

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF USING AI CHATBOTS FOR ENGLISH COMMUNICATION LEARNING IN A VIETNAMESE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

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**Abstract.** This study examines vocational college students' perceptions and self-reported practices of using AI chatbots to support English communication learning in Danang City, Vietnam. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, questionnaire data were collected from 100 second-year students and then explored further through semi-structured interviews with 10 students. Research findings show that the students viewed AI chatbots positively and used them mainly as accessible learning support for vocabulary learning, listening to conversations, speaking preparation, and out-of-class practice. Drawing on the extended Technology Acceptance Model, perceived usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and enjoyment were found to be positively related to students' intention to continue using AI chatbots, with enjoyment playing the strongest predictive role. The interview data also revealed a more cautious side: the students reported AI's inaccurate answers, sometimes unnatural language use, privacy concerns, and possible overdependence. Most students did not see AI chatbots as replacements for teachers, but as additional tools for practice and support. The study contributes a vocational-college perspective from Vietnam and highlights that continued AI chatbot use in English communication learning is shaped not only by perceived usefulness, but also by low-pressure and enjoyable practice conditions.

**Keywords:** AI chatbots; English communication skills; student perceptions; vocational education; Technology Acceptance Model

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, artificial intelligence has become more and more prevalent in English language learning. In this article, AI chatbots refer to conversational tools that utilise artificial intelligence to respond to user prompts in natural language. They can answer questions, maintain written or spoken exchanges, suggest expressions, correct language use, and provide examples for practice. ChatGPT and Gemini were the two most familiar AI chatbots among the students in this study. The term AI chatbots is therefore used throughout the article to refer to these interactive conversational tools.

Broader terms including artificial intelligence or generative AI are used only when discussing wider research areas. In these domains, chatbots have received much attention (Albadarin et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025; Zou et al., 2024). The main rationale for their popularity is the accessibility and user-friendliness with learners. In many EFL classes, where there is a common shortage of time for communicative practice, not all students have adequate chances to speak English in class. Some may feel nervous when being required to speak. Others are afraid of making mistakes in front of the teacher or their classmates. Fortunately, AI chatbots may offer them one more way to practise English outside the classroom (Feng et al., 2025; V. L. Nguyen et al., 2025). However, the use of AI chatbots in language learning is not positive in all aspects. Some studies showed that students appreciate these tools because they are convenient, flexible, and can be used at any time. However, AI chatbots also raise learners' concerns over wrong answers, over-reliance, and provided language quality (Nelson et al., 2025; T. X. H. Nguyen et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2025). Dizon (2024) revealed that learners consider ChatGPT useful for self-study and language practice, while remaining cautious to completely trust its responses. In a case study, Himz (2024) also found that both teachers and students claim the benefits as well as concerns when using generative AI in English teaching and learning. This means AI chatbots may be helpful, but they should be used with caution.

It is noteworthy that many earlier studies have been conducted in university settings or general education contexts. Much less has been explored in vocational colleges, especially in local educational settings where English is closely related to future jobs and practical communication needs. In Vietnam, though many students need English for effective workplace communication, they still do not have sufficient time or opportunities to practise communication in practical situations. It is important that this gap is bridged. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate

how Vietnamese vocational college students use AI chatbots in their own learning, what they think about these tools, and the benefit and difficulties they have when using them (Li et al., 2025; Liu & Zhao, 2025; Vo et al., 2024).

The present study focuses on second-year students at a vocational college in Danang City, Vietnam. It examines both their perceptions and the way they actually use AI chatbots to support their English skills development. The researchers hope to provide more insight from a local Vietnamese context and add one more voice to the discussion about AI in English language education. The study is guided by the following research questions: 1. How do vocational college students use AI chatbots to support English communication learning?; 2. What factors shape students' acceptance of AI chatbots for English communication learning?; 3. What benefits, difficulties, and needs for teacher support when using AI chatbots do students report?

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

### 2.1. AI Chatbots in English Language Learning

Recent studies have shown that AI chatbots are becoming more prevalent in English language learning (Li et al., 2025; Liu & Zhao, 2025; Zou et al., 2024), ranging across a variety of aspects, including speaking, listening, vocabulary learning, and learning outside the classroom. A review by Koç and Savaş (2024), which examined at 57 studies published between 2010 and 2024, shows that AI chatbots were mainly used to facilitate listening, speaking, vocabulary learning, oral communication, and pragmatic competence development. Rather than entirely promising results, the review reveals both positive and negative sides of AI chatbot application in English learning. This critical finding suggests that though AI chatbots may be helpful for language learning, their significance varies in every case, depending on how they are used in actual teaching and learning contexts.

One key finding in the existing literature concerns communicative skills-related outcomes. Studies published in *System* have reported quite positive results regarding the use of AI chatbots for speaking practice. Zhang et al. (2024) found that an AI speaking assistant promotes learners' foreign language enjoyment and willingness to communicate. It also reduced anxiety among Chinese EFL university students after six weeks. In another study, AI-supported interactive speaking activities were found to improve speaking performance and willingness to communicate more than traditional peer interaction. These participants also shared positive reflections of the learning experience. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) concluded that conversational generative AI chatbots help improve learners' willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence while lowering their speaking anxiety. In short, it seems that AI tools may facilitate oral communication in more than one possible way. They may help students foster skills and confidence, and alleviate stress when communicating in English (Vo & Nguyen, 2024; Xiao & Zhi, 2023).

Also, relevant literature highlights students' perceptions of AI chatbots, indicating that many learners regard these tools as convenient, flexible, and user-friendly. Dizon (2024) claimed that foreign language learners use ChatGPT for different self-study purposes, such as practising making conversation and learning vocabulary. That study also underscored that learners generally have positive views of ChatGPT, including ease of use and accessibility. However, they are less certain about its reliability. In a multi-method study, Tram et al. (2024) found that interactivity, enjoyment, trust, and subjective norms affect continued use through perceived usefulness. At the same time, self-efficacy and technology anxiety affect continued use through perceived ease of use. These findings are useful for the present study. They show that students do not continue using a tool for only one reason. In many cases, they keep using it because they find it useful, easy, enjoyable, and trustworthy sufficient for regular learning.

Finally, prior studies examined the limitations and concerns related to AI chatbots in language education. Despite the acceptance of AI chatbots among many learners, they do not trust them completely for all purposes. Dizon (2024) confirmed that students are still skeptical about the reliability of ChatGPT as a language learning tool. In a one-year case study, Hınız (2024) noted that students and teachers acknowledge the obvious advantages of using generative AI for English teaching and learning, yet expressed concerns over plagiarism, abuse, and negative impacts on learning behaviours.

To facilitate the identification of the main patterns, Table 1 provides a concise summary of the studies reviewed in this paper. Existing research offers substantial evidence that AI chatbots can support communication practice and enhance student motivation. However, students' experiences are not uniformly positive across studies. The findings remain mixed and appear to be influenced by contextual factors.

**Table 1. Main strands in recent research on AI chatbots in English language learning**

Strand	Representative studies	Main points
Communication practice	Zhang et al. (2024); Wang et al. (2024);	AI-supported speaking practice can foster willingness to communicate, lower anxiety, and support speaking development

Learner perception and acceptance	Dizon (2024); Nguyen et al. (2024)	Students often value usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and accessibility
Concerns and limits	Dizon (2024); Hınız (2024)	Reliability, overdependence, plagiarism, and weak learning habits remain concerns
Wider evidence base	Koç & Savaş (2024)	The field is growing, but methods, contexts, and learner groups are still uneven

## **2.2. Defining English Communication Skills in Vocational Contexts**

English communication skills in this study are interpreted as professional communication competence required for workplace interaction in vocational contexts. Following Kamil and Muhammad (2021), professional communication competence encompasses not only the mastery of specific communication tasks, but also the demonstration of appropriateness and effectiveness in using language for occupational purposes. In the present study, these skills include communicative vocabulary, listening comprehension in conversations, speaking preparation, pronunciation and fluency support, conversational grammar, and simple social interaction. This conceptualization aligns with English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) frameworks where language learning serves practical workplace communication needs rather than purely academic purposes.

## **2.3. Theoretical Background: Technology Acceptance Model and Self-Directed Learning**

This study adopts an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and self-directed learning as two connected lenses. The extended TAM is used to explain students' acceptance of AI chatbots. In the original model, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are central because learners are more likely to accept a tool when they believe it helps them and is not difficult to use (Nguyen et al., 2024). In the present study, two additional factors are included: reliability and enjoyment. Reliability is included because AI chatbot responses may be inaccurate, unnatural, or unsuitable for some learning purposes. Enjoyment is included because communication practice is not only cognitive. Students may return to a tool when the experience feels comfortable, interesting, and less stressful (Cui et al., 2025; Vo & Nguyen, 2024).

Self-directed learning is used to interpret students' actual practices outside the classroom. Three aspects are particularly relevant here: identifying learning needs, choosing learning resources, and monitoring one's own practice. These aspects help explain why students may use AI chatbots for vocabulary, listening, speaking preparation, or repeated practice when a teacher or partner is not available. In this way, TAM explains students' acceptance of AI chatbots, while self-directed learning explains how they use these tools as part of their own learning routines (Hou & Zhou, 2025; Lai, 2024; Roe & Perkins, 2025).

These two perspectives are linked in this study. If students find AI chatbots useful, easy to use, reliable enough, and enjoyable, they may be more willing to use them independently. At the same time, their independent use may still need teacher guidance, especially in checking accuracy, writing better prompts, and avoiding overdependence. This combined framework is used to interpret both the questionnaire results and the interview findings.

## **2.4. Research Gaps and the Present Study**

Although the literature is growing quite rapidly, some gaps still remain. First, much of the recent research has been carried out with university students, not vocational college students. Second, many studies have focused more on speaking, anxiety, or willingness to communicate, while fewer studies have looked at students' actual practices together with their perceptions in one connected piece of research. Third, evidence from Vietnam is still limited, especially from vocational education where English is closely related to practical workplace communication. These gaps lead directly to the present study. This study examines both perceptions and practices of using AI chatbots for developing English communication skills among second-year students at a vocational college in Danang City.

# **3. Research Methods**

## **3.1. Research design**

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the first phase, questionnaire data were collected from 100 second-year students to identify general patterns of AI chatbot use, students' perceptions, and relationships among the main acceptance factors. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students selected from the survey group. The interviews were used to explain the survey results in more detail, especially why students found AI chatbots useful, enjoyable, or unreliable in some situations. This design was suitable because the study needed both numerical patterns and students' own explanations of their learning experiences.

### 3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a vocational college in Danang City, Vietnam. The college offers vocational programmes in commerce- and service-related disciplines. The English communication modules at the college focus on practical language use, such as introducing oneself, asking and answering simple questions, understanding short conversations, using everyday expressions, and handling basic service encounters. These communication tasks are directly related to the vocational fields the students are studying, particularly in commerce and service sectors where English is used for customer interactions, workplace communication, and professional exchanges in tourism, hospitality, and business settings. In such a setting, the study treats English communication learning as job-related practical communicative support rather than as academic learning.

The participants were 100 second-year students who were learning English as part of their training programme. They were selected because English communication is important for both their studies and future work, especially in service and business fields. In addition, as second-year students had already some experience of learning English at the college, they were in a better position to reflect on how they used AI chatbots. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method. All second-year students who were attending the English communication modules, about 120 in total, were invited to join the survey. A total of 100 students returned consent forms and completed questionnaires, yielding a response rate of about 83.3%. All 100 completed questionnaires were screened before analysis. No response was removed due to substantial missing data.

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The study was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, a questionnaire was distributed to the targeted students. The questionnaire aims to collect information in three main areas: students' actual use of AI chatbots, their views of these tools, and the benefits and difficulties they experienced when using them. It included items concerning how often the students used AI chatbots, which platforms they liked to use, what their learning purposes were, and how they viewed usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and their future intention to continue using these tools. Most of the perception items employ a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered in Vietnamese so that students could understand the items clearly. The items adapted from English-language sources were translated into Vietnamese and checked by two EFL lecturers. The interviews were also conducted in Vietnamese, then translated into English for reporting selected quotations in the manuscript.

The questionnaire was developed in three stages. First, some items were adapted from earlier studies with validated instruments, including TAM items from Davis (1989) and AI acceptance items from Tram et al. (2024). Second, the first draft was checked by two EFL lecturers who had experience in using technology in language teaching, so that the content could be reviewed carefully. Third, a pilot survey was carried out with 15 students who had similar characteristics to the target sample of the study. After being piloted, several items were revised to enhance clarity. Also, one confusing item regarding trust in AI responses was divided into two separate items, one focusing on trust in terms of accuracy and one on trust in terms of privacy. The final questionnaire comprises six sections: (1) demographic information and usage patterns, (2) perceived usefulness with 5 items, (3) perceived ease of use with 5 items, (4) reliability concerns with 5 items, (5) enjoyment with 4 items, and (6) future intention with 4 items. All perception items used a five-point Likert scale, from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of .70: perceived usefulness ( $\alpha = .84$ ), perceived ease of use ( $\alpha = .81$ ), reliability concerns ( $\alpha = .79$ ), enjoyment ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and future intention ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students who claimed to have prior experience using AI chatbots for English learning. These students were shortlisted from the survey group to obtain deeper explanation for the questionnaire results. Each interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews mainly focused on how the students used AI chatbots to practise communication, what they found useful, what difficulties they faced, and how they perceived the role of AI in comparison with teachers and classroom learning.

The semi-structured interview guide covered five main areas, including (1) students' usual use of AI chatbots, for example, "Can you describe a typical time when you use ChatGPT for English practice?", (2) perceived benefits, for example, "What do you find most helpful when using AI chatbots?", (3) challenges encountered (e.g., 'Have you experienced any problems when using these tools?'), (4) comparison with classroom learning (e.g., 'How is practising with AI different from practising with teachers or classmates?'), and (5) future expectations (e.g., 'Will you continue using AI chatbots? Why or why not?'). Probes were used to encourage elaboration. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure comfort and accurate expression, then translated into English for analysis. To illustrate the procedure more clearly, Table 2 summarises the participants and instruments.

**Table 2. Participants and data collection tools**

Phase	Participants	Tool	Main focus
Quantitative	100 second-year students	Questionnaire	Use patterns, perceptions, benefits, and challenges
Qualitative	10 students	Semi-structured interviews	Deeper explanations of practices and views

As shown in Table 2, the two sets of data played different but connected roles. The questionnaire provided the broader picture, while the interviews helped elaborate that picture in more detail.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression. Descriptive statistics were used to highlight general patterns of AI chatbot use and student perceptions. Correlation was used to examine relationships among key variables. Multiple regression was then used to identify which factors were more strongly linked with students' future intention to continue using AI chatbots.

The qualitative interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). First, the interviews, conducted and transcribed in Vietnamese, were read and re-read by the first author to achieve familiarization. Second, initial codes were generated inductively from the data, capturing specific ideas related to benefits, challenges, and usage practices. Third, these codes were grouped into potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined against the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Fifth, themes were clearly defined and labelled. Finally, the analysis was written up, with the Vietnamese transcripts being translated into English for the presentation of verbatim quotes in this manuscript. To ensure trustworthiness, peer debriefing was conducted with a colleague who reviewed a sample of the transcripts and the developed themes to challenge interpretations and reduce researcher bias. The analysis produced four main themes: flexible out-of-class practice, low-pressure communication support, concerns about reliability and dependence, and the continued need for teacher guidance.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative data occurred at the interpretation and reporting stage. The qualitative findings were used to provide depth and context to the statistical patterns. For example, while the survey could show the strength of the relationship between enjoyment and future intention, the interviews were used to elicit the reasons for this link, such as the 'low-pressure' practice environment students described. This integration allows for a more comprehensive understanding than either method could provide alone.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. The students were informed about the purpose of the research, and their responses were treated confidentially. No personal names were used in the reporting of the findings. With the mixed-methods design established, the next section presents the findings organized by the three research questions.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section reports the findings in line with the three research questions and discusses them together. This way is more suitable for the present article because the study did not only ask what students thought. It also asked how they actually used AI chatbots, what they found useful, and what problems they still faced. In the broader literature, recent studies also suggest that AI-supported language learning should be understood through both use patterns and learner views, not from attitudes alone.

### 4.1. RQ1. Students' actual use of AI chatbots for English communication practice

The first finding is that the students seemed to use only a small group of AI chatbots, and ChatGPT was apparently the most common tool. In the data, 87% of the students reported using ChatGPT, while 62% used Gemini. The use of Microsoft Copilot, Claude, and Poe was much lower. This pattern suggests that the students tended to choose tools that were already well known, easy to access, and familiar in everyday digital life, rather than testing many platforms in a systematic way.

The interview results help explain this pattern. The interviewees described ChatGPT and Gemini as convenient tools for practice outside class, specifically for asking questions, trying role-play situations, checking expressions, and practising communication when they had no partner available. Some students also shared that AI chatbots were useful because they could practise at any time and repeat activities when necessary. They also got responses immediately. Hence, AI chatbots seemed to work as flexible partners for communication practice outside the classroom.

This finding resonates with some earlier studies. Dizon (2024) stated that foreign language learners used ChatGPT for different self-study purposes, especially for conversation practice and vocabulary learning. The

learners in that study also thought the tool was easy to use and easy to access, although they still had some doubts about reliability. In a broader review, Koç and Savaş (2024) also found that AI chatbots in English learning were often involved in speaking, listening, vocabulary, and oral interaction. While sharing a similar pattern, this study adds a more local view from a vocational college context, where communication practice is closely related to future job prospects.

The students also reported that using AI chatbots was useful for several areas of communication. In the survey, communicative vocabulary ( $M = 3.64$ ) and listening comprehension in conversations ( $M = 3.62$ ) received the highest ratings, followed by speaking, including pronunciation, fluency, and reflex ( $M = 3.45$ ). Social interaction and conversational grammar were rated a little lower, though still not negative. These mean scores suggest moderately positive perceptions rather than very strong agreement. In other words, the students did not claim that AI transformed everything. However, they did feel that it helped in practical areas that matter for communication. The interview data strengthen this point. The interviewed students said AI chatbots helped them expand vocabulary, try more natural expressions, and practise authentic situations such as asking for directions, introducing themselves, or dealing with customer-service talk (Jiang et al., 2025; Zou et al., 2024). These comments are important for this study because they show that the students' positive views were not only general excitement about new technology. Their use was linked with clear communication purposes.

This result also resonates with recent experimental studies on AI-supported speaking. Zhang et al. (2024) found that an AI speaking assistant helped students gain more enjoyment and more willingness to communicate. It also helped reduce their anxiety after six weeks of use. In a similar way, Wang et al. (2024) reported that conversational AI chatbots improved students' willingness to communicate and their perceived communicative capability. They also helped lower speaking anxiety, although clear improvement in short-term speaking test results was not always found. The present study does not test performance directly, so it cannot make strong claims about measurable improvement. Still, the students' reports suggest that AI chatbots may widen access to practice, which is itself an important condition for communication development (Liu & Zhao, 2025; Liu et al., 2025; Roe & Perkins, 2025).

**Table 3. Descriptive results for main AI chatbot use and perception items**

Area	Item / construct	M / %	SD
Preferred tool	ChatGPT	87%	—
Preferred tool	Gemini	62%	—
Learning use	Communicative vocabulary	3.64	0.82
Learning use	Listening in conversations	3.62	0.85
Learning use	Speaking support	3.45	0.80
Perceived usefulness	Overall usefulness	3.65	0.72
Ease of use	Overall ease of use	3.70	0.70
Reliability	Overall reliability	3.45	0.75
Enjoyment	Overall enjoyment	3.58	0.74
Future intention	Overall future intention	3.72	0.70

#### 4.2. RQ2. Students' perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and future use

The second research question focuses on student perceptions. The survey results reveal moderately positive views of usefulness. The mean scores for the four benefit items ranged from 3.56 to 3.73 (SDs from 0.79 to 0.84). The highest-rated item was 'Using AI chatbots helps me learn English communication faster' ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), followed by 'AI chatbots improve my communication skills' ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and 'AI chatbots help me understand conversations better' ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ). These scores suggest that many students believed AI chatbots were helpful, though not in an overly strong or unquestioned way.

The interviews corroborate this result in richer detail. The students valued AI because it provided answers almost immediately, offered many opportunities for practice, and could be used flexibly outside class hours. Some also mentioned support with pronunciation, faster correction, and repeated explanation when they did not understand the first time. These comments show why usefulness was rated quite positively. In a context where students may not always have access to teachers or speaking partners, fast and repeated practice seems to matter greatly.

This finding that perceived usefulness and ease of use predict continued use aligns directly with Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model. However, the present study extends TAM by showing that in the vocational education context, these factors operate alongside context-specific considerations. Students' considerable attention to enjoyment shows that, for learners who do not feel very confident in English communication, feelings may be as important as practical value. The results also match Tram et al. (2024)'s

multi-methods study, which found that continued use of ChatGPT was shaped through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, with enjoyment playing a mediating role (Ling & Jan, 2025; Zaimoğlu & Dağtaş, 2025).

The interviews also support this mixed result. Some students said that useful answers often depended on how clearly they wrote their prompts or instructions. When the prompt was too vague or too general, the answer became less useful and sometimes made them feel frustrated. This shows that having access to the tool is not the same as using it well for learning. Students may open and use the tool easily, but they still may need teacher guidance to make it more meaningful for communication practice. This point is critical in vocational education, where students may use AI often but not always strategically.

Reliability received a more cautious response. Trust in AI content ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), using AI instead of consulting a teacher ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), and belief in accuracy and reliability ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) were all moderate rather than strong. Concern about privacy and data security was slightly higher ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). These results suggest that students did not fully trust AI chatbots, even though they still found them useful. This can be explained with the interviews where some students stated that AI responses could sound too formal, less natural, or not fully authentic for real communication. Others also worried about overdependence.

The students also reported moderate enjoyment and apparent willingness to continue using AI chatbots. Enjoyment items ranged from 3.48 to 3.66 (SDs from 0.78 to 0.86), while intention items ranged from 3.70 to 3.73 (SDs from 0.75 to 0.82). Many students said AI practice felt less stressful than speaking in front of others and allowed them to try different topics more freely. This low-pressure feeling seems important because it links directly with continued use.

### **4.3. RQ3. Reported benefits, challenges, and the place of teachers**

The pattern of AI chatbot use reported by the students reflects key principles of self-directed learning (Shi et al., 2025). The students diagnosed their own learning needs (vocabulary gaps, pronunciation difficulties), identified available resources (ChatGPT, Gemini), and evaluated their learning outcomes. However, the finding that they still wanted teacher guidance on how to use AI effectively ( $M = 3.50$ ) underscores one important point. Self-directed learning with AI is not fully independent. The students in this study seemed to take the initiative to use AI tools by themselves, but they still viewed teachers as very important for giving direction and support. This may suggest that the old idea of self-directed learning, which was developed before the digital time, may need to be reconsidered for learning situations that involve AI (Mekheimer, 2025; Tran, 2025).

On the challenge side, both survey and interview data raised several concerns. The students gave only moderate ratings for trust in AI content ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) and in the accuracy and reliability of AI responses ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). Concern over privacy and data security was slightly higher ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). The interview helped explain these figures. The students mentioned unnatural responses, overly formal language, uncertainty about accuracy, difficulty in writing effective prompts, privacy concerns, and the risk of depending on AI too much. These concerns suggest that they were critical users rather than simply accepting AI chatbot responses passively.

A very important result is that most students did not believe AI chatbots could replace teachers. In the interviews, eight of the ten students clearly stated that AI chatbots should be used as support tools rather than as replacements for teachers. They described AI as a support tool or assistant rather than a substitute. They still valued teachers for explanation, orientation, emotional encouragement, and deeper guidance. This is a highlight in the present study and thus should be mentioned with emphasis in the article to ensure a more realistic view of AI in education.

This view is also supported by some earlier studies. Hınız (2024) showed that generative AI could help language learning in some useful ways, but both teachers and students still expressed concerns over misuse. In the wider review by Koç and Savaş (2024), the findings from different studies were also mixed, rather than completely positive. The present findings add to that discussion by showing that, in one Vietnamese vocational college, students welcomed AI support while still foregrounding human teaching.

### **4.4. Relationships among key factors**

The last part of the findings concerns the relationships among acceptance factors. In the data, all main variables were positively related to each other. Perceived ease of use demonstrated a strong link with perceived benefits ( $r = .661$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Perceived benefits also had a strong link with future intention ( $r = .733$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The strongest relationship was between enjoyment and future intention ( $r = .872$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Reliability also had a strong positive relationship with future intention ( $r = .746$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The regression results make the picture even clearer. The model was statistically significant and explained about 80% of the variation in future intention. Perceived benefits, ease of use, and enjoyment were all significant predictors, but enjoyment had the strongest effect. This means that students were more likely to

engage with AI chatbots not only when they thought the tools were useful and not too difficult to use, but also, and even more, when the experience felt interesting and comfortable for them.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative contribution of perceived benefits, ease of use, enjoyment, and reliability to students' future intention to use AI chatbots. The regression model was statistically significant,  $F(4, 95) = 98.34, p < .001$ , and it explained 80.2% of the variance in future intention (adjusted  $R^2 = .795$ ). This adjusted  $R^2$  value is high and should be interpreted with some caution. This finding has significant implications for vocational English education. It suggests that designing AI-supported learning activities that prioritize enjoyable, low-pressure interaction may be more effective for sustaining student engagement than focusing solely on perceived usefulness or ease of use. Educators and curriculum designers should therefore consider affective dimensions when integrating AI chatbots into English communication courses. One possible reason is that the predictors in the model were closely connected in students' actual learning experience. For these vocational college students, a chatbot that was easy to use was often also seen as useful, less stressful, and more enjoyable. The strong link between enjoyment and intention may also reflect the importance of low-pressure practice for learners who need English communication support but may not feel confident in classroom speaking situations. Almost all predictors were significant, except reliability ( $\beta = .08, p = .124$ ). Among all factors, enjoyment was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = .52, p < .001$ ). It was followed by perceived benefits ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ) and ease of use ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ). This result implies that the students cared not only about practical usefulness. More importantly, they were more likely to continue using AI chatbots when the experience felt enjoyable. In other words, feeling interested and comfortable seemed to have a stronger effect than other factors.

**Table 4. Multiple regression predicting future intention to use AI chatbots**

Predictor	$\beta$	p
Perceived usefulness / benefits	.31	< .01
Ease of use	.18	< .05
Reliability	.08	.124
Enjoyment	.52	< .001

Model fit:  $F(4, 95) = 98.34, p < .001, R^2 = .802, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .795$ .

The finding that enjoyment was the strongest predictor should be handled with careful interpretation in the Vietnamese vocational context. That feelings were stronger than perceived usefulness in this study can be justified with several reasons as follows. First, Vietnamese EFL learners, especially those in vocational settings, often feel nervous when they have to speak English. They may either not have many chances to practise speaking or be afraid of making mistakes in front of others. In such situations, AI chatbots may help ease the pressure by creating a space where students can practise without feeling judged. Second, the vocational students in this study are preparing for future jobs in service-related fields where practical communication is often more important than full academic accuracy. Therefore, more relaxed and less stressful interaction with AI may better suit their learning needs than very formal classroom practice. Third, enjoyment in this case may be close to what Zhang et al. (2024) called foreign language enjoyment, which is a positive feeling that can help students become more willing to communicate. When students enjoy practising with AI, they may come back to it more often. This can lead to more exposure and slowly help them feel more confident. From this view, for vocational students, feeling comfortable and relaxed with AI-based practice may come first, even before they clearly perceive its learning benefits.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examines the perceptions and practices of using AI chatbots to support English communication skills among second-year students at a vocational college in Danang City, Vietnam. The findings show that the students generally shared favourable views of AI chatbots and used them in practical ways for their English learning. The students mainly used these tools for communicative vocabulary, listening in conversations, speaking support, and repeated practice outside the classroom.

Also, the study found that perceived usefulness, ease of use, reliability, and enjoyment were all positively related to students' future intention to continue using AI chatbots. Among these factors, enjoyment appeared to play the strongest role. This suggests that the students were more willing to return to these tools when the learning experience felt comfortable, flexible, and less stressful. In this sense, AI chatbots seemed to offer students a low-pressure space to try English, make mistakes, and practise again. This point is consistent with earlier studies which found that AI-supported speaking practice could reduce anxiety and support willingness to communicate (Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

At the same time, the findings reveal that these students did not fully trust AI chatbots. Reliability ratings were only at a medium level, and many students remained cautious about accuracy, privacy, and the risk of depending on these tools too much. The interview elaborated this point more thoroughly. The students valued the speed and convenience of AI responses. However, they also mentioned some weak sides, such as unnatural language, less authentic interaction, and the need to ask questions carefully if they wanted to get useful answers.

Another important finding is that most students did not view AI chatbots as a replacement for teachers. Instead, they saw them as supporting tools. Teachers were still considered necessary for explanation, orientation, correction, and human encouragement. This is an important insight for English language education. It suggests that the main value of AI chatbots is not to take over teaching, but to extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom. In a vocational context, where communication practice is closely related to future workplace use, this kind of support may be particularly useful.

However, this study has some limitations. It was conducted in one vocational college with 100 students, so the findings should not be generalized too widely. The data also came from self-reported questionnaires and interviews, which may not fully show students' actual chatbot use or real improvement in English communication. In addition, the cross-sectional design could not show how students' practices change over time. Future studies should include more vocational institutions, use classroom or platform-based evidence of AI use, and examine whether regular chatbot-supported practice leads to measurable gains in speaking, listening, or interactional confidence. Teachers' perspectives and institutional guidance should also be studied, as students in this study still saw teacher support as necessary.

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