students demonstrated notable improvements in fluency and self-confidence while speaking (23'5% in both skills, that is 4 out of 17 students). These gains suggest a degree of enhanced comfort and ease during oral expression. Improvements were also observed in interaction (17'6%, that is 3 out of 17 students) and, to a lesser extent (11'8%, that is 2 out of 17 students), in talk content and body language. However, at the same time other students lowered their scores slightly in these same fields. Despite the positive developments, some aspects of performance—namely grammar accuracy and pronunciation—showed no progress and, in some other cases — specifically use of vocabulary — a slight decline.

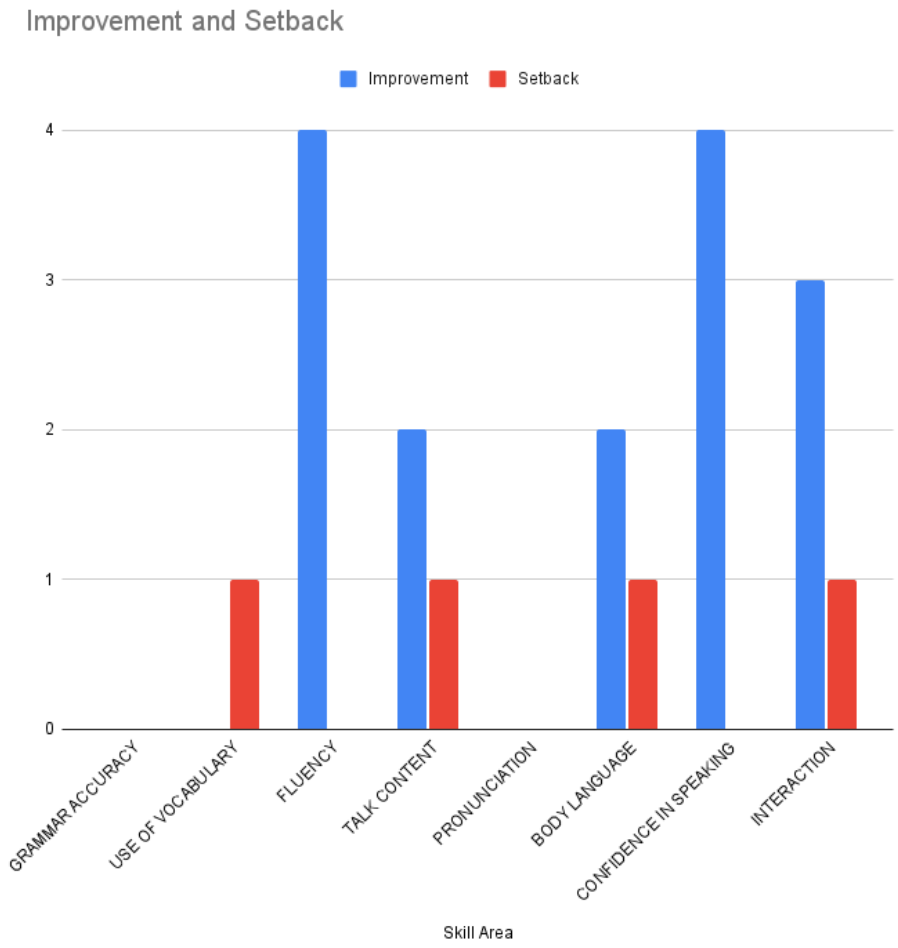


Chart 1. Improvement vs Setback by Language Skills

5.2 Students' survey results

To address objective two of this dissertation, a post-study survey was conducted with 15 students who participated in both the pre-task and post-task debates, with the aim of collecting their opinions and reflections on the use of chatbots to enhance speaking skills. An additional 2 participants were invited to complete the survey but did not respond. The survey focused on general use (hours per week, place and main use of the chatbot), user experience (engagement, effectiveness and limitations), and overall satisfaction with the chatbot experience.

In terms of usage duration, the majority of the 15 participants reported relatively brief interactions with ChatGPT. 10 participants (67%) indicated that they used the tool for less

than 30 minutes per week. 4 participants (27%) reported spending between 30 minutes and one hour using it. Only 1 participant (6%) engaged with the chatbot for a period between one and two hours, and no participants reported usage exceeding two hours (see chart 1 in Appendix 6).

The chatbot was mostly used at home, with only 2 reported use in the car and none at work (see chart 2 in Appendix 6).

Regarding the main purposes for which participants used ChatGPT, the most frequently cited reason was to gain confidence in speaking, mentioned by 7 participants. Improving grammar was the second most common use, reported by 5 participants. 4 participants indicated that they used the tool to improve their fluency, while 3 focused on learning new vocabulary and expressions. 2 participants used ChatGPT specifically to work on their pronunciation. Additionally, 1 participant selected "other" and specified that their primary goal was to improve listening skills (see Chart 3 in Appendix 6).

Participants were asked to rate how engaging they found their conversations with the chatbot, using a scale from 0 (not engaging at all) to 5 (very engaging). The responses ranged from 1 to 4, with no participants selecting the extreme ends of the scale (0 or 5). The most frequently given score was 3, chosen by 6 participants, indicating a moderate level of engagement. 3 participants rated their experience as 4, suggesting a relatively high level of engagement, while 4 participants gave a score of 2, and 2 participants selected 1, reflecting lower engagement (see Chart 4 in Appendix 6).

Opinions were mixed on how natural the conversations with the chatbot felt, though no participants selected either of the extreme values of 0 (very unnatural) or 5 (very natural). Responses ranged from 1 to 4, and the most common rating was 3, selected by 7 participants, indicating a perception of moderate naturalness. 3 participants rated the conversations as 2, while another 3 gave a lower score of 1, reflecting less natural interaction. 2 participants gave a score of 4, suggesting a relatively high degree of naturalness (see Chart 5 in Appendix 6).

Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the chatbot's ability to correct mistakes, using a scale from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). Responses varied across the scale, with most falling between 2 and 4. The most frequent score was 3, selected by 6 participants, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction. 4 participants rated their satisfaction as 4, while 2 gave a lower score of 2. 1 participant selected 1, and 1

participant indicated no satisfaction at all by choosing 0. Notably, 1 participant rated their experience with a 5, reflecting complete satisfaction (see Chart 6 in Appendix 6).

The chatbot helped some participants stay motivated to practice speaking, while others felt it had a more limited impact. Using a scale from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very well), the scores ranged from 0 to 4, with no participants selecting the maximum value of 5. The most frequent rating was 4, chosen by 5 participants, suggesting that a third of respondents felt the chatbot supported their motivation quite well. 4 participants gave a score of 3, indicating moderate motivational support. 2 participants rated the chatbot's ability to motivate them as 2, and 1 participant selected 1. Notably, 3 participants gave a score of 0, indicating that they did not feel motivated by the chatbot at all.

Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

To assess perceived effectiveness, participants had to respond to how helpful they found chatbots for improving their speaking skills, using a scale from 0 (not helpful at all) to 5 (extremely helpful). The most frequently chosen rating was 3**,** selected by 8 participants, suggesting a generally moderate perception of helpfulness. 2 participants rated the chatbot as 4, indicating a higher level of usefulness, while 1 participant gave the highest rating of 5, reflecting strong appreciation of the chatbot's effectiveness. 3 participants rated the chatbot as 1, and 1 participant selected 2, suggesting lower levels of perceived helpfulness. No participant rated the chatbot at the lowest point of the scale (0) (see Chart 7 in Appendix 6).

Also linked to effectiveness, participants were asked to what extent using chatbots had improved their pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar accuracy and speaking confidence, using a scale from 0 (no improvement) to 5 (significant improvement).

With regard to pronunciation, the most commonly selected score was 3, chosen by 7 participants, indicating a moderate perception of improvement. 4 participants rated their improvement as 1, and 2 participants gave a score of 2, reflecting limited perceived progress. 1 participant selected 4, suggesting a higher level of improvement, while another gave the lowest possible score of 0, indicating no improvement at all (see chart 8 in Appendix 6).

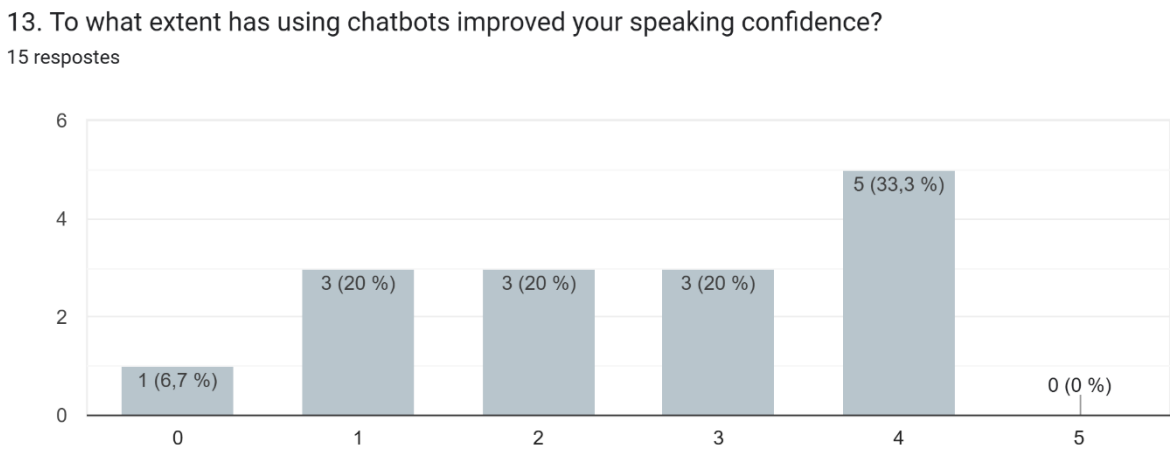
Regarding the improvement of fluency, the most common rating was 3, selected by 6 participants, indicating a moderate perception of improvement. 3 participants rated their improvement as 2, and 2 participants chose 4, reflecting a relatively positive impact. 2 participants gave the lowest score of 0, suggesting no perceived improvement in their fluency, while another 2 selected 1, indicating minimal improvement. Notably, no participants selected the maximum score of 5 (see chart 9 in Appendix 6).

Participants were also asked to assess the extent to which using chatbots had improved their vocabulary. Once again, the most frequently selected score was 3, chosen by 6 participants, suggesting a moderate perception of vocabulary improvement. 4 participants rated their improvement as 2, while 2 gave a more positive evaluation with a score of 4. 2 participants selected 1, and 1 participant rated the impact as 0, indicating no perceived improvement. Similar to the results on fluency, no participant chose the maximum score of 5 (see chart 10 in Appendix 6).

Regarding grammar accuracy, again the most common score was 3, selected by 6 participants, indicating a moderate perception of improvement. 4 participants rated their progress as 2, while only 1 gave a more positive rating of 4. 2 participants selected 1, suggesting minimal improvement, and 2 others rated their experience as 0, indicating no improvement in grammar accuracy. As with previous items, no participants selected the highest possible score of 5 (see chart 11 in Appendix 6).

The last of the areas that the participants were asked about, concerning effectiveness, was about speaking confidence. The results showed that the most frequently selected score was 4, chosen by 5 participants, indicating a relatively high perception of improvement. 3 participants rated their improvement as 3, while 3 others selected 2, suggesting moderate

gains. 3 participants gave a lower score of 1, and 1 participant reported no improvement at all by selecting 0 (no improvement). As with previous measures, none of the participants selected the highest score of 5 (significant improvement).



Number of students / score (from 0 to 5)

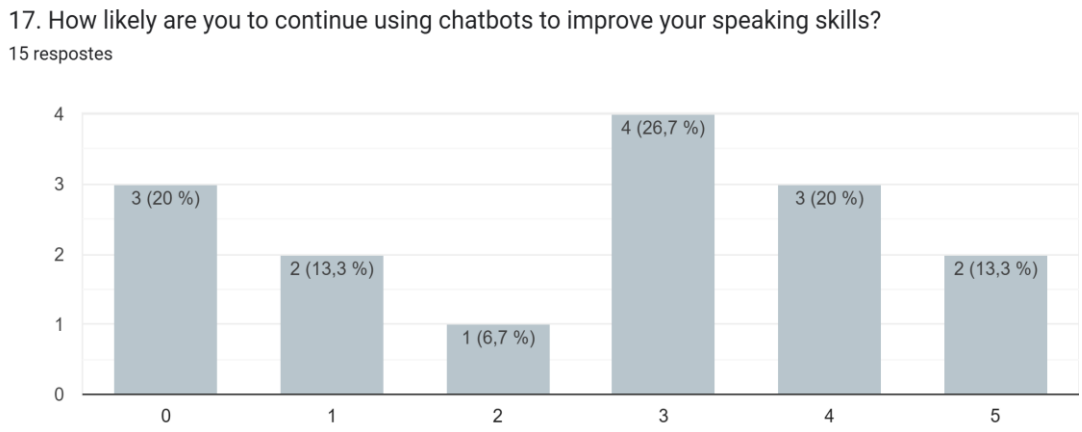
Focusing on the three questions concerning limitations of the chatbot, the score used to measure the responses ranged from 0 (Not an issue) to 5 (Major issue).

When rating the extent to which participants experienced the lack of real human interaction as a challenge when using chatbots, the most commonly selected score was 2, chosen by 6 participants. This score suggests that this was perceived as a minor to moderate limitation. 3 participants rated the issue as 3, while 2 gave it a higher severity rating of 4, and 1 participant considered it a major issue, selecting 5. 2 participants reported minimal impact by selecting 1, and 1 participant indicated that this was not an issue at all by choosing 0 (see chart 12 in Appendix 6).

Participants were also asked to what extent limited feedback on pronunciation posed a challenge when using chatbots. The most frequently selected score was 3, chosen by 8 participants, indicating a moderate perception of this issue. 2 participants rated the limitation as 5, suggesting they experienced it as a major challenge, while 1 participant gave a slightly lower score of 4. 2 participants selected 2, and 2 others rated the issue as 1, indicating that they did not consider it particularly problematic. No participants selected 0 (see chart 13 in Appendix 6).

Concerning the issue of repetitive or unnatural responses when using chatbots, participants' ratings revealed a moderate level of concern. The most commonly selected score was 3, chosen by 5 participants, indicating that this was perceived as a somewhat noticeable challenge.4 participants rated the issue as 4, suggesting a stronger experience of repetition or unnaturalness in chatbot interactions. 4 others selected 2, while 2 participants gave a lower score of 1, indicating the issue was relatively minor for them. No participant rated this limitation as 0 (not an issue), and none selected 5 (major issue) (see chart 14 in Appendix 6).

The last of the numerical response questions was about the likelihood to continue using chatbots to improve speaking skills, and it obtained the greatest variation of responses. The most frequent score was 3, selected by 4 participants, indicating a moderate likelihood of continued use. 3 participants chose 4, and 2 participants gave the highest rating of 5, reflecting a strong intention to continue using chatbots. At the lower end, 2 participants selected 1, and 3 participants rated their likelihood as 0, making it clear that they were not likely to continue. 1 participant chose 2, indicating slight interest.



Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

Participants' responses to the open-ended question about their experience with chatbot conversations revealed a wide range of opinions, reflecting enthusiasm, skepticism, or refusal. Several participants found the chatbot experience comfortable, interesting, and useful, particularly noting that it helped reduce anxiety compared to speaking with a

human. “It’s a good tool to improve speaking skills because I feel less nervous speaking with a chatbot than with a person.” For some, it provided a convenient and accessible way to practice speaking and listening skills, especially when human interaction was not easily available. 1 participant appreciated the ability to revisit transcripts and found the tool beneficial as a complementary resource for language learning. “One aspect that I found positive is that when it replied and I didn't understand, I could ask it to do it more slowly and that made it easier for me to understand. In conclusion, I think it is a good tool to practice speaking, but it is also true that it can be complementary to having conversations with real humans, but not a substitute for it”.

However, many participants also reported limitations. Common criticisms included the repetitive or unnatural nature of responses, limited feedback—particularly on pronunciation—and frustration when conversations were interrupted due to pauses or delays in replying. “The conversation was often cut off by the AI if I paused to think.” A few participants expressed discomfort or disinterest in speaking to a machine, describing the experience as artificial or demotivating “Using a chatbot to improve my spoken language skills, as one can do with people, feels tremendously artificial, forced, and unnatural to me. It doesn't work for me.” 2 participants explicitly noted that talking to a chatbot was not an option because they rejected any use of AI.

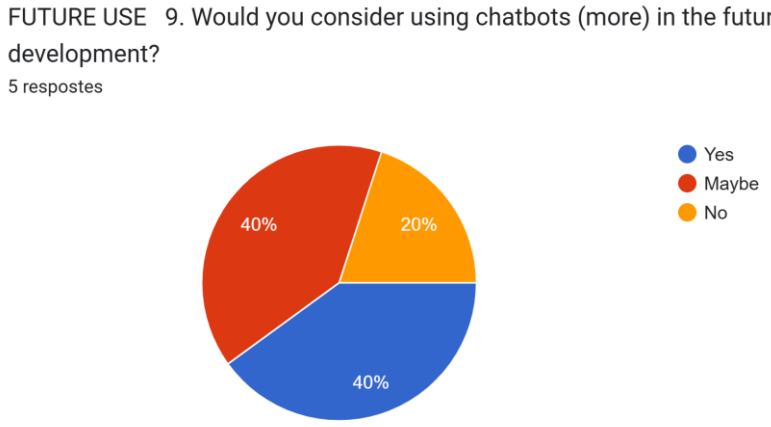
There was also a noticeable diminution in students' engagement or interest after the novelty effect wore off. The initial excitement or curiosity about talking to a chatbot turned into boredom or disinterest. “At first it was fun, but in the end, it was boring and repetitive.”

5.3 Teachers' survey results

The survey results reveal a cautious but emerging interest among EOIs English teachers in the use of AI chatbots for developing adult learners' speaking skills (see Appendix 7). 4 of the 5 respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience and worked with learners of mixed or intermediate levels. While general familiarity with chatbots was limited, 2 participants had experimented with them—One tried it once or twice and the other one occasionally. Notably, only 1 respondent reported integrating chatbots into their teaching practices as speaking practice homework.

Perceptions of chatbot effectiveness were mixed, with 2 teachers considering them only "somewhat effective" and the other 3 expressing uncertainty about their impact on speaking development. The benefits that those 2 teachers who had used chatbots observed included increased student confidence, more opportunities for speaking outside of class, and reduced speaking anxiety. However, significant challenges were identified, particularly the limited accuracy of chatbot feedback, students' reluctance to use AI, and issues related to technological access or digital proficiency.

Despite these concerns, most respondents showed some openness to using chatbots in the future: 2 teachers indicated they would consider it, 2 answered "Maybe," and only 1 expressed clear reluctance by responding "No".



6. Discussion

The results of this study offer valuable insights into the practical application of AI-powered chatbots within the framework of language learning, particularly among adult learners at the *Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes* (EOIs). While the improvements in speaking skills were generally low-modest, they highlight several important considerations for the integration of chatbots into language education.

One of the most promising findings was the modest increase in fluency and speaking confidence observed in a portion of participants. This directly addresses research question 1, as it suggests that practicing speaking activities with a chatbot can provide meaningful insights into the usefulness of AI for oral skill development. These outcomes are consistent with previous research by Fathi et al. (2024), which emphasized that AI-mediated interactions could enhance learners' willingness to communicate and support continuous speaking practice. Similarly, Huang et al. (2021) highlighted the value of frequent conversational engagement, an aspect some students in this study appreciated—particularly those who customized the chatbot's behavior, even if their use was not daily.

However, improvements in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary were limited, indicating that chatbots function best as supplementary tools rather than independent solutions. These findings, even though this study focuses on the use of chatbots to improve speaking skills exclusively, support Brinegar (2023), who pointed out that learners may become overly reliant on chatbots for routine tasks but still require structured instruction for complex linguistic development.

Teachers' survey responses added another valuable contribution to address research question 2. Despite growing awareness of chatbots' potential, AI-assisted activities are still underused among EOI teachers due to skepticism, insufficient familiarity with this kind of technology, uncertainty about effectiveness and lack of pedagogical training. Barriers such as limited knowledge, student reluctance, and lack of training remain. However, teachers' survey responses showed a cautious willingness to explore chatbots potential— four out of five respondents indicated some interest in future use, suggesting growing openness. This means that, for broader adoption, professional development and clear integration strategies are needed. Teachers have to master the use of the tool and know how to transfer it to the students. This is consistent with the findings of Brinegar (2023), who observed that

some of the disadvantages of using chatbots are the limited knowledge that teachers have of modern chatbots.

Further data from the surveys provides deeper insight into participant experiences. Most students engaged with ChatGPT for relatively short periods—typically under 30 minutes per week, and at home. Their main purposes for using the chatbot included building confidence and enhancing grammatical accuracy, though a few also aimed to improve pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. Conversations with the chatbot were generally perceived as moderately engaging, with some variation in individual responses. Similarly, the naturalness of these conversations was rated as somewhat authentic, though several participants noted that they lacked the spontaneity and fluidity of real human dialogue.

When asked about the chatbot's ability to correct mistakes, most participants expressed moderate satisfaction. Some appreciated the feedback, while others found it either insufficient or overly generic. Motivation to continue using the chatbot was another area with diverse responses: some users felt encouraged and supported, while others did not find it especially motivating—a reaction that some explicitly attributed to the novelty effect described by Huang et al. (2021), where the initial interest in a new technology tends to decline once users become familiar with it.

Overall, participants considered the chatbot moderately helpful for improving speaking skills. While perceived benefits were reported in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and confidence, these gains were generally moderate and varied considerably. Pronunciation improvement, in particular, was limited by the chatbot's restricted capacity to provide specific feedback.

Participants also reported some challenges. The lack of real human interaction was noted by many, though not necessarily viewed as a major barrier. Limited feedback on pronunciation and the repetitiveness or unnatural nature of some responses were recurrent concerns, yet most participants were still able to engage with the tool. When asked about their likelihood to continue using chatbots, around 60% of participants expressed a moderate to high level of interest, while 20% were reluctant to use them in the future.

Open-ended responses revealed a marked contrast in attitudes. Approximately half the participants valued the chatbot as a helpful and low-pressure tool for practice, particularly when used in moderation or alongside real human interaction. The other half expressed

opposition or disinterest, citing reasons such as repetitive dialogue, lack of feedback rigor, or a general aversion to AI-based tools.

Regarding research question 3, the results suggest that to achieve greater usefulness, chatbots must be used with clear guidance. Students who learned how to give commands (e.g., to slow down, correct grammar, or ask follow-up questions) reported better experiences and perceived improvements. This supports Brinegar (2023), who advocated for customizable dialogue systems tailored to learners' levels, although for the study a general-purpose chatbot was used—ChatGPT.

Moreover, a notable shift in perception was observed among initially skeptical students who developed a more positive outlook after using the chatbot, suggesting that direct exposure may help reduce resistance to AI tools in education. In other words, some students did not use the chatbot because they were unaware of its use and/or usefulness until they experienced it.

Despite these promising aspects, the study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small (17 participants), and the duration of chatbot use was relatively short (8 weeks), which may not be sufficient to produce substantial gains in all areas of speaking proficiency. Second, most students used the chatbot for less than 30 minutes per week, limiting their exposure and potential progress. Third, the evaluation method, while rigorous, could not isolate chatbot impact from other variables such as ongoing classroom instruction. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from what participants said about their own experiences, which may be influenced by individual biases, such as personal beliefs or feelings about what was expected from them, or expectations of what they thought would happen.

7. Conclusions

This dissertation set out to analyze the usefulness of chatbots as tools for improving speaking skills among adult students at the *Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes* (EOIs). The primary objective was to evaluate whether regular interaction with a chatbot over an eight-week period could contribute significantly to students' oral language development.

The overall results suggest that the improvement in students' speaking skills after using the chatbot was limited. While some progress was observed, it cannot be conclusively attributed to chatbot use alone, as students continued to attend regular English classes throughout the study period. Thus, the role of the chatbot in fostering speaking skills can be considered marginal in this context, as it was not the only agent influencing the results. This fact could be seen as a variable that limits the ability to isolate the chatbot's specific impact on speaking skills development.

A secondary aim was to capture the opinions and perceptions of EOI students on their experience with the use of chatbots. Quantitative and qualitative research exploring how students felt during chatbot interactions gave useful insights into what motivates them and how they emotionally respond to AI-based speaking practice. While some aspects were appreciated, several participants felt that the overall experience did not fully meet their expectations, citing issues such as unnatural communication and limited feedback of responses. Despite these low-medium scores, their reported willingness to continue using chatbots in the future revealed a mixed level of commitment, with a tendency toward a moderate to high likelihood among most participants (60%), though a few (20%) expressed clear reluctance. A notable change of mind was reported among some participants who initially approached the study with skepticism, as they were unfamiliar with chatbots. These findings suggest that while there is potential for continued engagement, improvements are needed to enhance user satisfaction and encourage broader acceptance.

Lastly, it was intended to respond to why chatbots remain underutilized by language teachers within the EOIs. Although there is a cautious but growing interest in using chatbots for speaking practice among experienced English teachers, they are still perceived as lacking pedagogical value, especially when compared to more personalized classroom-based speaking activities. Concerns about the chatbot's limited accuracy in feedback and technology access or proficiency also emerged as key reasons for their minimal adoption,

but a factor that may be decisive in its poor acceptability is students' reluctance to use AI. The median age of participants was 57'3 years. This suggests that age-related factors may influence students' openness to using AI, favoring established methods over unfamiliar innovations and, thus, potentially contributing to its limited acceptance.

In conclusion, while general-purpose chatbots may hold some potential as supplementary tools in oral practice when used regularly and with a clear understanding of how to interact with them effectively, they are not yet a replacement for human-led interaction and their current design and implementation are insufficient to generate meaningful improvements in speaking proficiency among EOI students. Future research with larger sample sizes, longer duration, and structured chatbot orientation could provide more definitive insights into their pedagogical value.

8. Recommendations and implications for future research

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for both educational practice and future research.

First, although open-domain chatbots in their current form do not appear to significantly enhance speaking skills among EOI students, they may still offer potential if users understand how to interact with them effectively and integrate them purposefully into their language practice.

Second, language teachers at EOIs should receive targeted training on how to integrate digital tools such as chatbots into their teaching practice. Currently, the limited use of chatbots appears to stem from a combination of skepticism and lack of familiarity. Professional development sessions that showcase best practices and demonstrate the potential benefits of chatbot-assisted speaking practice or learning may help bridge this gap.

Third, future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to better assess the impact of chatbots over an extended period. Eight weeks may be insufficient to capture substantial improvement in oral skills, particularly when other learning variables, such as classroom instruction, remain in play. Conducting a similar study across longer timelines could provide more reliable data on the chatbot's effectiveness.

In sum, while the current evidence does not support the widespread implementation of chatbots in EOIs as independent tools for speaking improvement, they should not be dismissed entirely. With further refinement and strategic integration, chatbots may still play a valuable role as complementary resources in the language learning framework.

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10. Appendixes

Appendix 1 - Consentiment Informat

Màster Universitari
Formació del Professorat d'Educació Secundària Obligatòria i Batxillerat
FACULTAT D'EDUCACIÓ, TRADUCCIÓ, ESPORTS I PSICOLOGIA
UVIC | UVIC·UCC

CONSENTIMENT INFORMAT PER A LA PARTICIPACIÓ AL PROJECTE D'INVESTIGACIÓ DEL TREBALL FINAL DE MÀSTER: «Analysis of the Usefulness of Chatbots to Improve Speaking Skills in EOIs»

Dades de la persona participant
Nom i cognoms:
Edat:
Home ☐ Dona ☐

Informació sobre el projecte

Objectius del TFM:

El projecte d'investigació «Analysis of the Usefulness of Chatbots to Improve Speaking Skills in EOIs» té com a objectiu principal investigar si els xatbots són una eina eficaç per a adquirir nou vocabulari i expressions en una llengua estrangera, i millorar la comprensió i la producció oral, així com la fluïdesa, d'aquesta L2. Les dinàmiques d'aquesta investigació es treballaran a partir de tres blocs d'activitats:

- Primera activitat: es portarà a terme un debat a la classe per parlar d'un tema sobre tecnologia. La meitat dels alumnes hauran de posicionar-se a favor del tema i l'altra meitat en contra.

S'avaluarà, per mitjà d'una rúbrica, les intervencions de cadascun dels participants en el projecte.

- Segona activitat: els participants portaran converses amb un xatbot sobre el mateix tema parlat al debat per tal d'adquirir més vocabulari, expressions, fluïdesa, etc. Ho faran a casa o en un ambient en el qual se sentin còmodes, i en horari lliure, segons la seva disponibilitat.

- Tercera activitat: es tornarà a portar a terme amb tots els alumnes un debat a classe sobre el mateix tema. Els participants tornaran a ser avaluats per mitjà de la mateixa rúbrica de la primera activitat.

Implicacions:

La participació en el projecte implica:

- que els membres del projecte puguin recollir evidències escrites, per mitjà d'una rúbrica, de les intervencions dels participants durant el primer debat (pre-task) i durant el segon debat (post-task).

- que els participants del projecte es comprometin a destinar el temps indicat a portar converses amb el xatbot que se'ls especifiqui.

- contestar un qüestionari administrat pels membres de l'equip investigador del projecte.

Durada:

La intervenció es realitzarà durant els mesos de març i abril del curs acadèmic 2024-2025, i la recollida de dades es realitzarà el mes d'abril del mateix curs acadèmic.

Riscos i beneficis:

El material escrit obtingut de l'avaluació de la primera i la tercera activitat s'utilitzarà exclusivament per a finalitats d'investigació de l'actual projecte, i no seran mai tingudes en compte per a fer qualificacions del curs de l'EOI. El material s'utilitzarà en entorns no públics.

Voluntarietat:

La participació en aquest estudi és completament voluntària. No hi ha cap penalització ni conseqüència per no participar-hi.

Informació sobre el tractament de les dades personals

Les dades facilitades són obligatòries per complir amb l'objectiu essencial del TFM, que consisteix en el desenvolupament de la investigació científica. Només s'utilitzaran per a les finalitats del present projecte d'investigació.

He llegit tota la informació que se m'ha proporcionat; he entès les explicacions exposades amb claredat i he pogut realitzar preguntes per comprendre aquesta informació. Hi estic d'acord i accepto participar en el projecte «Analysis of the Usefulness of Chatbots to Improve Speaking Skills in EOIs».

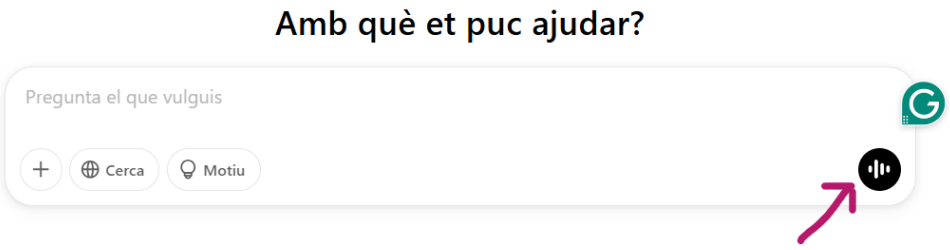
Sí ☐ No ☐

A ..... de ..... de 2025

Signatura de la persona participant	Signatura de la investigadora

Appendix 2 - Instructions for using ChatGPT

- Login to the **chatgpt.com** web site
- You have to link your account with an email account.
- Choose a chatbot profile: there are several male and female voices to choose from. Some have American pronunciation, others British.
- Click on the **black circle** to start talking. Although the initial presentation may be in Catalan or Spanish, if you speak to it in English, it automatically switches language.



- Try to give it directions so that its interventions are more in line with your needs:
  - If you ask it to finish its interventions with a follow-up question, it will ask you questions and the dialogue will be more fluid.
  - If you tell it that you didn't quite understand what it said, and ask it to say it again more slowly... you may be lucky and it will do it!

Don't be embarrassed to make it repeat things, or ask it to tell you differently. Remember that it will not judge you! And you can take the opportunity to ask it to correct your pronunciation, or to tell you a more correct or natural way to say a sentence you have just formulated, etc.

Appendix 3 - Debate Assessment Rubric (Pre-test and post-test)

Category	Score 1 - Poor	Score 2 - Needs Improvement	Score 3 - Satisfactory	Score 4 - Good	Score 5 - Excellent
1. Grammar Accuracy	Grammar frequently incorrect; message difficult to understand.	Frequent errors; interfere with meaning.	Some noticeable errors; may cause minor confusion.	Minor errors, but they don't affect understanding.	No noticeable grammar errors; complex structures used correctly.
2. Use of Vocabulary	Very limited vocabulary; frequent misuse of words.	Limited vocabulary; noticeable mistakes.	Adequate vocabulary; sometimes repetitive or slightly inaccurate.	Good range; mostly accurate and appropriate	Wide range of vocabulary; accurate and appropriate use.
3. Fluency	Struggles to speak continuously; many long pauses.	Frequent hesitations disrupt flow.	Noticeable pauses and fillers, but can complete thoughts.	Minor hesitations, but mostly fluent.	Speaks smoothly with no hesitation or pauses.
4. Talk Content	Lacks clear ideas; difficult to follow.	Ideas are poorly organized or underdeveloped.	Content is understandable but may lack detail or structure.	Ideas are mostly clear and organized.	Ideas are clear, well-organized, and fully developed.
5. Pronunciation	Pronunciation severely affects understanding.	Many mispronunciations; requires effort to understand.	Some pronunciation issues, but understandable.	Mostly clear; only a few mispronounced words.	Clear and natural pronunciation; easy to understand.
6. Body Language	No eye contact, closed posture, or distracting gestures.	Minimal or distracting body language.	Some positive body language; could improve.	Good use of body language; mostly effective.	Excellent eye contact, posture, gestures; enhances message.
7. Confidence in Speaking	Very nervous; avoids speaking or interaction.	Appears uncomfortable; lacks self-assurance.	Moderate confidence; occasional hesitation.	Confident; some minor signs of uncertainty.	Very confident; engages audience naturally.
8. Interaction	No meaningful interaction. Makes interventions without allowing others to give their opinion.	Struggles to engage or respond.	Interacts somewhat effectively.	Mostly good interaction; some minor issues.	Responds and interacts naturally; good turn-taking.

Appendix 6 – Students' survey charts

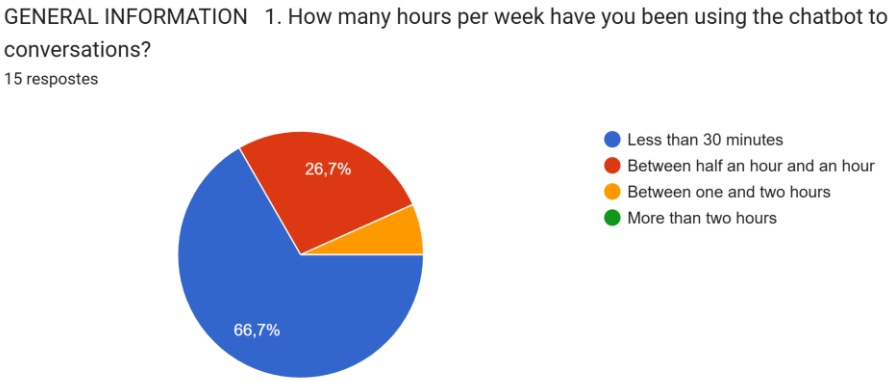


Chart 1

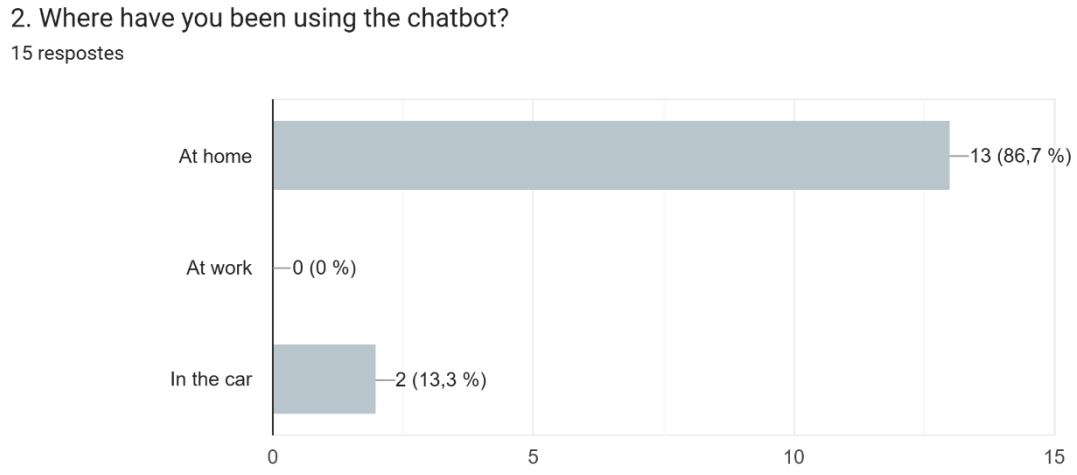


Chart 2 (Places / Number of students)

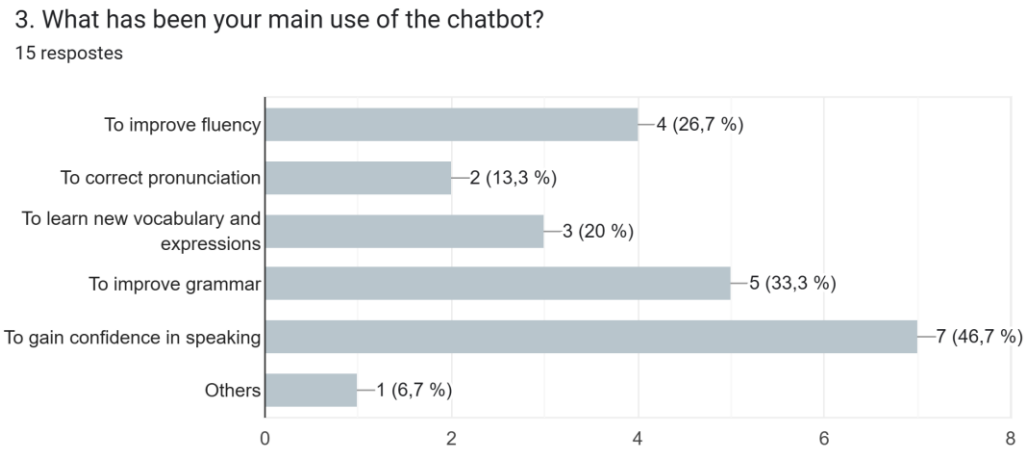


Chart 3 (Uses / Number of students)

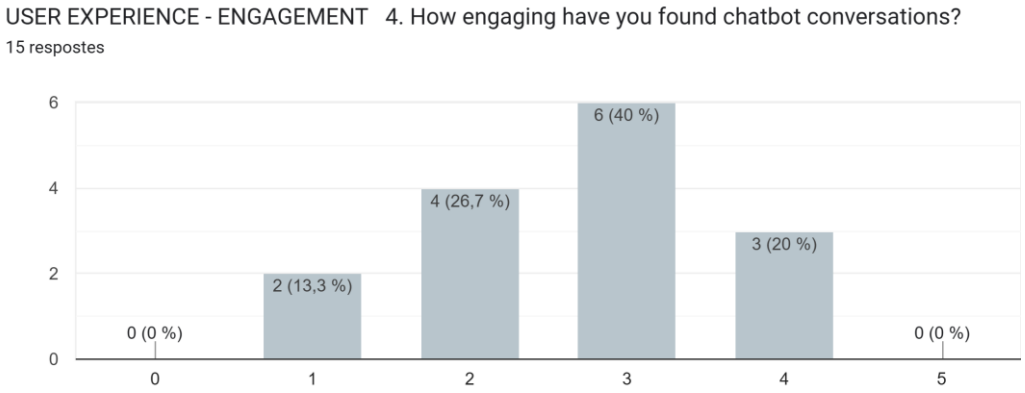


Chart 4 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

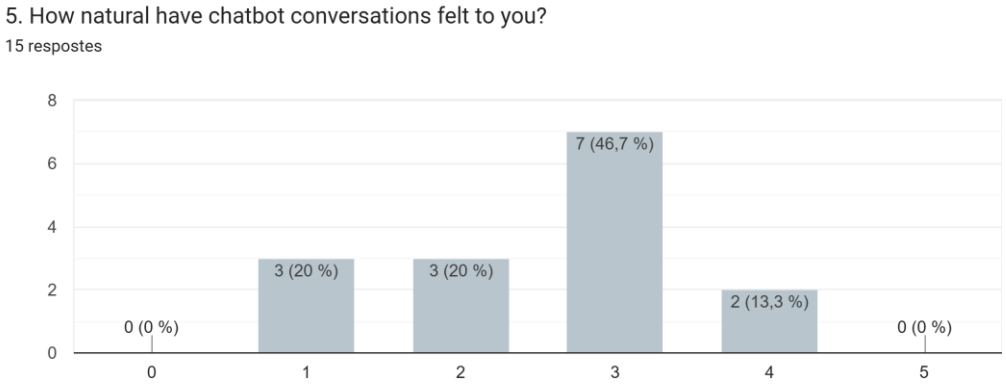


Chart 5 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

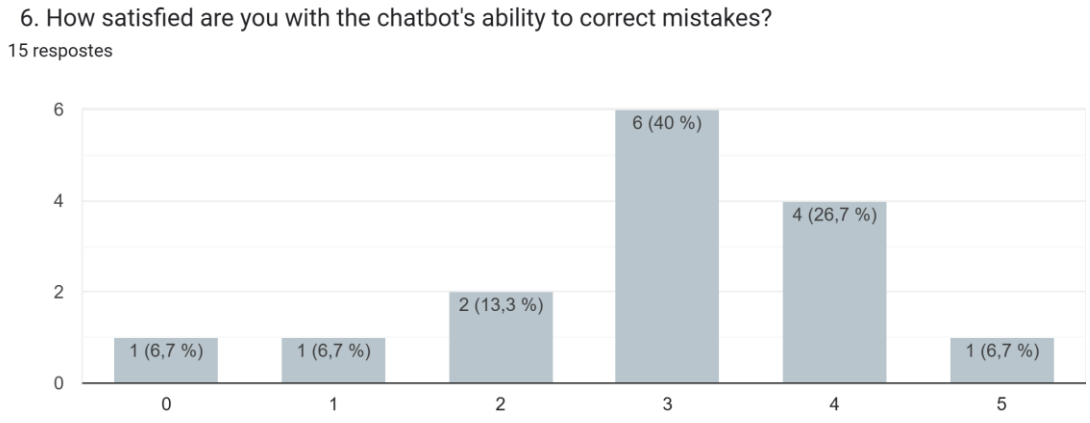


Chart 6 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

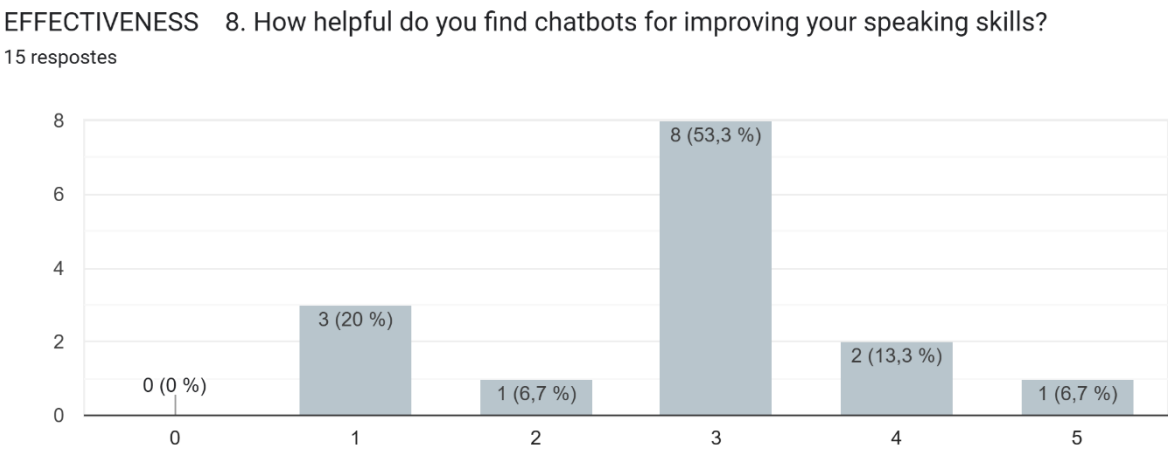


Chart 7 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

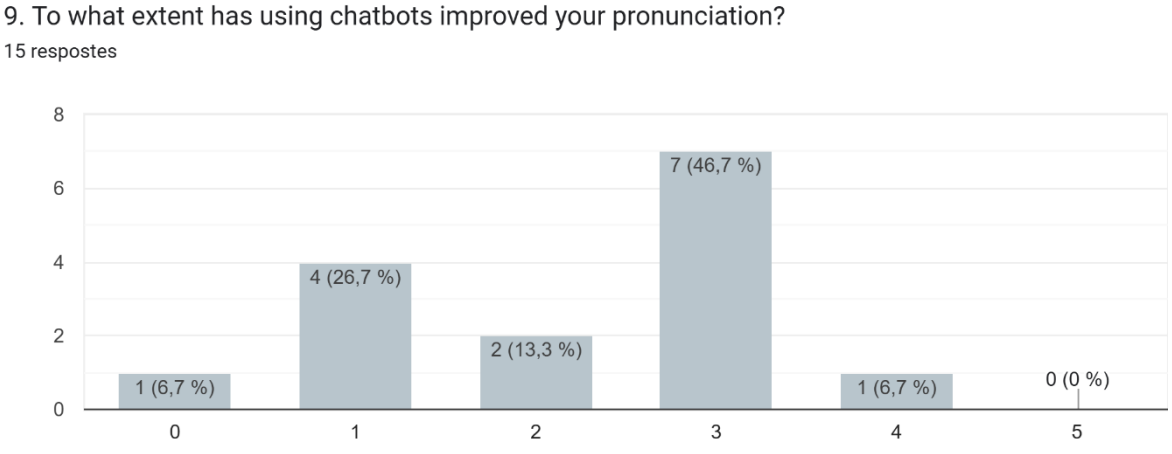


Chart 8 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

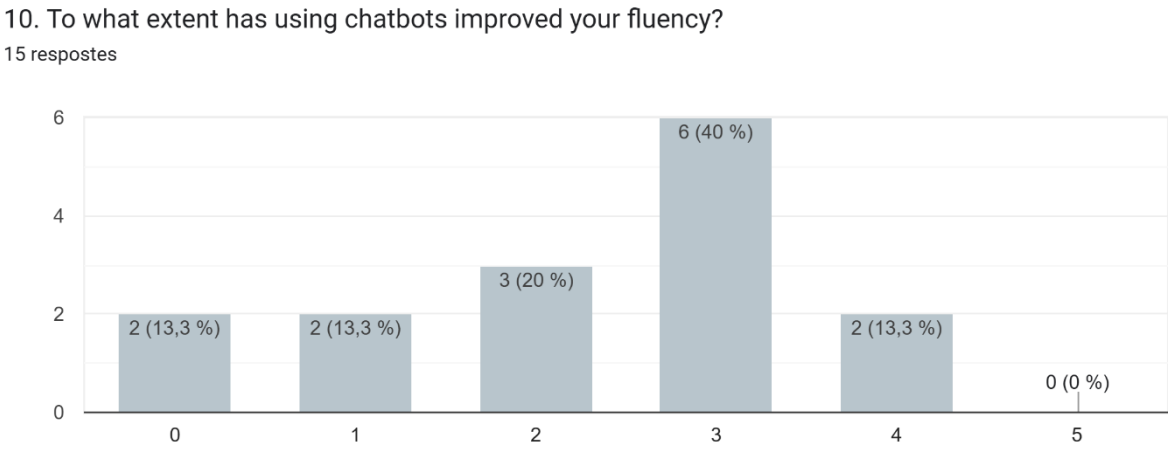


Chart 9 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

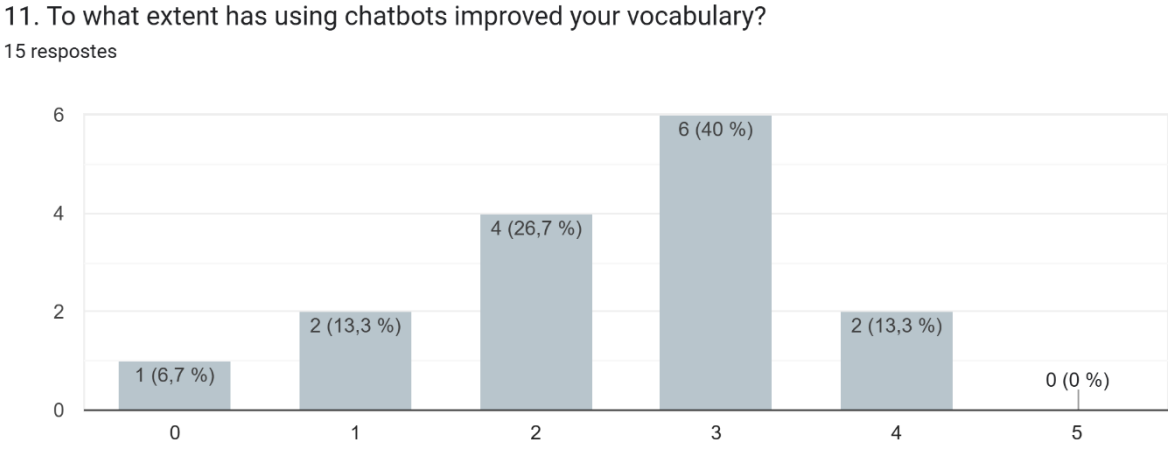


Chart 10 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

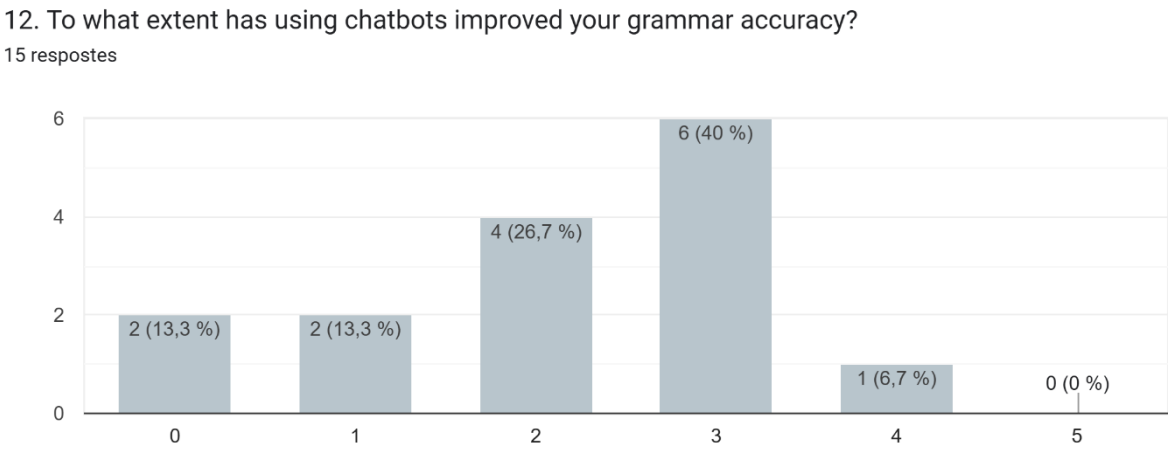


Chart 11 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

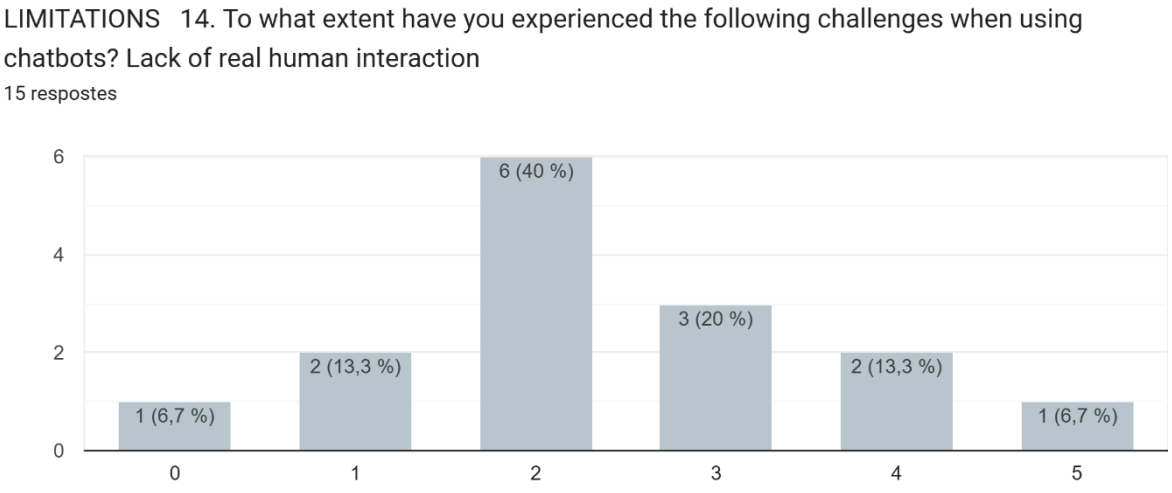


Chart 12 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

15. To what extent have you experienced the following challenges when using chatbots? Limited feedback on pronunciation

15 respostes

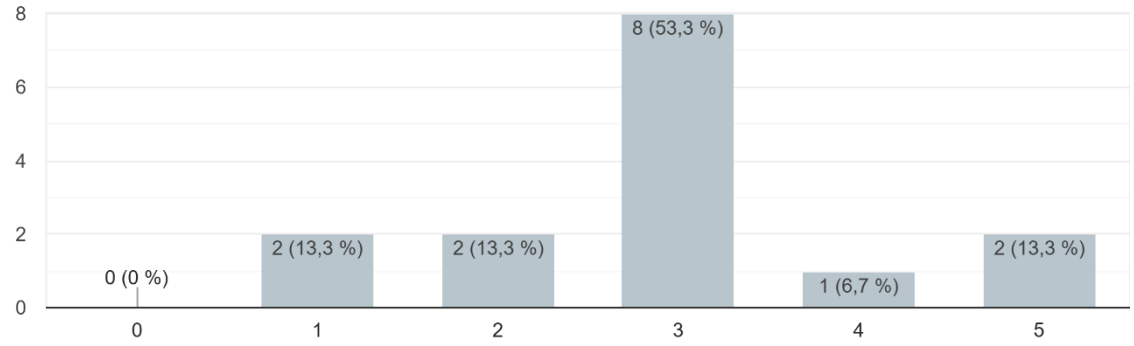


Chart 13 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

16. To what extent have you experienced the following challenges when using chatbots? Repetitive or unnatural responses

15 respostes

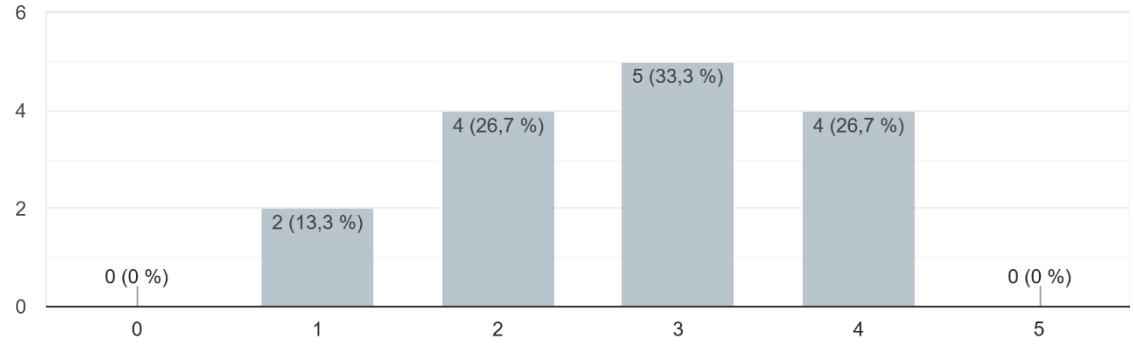


Chart 14 (Number of students / Score (from 0 to 5)

Appendix 7 - Teachers' survey charts

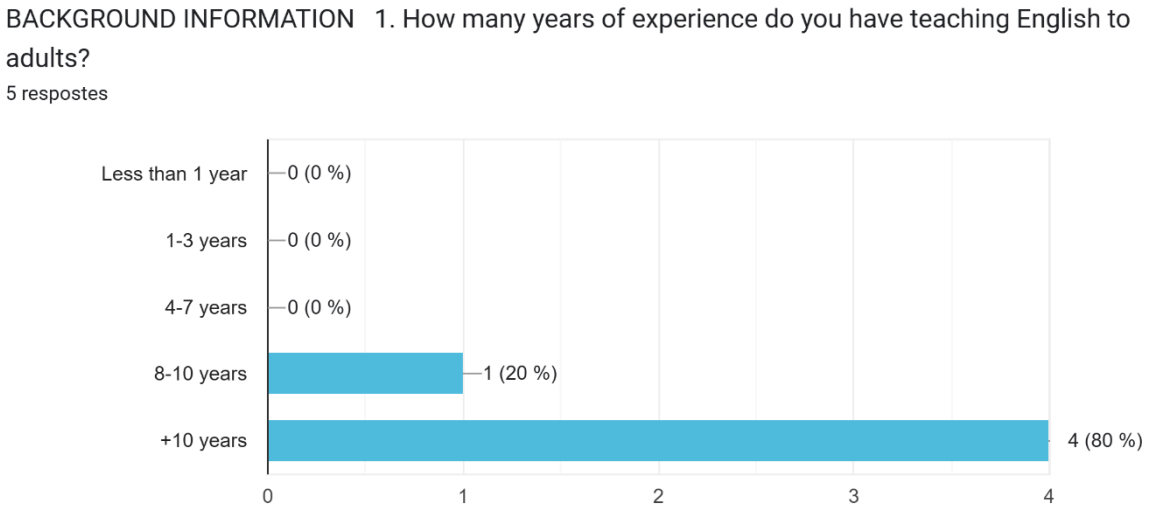


Chart 1 (Years of experience / Number of teachers)

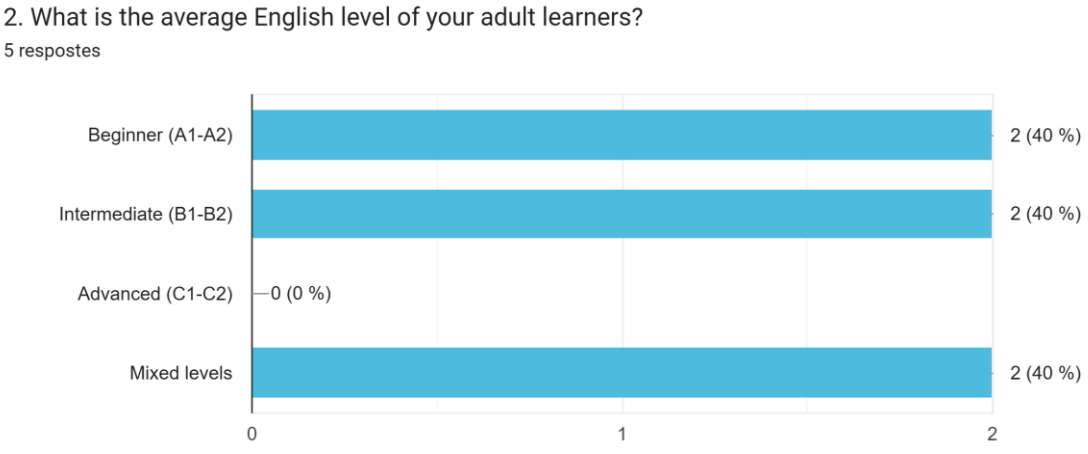


Chart 2 (English level / Number of teachers)

USE OF CHATBOTS 3. Are you familiar with AI chatbots as language learning tools?

5 respostes

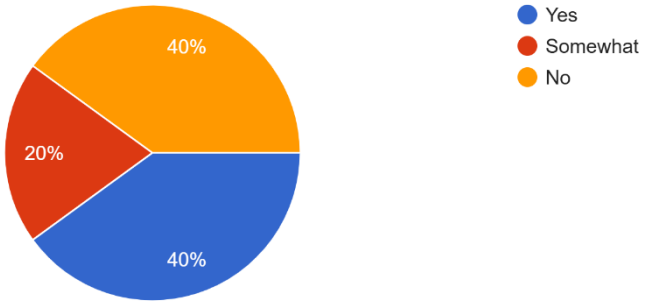


Chart 3

4. Have you ever used a chatbot to help students practice speaking skills?

5 respostes

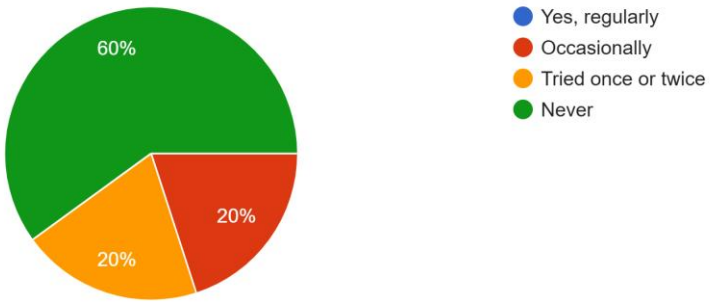


Chart 4

5. How do you integrate chatbot use into your teaching?

5 respostes

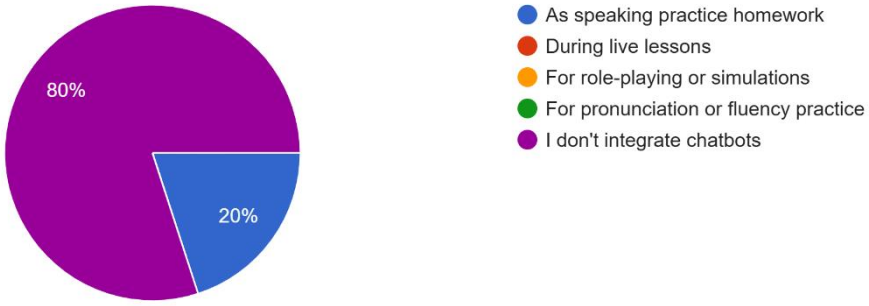


Chart 5

PERCEPTIONS AND IMPACT 6. How effecive do you think chatbots are for improving speaking skills in adult learners?

5 respostes

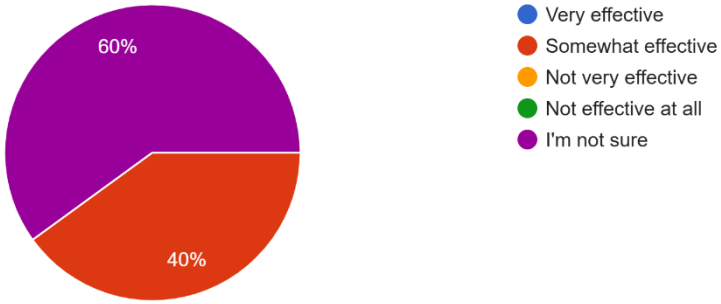


Chart 6

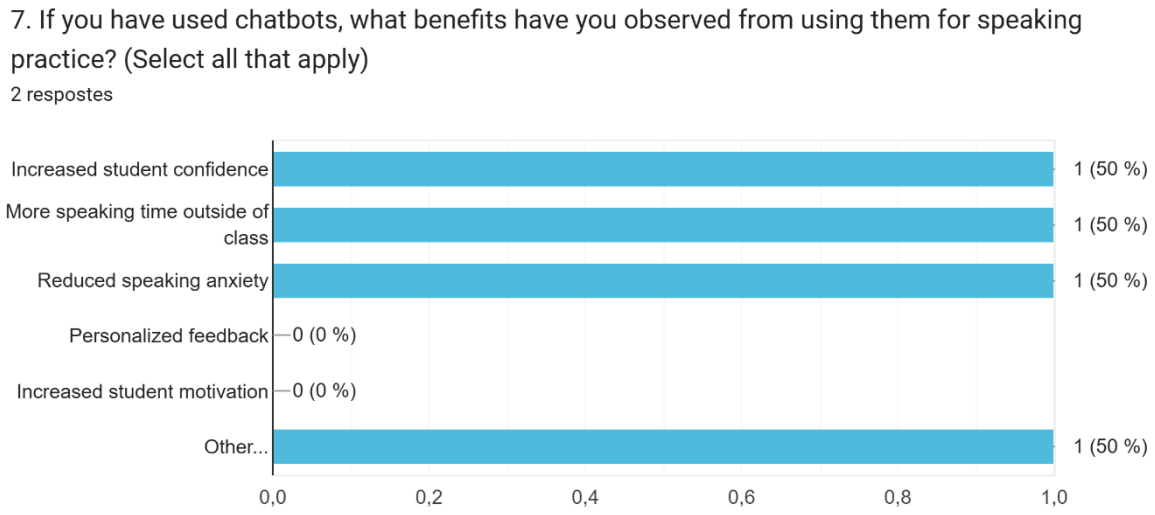


Chart 7 (Benefits / Number of answers)

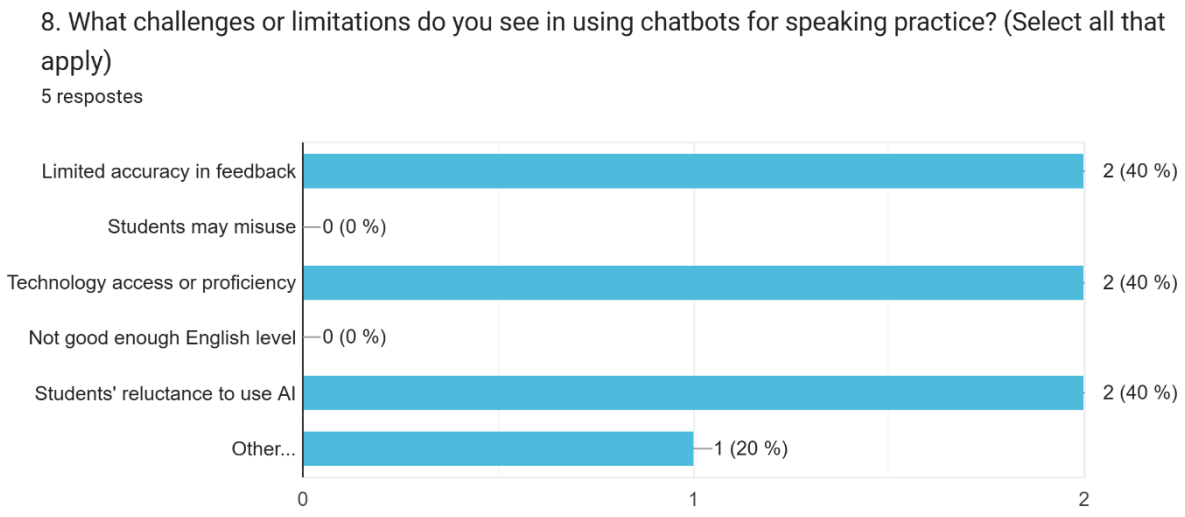


Chart 8 (Challenges / Number of answers)