

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

INVESTIGATING AI-ASSISTED APPLICATIONS IN IELTS-ORIENTED SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF NEU STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates how students at the National Economics University (NEU) in Vietnam perceive the use of AI-assisted applications (apps) for developing IELTS-oriented speaking skills. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 80 NEU students, ranging from first- to fourth-year, to collect data on their usage patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges regarding AI apps. Overall, the respondents reported a moderate frequency of use, particularly with specialized IELTS training apps such as Study4, Prep, or more recently, ChatGPT in conversation mode. A large proportion of users expressed high satisfaction with the flexibility and convenience of AI-assisted apps, as these tools allow them to practise speaking anytime and anywhere, at their own pace, while receiving instant and detailed feedback on various aspects of their performance. Linguistic benefits—such as access to idiomatic expressions, collocations, and model answers—were also highly valued. Nevertheless, the participants pointed out several limitations, including the lack of genuine human interaction and a tendency to foster dependence on automated corrections. While most respondents expressed favourable views, a considerable neutral group suggested that further improvements in these AI-assisted tools would enhance their effectiveness in supporting learners' speaking skill development.

KEY WORDS: AI-assisted apps; AI apps; IELTS speaking; speaking skills; speaking skill development.

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1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, English proficiency has become an essential requirement for university students, serving not only as a tool for communication but also as a key to academic achievement and career advancement. Of the four core language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - speaking holds a central role, as it enables learners to participate in discussions, deliver ideas effectively, and thrive in an increasingly interconnected environment. As Davies & Pearse (2000) pointed out, equipping students with the competence to use English accurately and effectively in interactions is the main goal of English language instruction. Speaking skills in a higher education environment are performed under multiple activities, including giving presentations, having discussions, etc. (Jordan, 1997).

At the National Economics University (NEU), minimum English proficiency requirements are set for graduation - typically an IELTS score of 5.5 for students enrolled in Vietnamese-instructed programs and 6.0 or 6.5 for those in English-instructed programs. Consequently, students across all programs are required to obtain an IELTS certificate to be eligible for graduation. Those NEU students who have not yet met the IELTS graduation requirement need to practice extensively to achieve their target band score.

Nevertheless, despite official training in IELTS classes, many students continue to face persistent difficulties, such as limited opportunities for interaction, a lack of practice time, low self-confidence, a shortage of vocabulary and ideas, and a lack of tailored feedback. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced promising solutions to these challenges. Smith and Johnson (2022) found that students using a speech recognition system show significant improvements in pronunciation and oral fluency compared to those who do not. Similarly, García et al. (2023) reported

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that students engaging in conversational activities with an AI-assisted application develop greater confidence and are better at sustaining fluent dialogues in English. AI-assisted speaking tools, such as speech recognition systems, chatbots, and virtual tutors, allow learners to practice at their own pace and convenience. They provide instant feedback on pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary, helping learners improve their speaking more efficiently. These technologies can also simulate realistic conversation scenarios, adapt to individual learning needs, and reduce learners' anxiety when they speak a foreign language.

In light of the growing potential of AI to enhance language learning and the specific requirement to meet NEU's English-speaking outcomes, this study investigates the use of AI-assisted applications (hereafter referred to as "AI apps") in supporting students' speaking skill development. By analyzing both the advantages and limitations of AI speaking apps, it seeks to provide insights into effective ways of integrating technology into English language education to help learners achieve their intended outcomes.

2. AI-assisted apps and Speaking Skills

2.1. AI-assisted apps

AI-assisted apps have a long history, starting with Eliza in the 1960s (Kim et al., 2019). Since then, they have evolved from simple programs to advanced generative models, with well-known examples including Alice, Cleverbot, and Replika. While many AI apps share similar features, some are particularly effective in promoting and motivating users to learn, engage in conversation, and communicate effectively (Kim et al., 2019). These tools provide more opportunities for foreign language students to practise, overcoming the limitations in the traditional classrooms.

Some AI apps are specifically designed for language learning. Recent AI apps such as *Elsa Speak* and *Duolingo* employ advanced technologies, including speech evaluation and natural language processing, to assist learners with speaking. More recently, powerful AI models like *ChatGPT* have made human-AI conversations increasingly popular; for instance, *ChatGPT Voice Mode* and *ChatGPT-4.0* offer realistic, human-like interactions.

These developments demonstrate that AI is a powerful tool for language education. Studies indicate that the primary role of conversational AI is to function as a speaking partner, responding to learners' spoken input and providing timely feedback (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). Such systems can support fluency development, vocabulary expansion, and learner motivation (Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020). However, researchers also emphasize the need for further empirical studies to fully understand the long-term impacts of AI-assisted apps on speaking proficiency and learner autonomy (Chou, 2023).

2.2. AI-assisted apps and Speaking Skills

AI has been found to support the development of learners' speaking skills. Zou et al. (2023) noted that multiple studies have confirmed the effectiveness of AI apps in enhancing EFL speaking proficiency. Similarly, Kim et al (2019) reported that both text- and voice-based AI apps contribute to speaking skill development, with voice-based options being preferred. As most contemporary AI apps integrate both text and voice functions, they can increase interactivity, provide accurate models of pronunciation and intonation, and offer valuable feedback to learners.

Several studies have highlighted various benefits of AI-assisted apps in developing foreign language learners' speaking skills. Kang (2022), for example, compared the performance of non-native English speakers who interacted with the AI app Replika to those who practised with native English speakers. The findings revealed that AI interaction has greater positive impacts on learners' speaking proficiency, particularly in accuracy, fluency, coherence, and interaction. Likewise, Lin and Mubarak (2021) investigated the effects of Replika on EFL learners' speaking development and find improvements in fluency, consistent use of appropriate grammatical structures, and the ability to develop topics logically and coherently, with minimal hesitation or repetition.

Similarly, in Vietnam, several authors have also evaluated AI-assisted apps for learning languages. Nguyen (2024) surveyed a population of 75 English majors at the University of Da Nang. The results indicated that students find AI motivating and often prefer it over traditional materials. Most also believe their English proficiency has improved through AI-based learning. Trang (2023) investigated students at Hanoi National University of Education regarding their awareness and use of ChatGPT. The study revealed positive attitudes toward its usefulness in supporting learning and language development. However, students also raise concerns about reliability and potential negative effects on critical thinking.

AI apps play a significant role in enhancing speaking skills while also helping to reduce learners' anxiety. Their effectiveness can be explained by several key features. First, they are *accessible* anytime and anywhere, enabling learners — particularly those with limited schedules — to practice at their convenience (Dokukina & Gumanova, 2019). Second, they offer *instant, personalized feedback*, allowing learners to identify and correct errors in real time, thereby improving pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical accuracy (Hakim & Rima, 2022; Rad, 2024). Additionally, AI apps provide a *low-pressure environment* where learners can engage at their own pace without fear of making mistakes, creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere that increases willingness to communicate (Mageira et al., 2022; Rad, 2024). Finally, by offering authentic conversational experiences, they help learners develop a deeper *understanding* of the target language (Rad, 2024). Collectively, these features substantially contribute to the development of speaking skills.

Below is the interface of an AI-assisted app – Study4 as illustration.

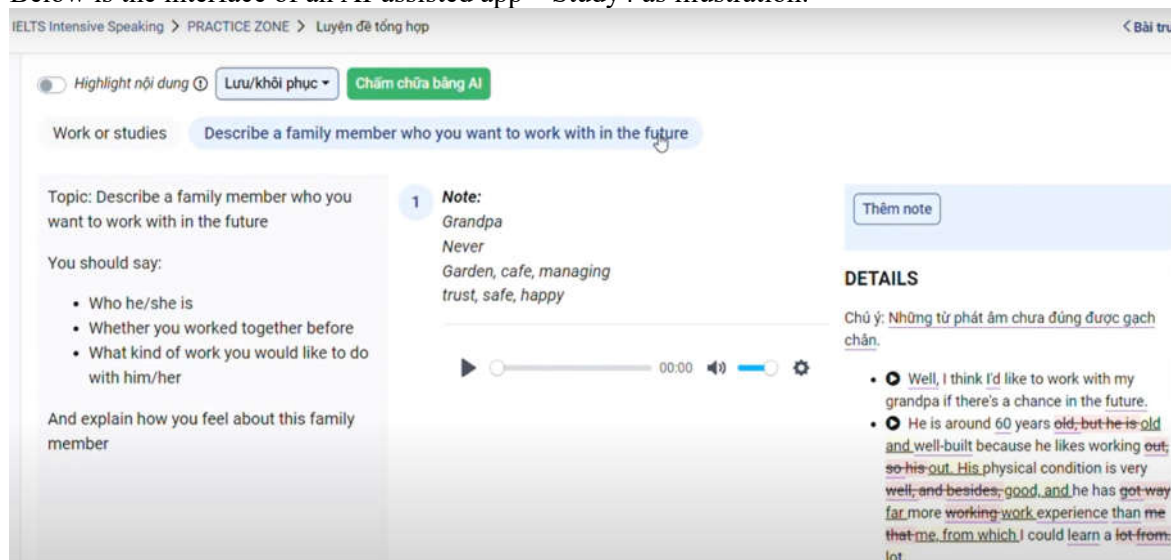


Figure 1. An example of AI-assisted IELTS speaking app interface

The screen capture from Figure 1 shows that on this Study4 app, learners are provided with a list of questions in various parts, together with suggestions of the points that can be included in the answer. The app also allows users to make their own notes for their responses. Users can record their spoken answers directly within the platform, after which the AI app generates automatic feedback addressing their lexical choices, pronunciation mistakes, sentence structures and fluency. Therefore, the users can determine their specific weaknesses and practise to overcome them, as well as compare their original production with the improved versions.

2.3. Assessment of speaking skills

There are various methods for assessing speaking skills, each emphasizing different elements and techniques. Nevertheless, most frameworks agree on four essential components of spoken communication: *Fluency and Coherence*, *Lexical resources*, *Grammatical range and Accuracy*, and *Pronunciation*. Mazouzi (2013) emphasizes that speaking performance requires a balanced combination of proficiency and accuracy and highlights the importance of a solid understanding of the language system. *Fluency*, often prioritized by educators, is regarded as the primary element of speaking performance. Hughes and Reed (2016) describe it as the capacity to convey ideas clearly and coherently, ensuring smooth interaction and sustaining the listener's engagement. Similarly, Hedge (2001) defines fluency as the ability to produce connected speech by linking words and phrases, articulating sounds distinctly, and applying appropriate stress and intonation. *Accuracy*, the second major aspect, is equally crucial for achieving high proficiency in a foreign language. Mazouzi (2013) stresses that learners must pay attention to the accuracy and completeness of language forms during oral communication, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. *Lexical resources* is another key component in assessing a person's speaking competence. This criterion evaluates a speaker's vocabulary, not only the range of vocabulary but also their ability to apply it accurately and appropriately with the sophisticated shades of meaning, use of phrasal verbs, and idiomatic expressions. *Pronunciation*, according to Thornbury (2005), is often the least prioritized aspect of speaking skills, which often receives little attention from learners. However, pronunciation is crucial to effective communication as it helps the speaker be fully understood by listeners.

For the evaluation of IELTS speaking skills, the IELTS speaking criteria serve as a critical framework. These four criteria, *Fluency & Coherence*, *Lexical Resource*, *Grammatical Range & Accuracy* and *Pronunciation*, which are equally weighted, provide a standardized and widely recognized rubric that can be based on to assess a speaker's proficiency. Each criterion aims to explore a distinct dimension of the candidate's spoken performance, providing a comprehensive measure of communicative competence. This framework is widely adopted in both language teaching and research, serving as a benchmark for assessing oral proficiency in English.

To contextualize the analysis of speaking proficiency, Table 2 presents an adapted version of the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors (British Council, 2024), highlighting the four main scoring criteria.

Table 2. Shortened Marking Criteria for IELTS Speaking

Criterion	Expanded Descriptors
Fluency & Coherence	Speaks fluently with minimal hesitation, self-correction, or repetition; any pauses are mostly content-related. Ideas are developed coherently with appropriate linking devices and cohesive features.
Lexical Resource	Uses a broad and flexible range of vocabulary; includes less common, idiomatic expressions and appropriate collocations; paraphrases effectively to convey precise meaning.
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Employs a wide variety of sentence structures, including both simple and complex forms; uses grammatical structures naturally and accurately; errors are infrequent and non-systematic.
Pronunciation	Pronunciation is intelligible throughout; uses a full range of phonological features (rhythm, stress, intonation) flexibly; accent does not hinder understanding.

[Source: British Council; public band descriptors, 2024]

3. Methodology

The population comprised 80 students from the first to the fourth year at NEU, thereby ensuring a broad and diverse representation of English proficiency levels. Many of them had been undertaking

intensive IELTS training with the objective of achieving an IELTS score of 6 - 6.5 or higher, while some of them had already obtained a necessary IELTS certificate and thus had undergone a similar intense training process. They all aimed to acquire a good command of English to perform well in certain courses in the curriculum and to meet the graduation requirements, so they were highly motivated to enhance their English skills.

A questionnaire was delivered from Jul 15th – Jul 30th, 2025 to gather data on relevant aspects including students' usage behaviors, their perception of AI apps' benefits and challenges, and their attitudes toward AI speaking apps. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and distributed to the intended participants via official university communication channels and NEU-related social media platforms. Clear instructions were provided, explaining the purpose of the study and assuring participants of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. The survey remained open for two weeks to allow adequate time for completion. 80 responses were valid for analysis.

The research aims to answer the following two research questions: 1/How have NEU students used AI-assisted apps to develop their IELTS speaking skills, and how has this practice enhanced their speaking skills?; 2/What benefits and challenges do the students encounter when using AI-assisted apps?

4. Research findings and discussion

4.1. NEU students' use of AI-assisted apps to develop their IELTS speaking skills

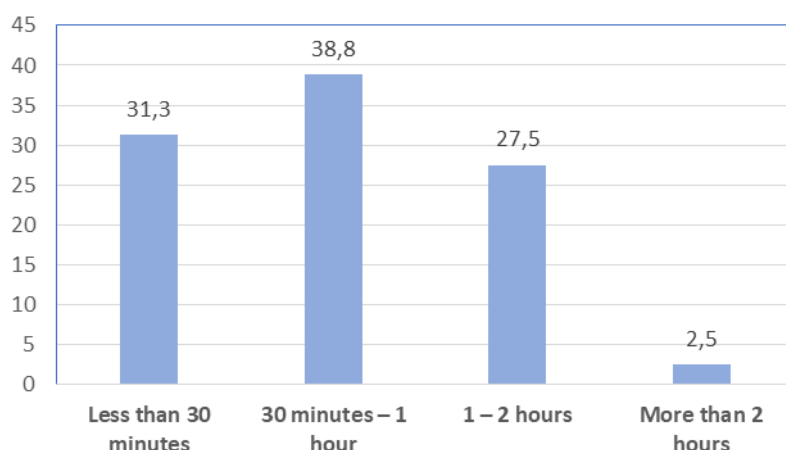


Figure 1. The number of hours spent on AI apps practising speaking skills per day

The data in Figure 1 indicate that almost half of the participants dedicate a moderate amount of time each day to AI apps to enhance their speaking skills. The highest proportion spends between 30 minutes and 1 hour daily (38.8%), while a similarly notable percentage of 31.3% spends less than 30 minutes per day, showing a moderate level of commitment among many respondents. Nevertheless, a quite considerable percentage, 27.5% practise 1-2 hours per day, and 2.5% even study for more than 2 hours, which suggests an intense engagement in English speaking training. Given that the students also have to allocate their time budget to other subjects as well, the amount of time dedicated solely to learning speaking on AI apps can be considered significant.

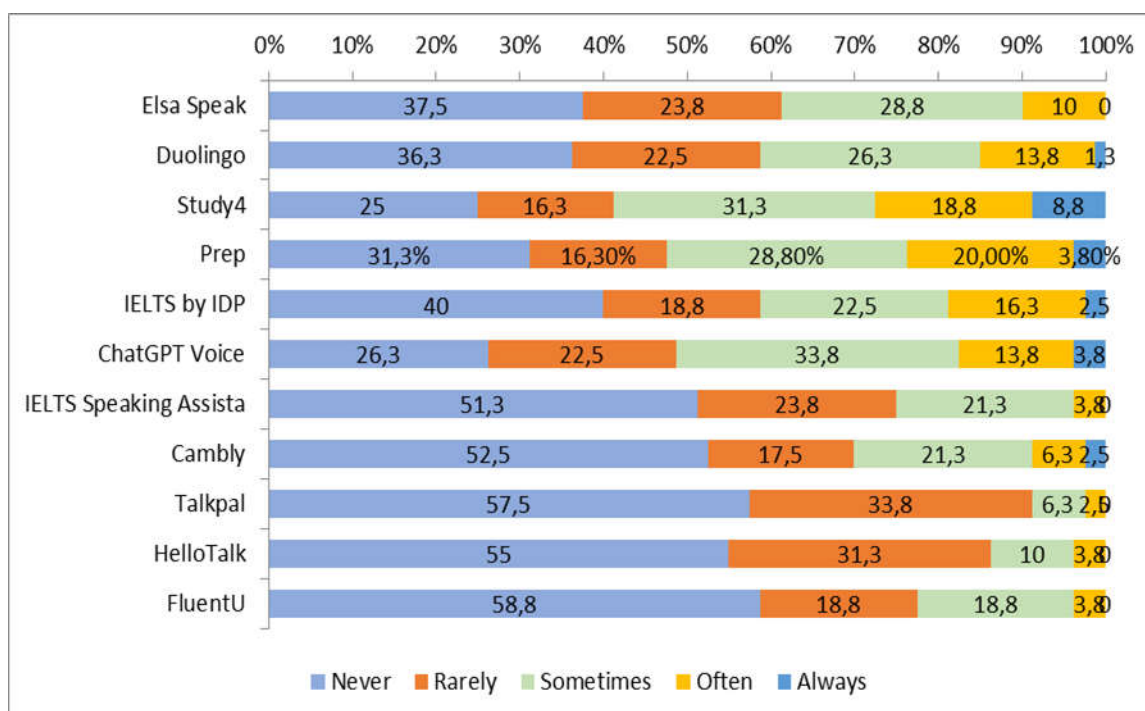


Figure 2. The frequency of AI apps usage in practising IELTS speaking

Figure 2 reveals the frequency at which NEU students use 11 popular AI-assisted English-speaking apps, based on which their usage and preferences can be identified. The chart shows that, on average, the usage of these apps is at a moderate level because a larger number of respondents “never” or “rarely” use these tools than those who “sometimes” or “often” use them.

Nevertheless, certain apps display higher engagement. For example, *Study4* and *Prep* record more “sometimes” (31.3% and 28.8%) and “often” responses (18.8% and 20%), which indicate the popularity and effectiveness of these two apps. *Study4* and *Prep* are, in fact, intensively advertised and recommended in IELTS groups, so they seem to be more familiar to IELTS learners in Vietnam and used by a large number of them despite their required fees.

Recently, *ChatGPT voice mode* also provides IELTS learners with an interactive, convenient, free-of-charge way to practise speaking in real time. It has increasingly shown its advantages, for example, it can simulate a favorable dialogue environment, enable immediate back-and-forth exchanges without typing, and also provide immediate feedback to the learners. Not surprisingly, *ChatGPT voice mode* has been “often” used by up to 33.8%, the highest level for this type of frequency.

Elsa Speak, *Duolingo*, and *IELTS by IDP* show relatively positive responses for “sometimes” and “often” frequencies, at 28.8%, 26.3%, 22.5% and 10%, 13.8%, 16.3% respectively. *Elsa Speak* is a pronunciation-focused app that uses advanced speech recognition to give learners instant, detailed feedback. For IELTS candidates, this is especially useful for improving pronunciation - a key part of the speaking test. With lessons tailored to users’ needs, Elsa helps them practise difficult sounds, stress, and intonation patterns, so they can speak more clearly and confidently. *Duolingo*, on the other hand, takes a broader approach. Its speaking practices help learners practise forming sentences, using new vocabulary, and speaking more spontaneously. The game-like format keeps users motivated, while repeated practice helps them remember and use language naturally. With daily practice, IELTS learners can improve their fluency, have a wider range of vocabulary, and gain greater comfort talking about everyday topics. Besides, the *IELTS IDP* app, created by IDP Education, is a

convenient digital tool that helps learners prepare for the IELTS exam. It provides various practice questions, mock speaking tests, and the ability to record themselves, so users can see the evaluation of their pronunciation, fluency, and clarity.

Other apps, including *IELTS Speaking Assistant*, *Cambly*, *Talkpal*, *Hellotalk* and *FluentU* seem not to be very popular with IELTS learners in Vietnam, with the majority of the respondents “never” or “rarely” use them.

Table 3. *Students' evaluation of how AI apps have improved their IELTS speaking skills*

Categories	Statements	Mean	Std
Fluency and Coherence	1. I am aware of my excessive pauses or fillers during delivery.	3.68	0.94
	2. I am given evaluation on the logical flow and relevance of my answers, which helps me develop topics more coherently.	3.64	0.81
	3. I am suggested ways to better organize my points using cohesive devices.	3.73	1.10
Lexical Resources	4. I am aware of repetitive vocabulary.	3.81	0.96
	5. I am provided with more higher-level synonyms relevant to my speaking topics.	4.09	1.05
	6. I am provided with idiomatic expressions and collocations appropriate for IELTS topics.	4.13	0.90
	7. I am provided with paraphrasing exercises and then evaluated on whether I can use structures and vocabulary effectively.	3.38	0.85
Grammatical range and accuracy	8. I am aware of grammar errors in my spoken responses and provided with corrections.	3.78	0.86
	9. I am suggested how to transform simple sentences into more complex structures to improve grammatical range.	3.8	1.05
	10. I am helped to focus on my recurring grammar mistakes over time.	3.59	0.96
Pronunciation	11. My pronunciation is evaluated, including vowel/consonant accuracy, stress placement, and intonation.	3.89	0.84
	12. I am provided with visual pitch and stress patterns, which helps me improve rhythm and intonation.	3.40	1.15
	13. I am aware of accent-related clarity issues and provided targeted pronunciation drills.	3.60	0.95

Table 3 presents the participants' evaluation of how AI apps have helped improve their IELTS speaking performance in the four main areas: *Fluency and Coherence*, *Lexical Resources*, *Grammatical Range and Accuracy*, and *Pronunciation*. The scores, which are all quite high (from 3.38 to 4.13 out of 5), show that most users find these AI tools really helpful. The low standard deviations (all below 1.15) indicate the respondents generally have consensus in perceiving the benefits of AI apps in improving their speaking skills.

The most prominent area of positive feedback lies in the *Lexical Resources* category, where the highest mean score (4.13) is recorded for the provision of idiomatic expressions and collocations

appropriate for IELTS topics. This suggests that participants view AI apps' ability to supply advanced vocabulary and idiomatic language as one of their most valuable features. Similarly, the participants also highly appreciate the apps' supply of higher-level synonyms (4.09) and their reminders of users' repetitive vocabulary (3.81). The lowest score in *Lexical Resources* category (3.38) is for paraphrasing exercises, which indicates that while this aspect is still perceived positively, it may be regarded as less effective compared to other vocabulary-related features.

Fluency and Coherence scores are relatively consistent, with means ranging from 3.64 to 3.73, which suggests that feedback on logical flow, reducing pauses/fillers, and using cohesive devices is seen as moderately helpful. *Grammatical Range and Accuracy* shows similar evaluation, with the highest scores (M=3.8) for suggestions to transform simple sentences into more complex ones, followed by the awareness and correction of grammar errors (M = 3.78). In this category, learners do not value the feature of highlighting recurring grammar issues as highly as other functions (M = 3.59).

Pronunciation feedback is moderately acknowledged, with the highest score for the apps' evaluation of accuracy, stress, and intonation (M = 3.89). The supply of visual aids for pitch and stress receives a comparatively lower mean score (3.40), accompanied by the highest standard deviation in the table (1.15), suggesting great inconsistency in user experiences with this feature.

4.2. Benefits and challenges in using AI-assisted apps

Table 4. Students' perception of AI apps' benefits in training their IELTS speaking skills

Benefits	Statements	Mean	STD
Personalization	1. I get instant, separate, abundant feedback on my pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar and overall performance.	4.14	0.94
	2. I have personalized lessons and activities to my needs.	3.56	0.81
	3. I receive targeted practice to fix specific weaknesses.	3.75	1.1
	4. I can practice speaking at any time and from anywhere.	4.22	1.05
Cost-effectiveness	5. I have lessons at little or no cost compared to traditional speaking courses and tutoring.	3.70	1.16
Engagement	6. I can practice in a low-pressure environment without fear of judgment, which helps me feel more confident.	3.98	0.9
	7. I have gamified practices to keep me engaged.	3.51	0.85
	8. I can track my progress and goal achievement over time.	3.6	1.05
Linguistic benefits	9. I am provided with model answers and practice questions with relevant vocabulary and structures.	4.05	1.05
	10. I am provided with high-scoring, topic-specific vocabulary, idiomatic expressions to improve lexical variety.	3.86	0.96
	11. I am provided with advice on how to turn my utterances into more complex, advanced structures.	3.79	0.84
	12. I imitate native-speaker audios to improve my pronunciation.	3.91	1.15

Table 4 presents the perceived benefits of using AI-assisted apps in training speaking, organized into four categories: *Personalization*, *Cost-effectiveness*, *Engagement*, and *Linguistic Benefits*. Overall, the results suggest that *Personalization* is the strongest area of benefit. The highest mean score in the entire dataset, 4.22, highlights the advantage of availability at any time, anywhere of AI tools. Understandably, instant access is often cited as a key driver of sustained practice and learner

autonomy. Enabling users to engage with speaking practice at flexible times suitable to their personal schedules can increase both their frequency and consistency of learning. The respondents also highly appreciate the feature of “*getting instant, separate feedback on my pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar*” ($M = 4.14$, $STD = 0.94$), which shows appreciation for immediate, detailed feedback across different aspects of AI. Feedback, which helps learners identify their strengths and weaknesses in real time, is often insufficient in traditional classroom settings and therefore represents a major advantage of AI apps. Two other features of *Personalization* category namely “*I receive targeted practice to fix specific weaknesses*” ($M=3.75$) and “*I have personalized lessons and activities to my needs*” ($M=3.56$) receive a comparatively lower score, suggesting that the tailored lessons may not always meet expectations.

Linguistic benefits are rated second most positively, with the highest rank of this category falling in the provision of model answers and questions with relevant vocabulary and structures ($M=4.05$). The other linguistic advantages related to vocabulary, structures, and pronunciation are also rated at quite high mean scores of just under 4.0, which suggests that the students well perceive the AI apps’ benefits in supporting them to develop their language.

Regarding *Engagement* and *Cost-effectiveness* categories, the most treasured feature is AI apps’ ability to provide a low-pressure environment without fear of judgment ($M=3.98$), and thus enhance users’ confidence. Unlike face-to-face settings or traditional classrooms, where learners may feel anxious about making mistakes or being evaluated by peers or instructors, AI apps allow them to have a completely *private space* where they can practise at their own pace. Regarding cost-effectiveness, the respondents have different ideas ($STD=1.16$) about the costs required for AI-assisted apps. Except for ChatGPT, which is free, other highly rated AI apps in Figure 2 - Study4, Prep, and Elsa Speak - require relatively high subscription fees for limited periods, which may lead some participants to view them less favorably. *Gamified practices* ($M = 3.51$) seems not to be a crucial feature to IELTS learners while *tracking progress* ($M = 3.60$) is not really considered an effective feature of AI apps.

Table 5. *Students’ perception of AI apps’ challenges in training their IELTS speaking skills*

Challenges	Statements	Mean	STD
Assessment	1. AI apps sometimes misinterpret what I say.	2.78	0.94
	2. I feel the AI’s feedback on my speaking is inadequate or not detailed enough.	2.55	0.81
	3. AI apps sometimes overrate or underrate my performance.	3.58	1.1
Interaction	4. I feel a lack of genuine human connection and empathy that a human teacher provides.	3.70	0.97
	5. The AI’s rigid structure makes practice boring and make me discouraged.	3.5	1.05
Motivation	6. I have become too dependent on AI corrections instead of fixing mistakes myself.	3.64	0.9
	7. My progress in the app doesn’t always reflect my improvement in real-life conversations.	2.91	0.92
Technical Issues	8. I have troubles with the apps’ technical malfunctions or connectivity issues.	2.88	1.05

Table 5 shows that the challenges posed by AI apps can be grouped into four key areas: *Assessment*, *Interaction*, *Motivation*, and *Technical Issues*. While these AI tools offer varied and personalized practices (as shown in statement 2, Table 4), they fall short in the areas related to human interaction. The most prominent concern is the absence of human connection and empathy ($M = 3.70$), which implies that many learners value the genuine encouragement and emotional support that can only be provided by human teachers. Another key challenge is learners’ reliance on AI-provided

corrections ($M = 3.64$), which reduces their opportunities to actively correct themselves, and thus deteriorates their independent problem-solving skills. Two challenges that receive moderately high concern are the worry that AI apps sometimes overrate or underrate learners' performance ($M=3.58$) and that learners may find working on computers uninspiring and demotivating ($M=3.5$).

On the other hand, the low mean scores of assessment-related challenges suggest that assessment issues are not significant concerns for users. The modest mean of 2.55 implies that the participants generally disagree that AI apps provide insufficient feedback, which reinforces the earlier finding that students receive abundant feedback from AI ($M=4.14$, statement 1, table 4). Technical issues ($M=2.88$) or misinterpretation of users' utterances ($M=2.78$) seem not to be significant sources of user dissatisfaction.

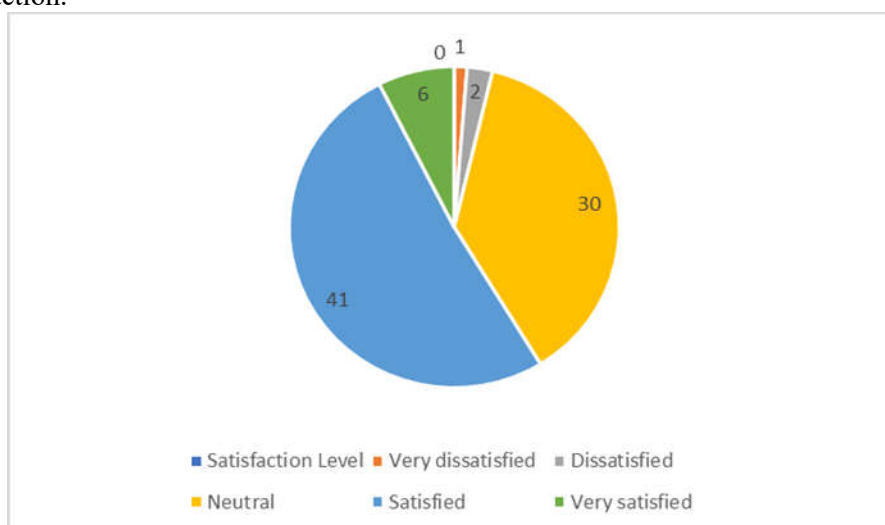


Figure 3. The students' level of satisfaction for AI apps in practising IELTS speaking

As is shown in Figure 3, the majority of respondents report a positive experience, with 41% indicating they are satisfied and 6% stating they are very satisfied. A substantial portion of 30% remaining neutral suggests that these people do not find the AI tools exceptionally impressive. Only a small minority express negative views: 2% are dissatisfied and 1% are very dissatisfied.

Overall, the results reveal a generally favorable evaluation of AI apps. However, the sizable neutral group highlights the need for further improvements of AI apps to enhance user satisfaction and bring about their true effectiveness in training IELTS speaking.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigates the use of AI-assisted applications in IELTS speaking training among 80 NEU students from the first to the fourth year. The findings reveal three key points. *First*, students report a moderate level of use of AI-assisted apps for speaking practice. Among the four assessed aspects of speaking, *Lexical Resource* development received the highest evaluation. *Second*, students express appreciation for the apps' convenient access, detailed feedback across multiple areas, and provision of effective vocabulary and sentence structures. *Third*, several limitations were also identified. The lack of authentic human interaction emerges as the most significant drawback, followed by concerns over students' overreliance on AI-generated corrections and the occasional inaccuracy of AI scoring.

Despite these limitations, AI-assisted applications are still becoming increasingly prevalent among IELTS learners because of the benefits that traditional classroom settings alone cannot provide. These findings suggest that AI-assisted apps can serve as a valuable complement to traditional IELTS speaking practice. When used sensibly, they have the potential to enhance learners' speaking performance and promote autonomous learning.

From the findings of the research, some recommendations are proposed for AI-assisted speaking apps to better support learners. *First*, feedback could be made more personal and context-sensitive - moving beyond generic comments to explain why a particular pronunciation, grammar choice, or expression does not work, and suggesting several natural alternatives. *Second*, the current lack of real, two-way interaction could also be addressed by adding AI-driven conversation simulations that adapt to a learner's responses, creating a practice environment closer to real-life communication. *Third*, the topics should be more varied with a mixture of practice formats, and provision of creative speaking tasks so that learners can feel more motivated. *Finally*, if AI-assisted apps are more reasonably priced, and free AI apps offer improved functionality, more students can have access to effective speaking practice tools and achieve better IELTS outcomes.

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Khảo sát việc ứng dụng công cụ trí tuệ nhân tạo trong phát triển kĩ năng nói định hướng IELTS: trường hợp sinh viên NEU

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khảo sát việc sinh viên Đại học Kinh tế Quốc dân (NEU) tại Việt Nam nhìn nhận việc sử dụng các ứng dụng hỗ trợ trí tuệ nhân tạo (AI) trong phát triển kỹ năng nói định hướng IELTS. 80 sinh viên NEU từ năm thứ nhất đến năm thứ tư tham gia trả lời một phiếu điều tra nhằm thu thập dữ liệu về thói quen sử dụng, lợi ích nhận được và những thách thức đối với sinh viên khi sử dụng các ứng dụng AI. Nhìn chung, người tham gia cho biết họ sử dụng các ứng dụng AI với tần suất trung bình, đặc biệt là các ứng dụng luyện thi IELTS chuyên biệt như Study4, Prep, hoặc gần đây hơn là ChatGPT chế độ hội thoại. Phần lớn sinh viên bày tỏ mức độ hài lòng cao đối với tính linh hoạt và tiện lợi của các ứng dụng AI, vì các ứng dụng này cho phép người sử dụng luyện nói được mọi lúc, mọi nơi, theo nhịp độ riêng, đồng thời nhận được phản hồi tức thì và chi tiết về nhiều khía cạnh khác nhau trong quá trình luyện tập. Những lợi ích ngôn ngữ - ví dụ việc được cung cấp các cụm thành ngữ, cụm từ cố định và câu trả lời mẫu - được đánh giá khá cao. Tuy nhiên, người tham gia cũng chỉ ra một số hạn chế, chẳng hạn sự thiếu tương tác thực sự với con người và nguy cơ phụ thuộc vào các gợi ý, chỉnh sửa dựa vào công nghệ. Mặc dù đa số có cái nhìn tích cực, song vẫn có một nhóm trung lập đáng kể cho rằng các ứng dụng AI cần được cải thiện thêm để nâng cao hiệu quả trong việc hỗ trợ phát triển kỹ năng nói của người học.

Từ khóa: ứng dụng hỗ trợ AI; ứng dụng AI; luyện nói IELTS; kĩ năng nói; phát triển kĩ năng nói