Enhancing Students' English-Speaking Skills and Vocabulary through AI-Based Local Tourism Conversations

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Abstract
Vocabulary is essential as it supports other skills, including speaking, which is among the most necessary skills for students. Practicing English through local contexts enables students to enhance their language proficiency and local knowledge. In this study, the researchers aimed to compare students' vocabulary knowledge and speaking skills before and after using an AI chatbot to discuss local tourism in Thailand. Additionally, this study seeks to investigate students' attitudes toward improving vocabulary and speaking skills through using the AI chatbot. 54 participants were selected using the purposive sampling method, and the researchers utilized a mixed-methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data included scores from vocabulary tests before and after learning local tourism practices with the AI chatbot, scores from English speaking skills tests both before and after learning, and attitude questionnaires regarding learning through instruction via the AI chatbot. The qualitative data were collected from a focus-group interview. The findings revealed that students significantly improved their vocabulary and speaking skills through participating in the AI chatbot activities. Furthermore, students expressed positive attitudes about the AI chatbot activities. This study suggests that AI can be effectively integrated into language learning classrooms.
Key words: speaking skills, vocabulary, artificial intelligence, tourism, local contexts

Introduction

Proficiency in English provides considerable advantages, including improved academic performance, increased opportunities for employment success, and workplace performance (Kanoksilapatham & Pariwatnanont, 2024). Regarding English proficiency, speaking is among the important skills. Previous studies (Aldosari et al., 2025; Lin, 2023) have highlighted how, in the tourism sector, speaking is the most necessary skill needed by tour guides. Local hosts' English-speaking proficiency significantly influences the travel experiences of international tourists (Lin, 2023). Therefore, English-speaking proficiency should be promoted for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) to enable them to successfully communicate and convey meaning to their audience.

However, Thailand's EFL education encounters several challenges. A significant number of the Thai population faces persistent difficulties in understanding basic English conversations, hindering their ability to succeed on the global stage and placing them at a significant disadvantage in the modern world (Srithep, 2023). Thai students encounter challenges in multiple aspects of their speaking skills, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, inadequate knowledge of grammar, and a perception of being inarticulate, alongside internal barriers such as lack of confidence, fear, negative attitudes toward speaking, and negative past experiences (Chulee et al., 2023). These factors underscore the need to enhance Thai EFL students' speaking skills.

Apart from speaking skills, possessing a strong vocabulary is essential for acquiring proficiency in any language, as vocabulary is a fundamental component supporting the development of other English skills. Sufficient vocabulary knowledge allows students to communicate more freely and effectively (Suwanasilp & Durongbhandhu, 2023), and individuals need to acquire and comprehend a wide range of vocabulary

(Fauziningrum et al., 2023). Therefore, vocabulary requires practice and exposure to the language in order to acquire new words and use them correctly.

Over the past five years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has played a crucial role in many fields, including language learning. Incorporating AI literacy into graduates' skills could improve their employability and preparedness for the swiftly changing job market (Rasul et al., 2023). One such AI innovation that has recently gained attention in improving English proficiency is chatbots. Previous studies have demonstrated that AI chatbots are effective for enhancing students' English proficiency (Fathi et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021). For instance, AI learners can enhance their proficiency in speaking by improving their fluency, coherence, grammatical range and accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and willingness to communicate (Fathi et al., 2024). AI chatbots can also give feedback in speaking (Zou et al., 2023). Therefore, AI appears effective in improving students' vocabulary and speaking skills.

Although technological advancements have been made, there remains an academic gap in the effective integration of AI chatbots and local contexts into EFL education in Thailand. As English continues to be widely used across the world and regionalization becomes more prominent, distinct cultural and national identities have attenuated (Kanoksilapatham, 2020). In order for Thai EFL learners to highlight local contexts, such as within the tourism industry, it is advisable to include cultural and tourist attractions in language learning activities. Doing so can facilitate students' ability to establish a meaningful connection with the language and enhance their knowledge and appreciation of Thai culture and local places.

While previous studies have focused on the use of AI to augment a wide range of English proficiencies, such as speaking skills (Du & Daniel, 2024; Duong & Suppasetseree, 2024; Tai & Chen, 2024) and writing skills (Hawanti & Zubaydulloevna, 2023; Maghamil & Sieras, 2024), a limited amount of extant research examines the combined use of AI and local tourism practices to improve English proficiency among EFL students. Therefore, this study aimed to compare students' vocabulary knowledge and speaking skills both before and after conducting local tourism conversations with an AI chatbot (ChatGPT) in the classroom. Moreover, this study seeks to investigate students' attitudes toward improving vocabulary and speaking skills through the use of the AI chatbot in the classroom.

Literature Review

1. The Importance of English-Speaking Skills and Vocabulary

Developing English-speaking skills is crucial for EFL students since it greatly impacts their ability to communicate effectively with people globally. Speaking is defined as the ability of an individual to generate sounds and communicate ideas that exist in their minds (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). It involves not only producing sounds but also transforming ideas into meaningful expressions (Ulinuha & Parnawati, 2024). Thus, speaking proficiency equips students with a crucial benefit for effective communication (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023), enabling them to verbally exchange their information, thoughts, and feelings with other individuals (Wahyuni et al., 2026). The demand for English speaking proficiency is undoubtedly high in today's rapidly changing world (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021), and its importance remains clear in all spheres of life due to its widespread use in the global job market (Manipatruni et al., 2024). Therefore, speaking is clearly a useful skill that involves verbally communicating among individuals, and mastery is vital for effective global communication.

To support speaking proficiency, vocabulary is an essential component. Vocabulary is defined as an individual's understanding of word definitions and meanings, and it is fundamental for effective oral and written expression, as well as for understanding others (Menggo et al., 2024). Fauziningrum et al. (2023) mentioned that a broad

vocabulary is crucial for successful communication; hence, individuals need to acquire and comprehend a wide range of vocabulary terms. Given the importance of learning vocabulary, the present study incorporated local tourism into students' practices. The vocabulary was presented in five different themes: (1) Traditions and Festivals, (2) Temples, (3) Natural Attractions, (4) Textiles, and (5) Local Food.

2. The Integration of AI Technologies into Education

Progress in technology has created new opportunities for improving EFL instruction. Technology now enables teachers to distribute instructional materials more easily and facilitates students' access to these materials (Ulinuha & Parnawati, 2024). Studies have demonstrated AI's vital role in various fields, including language learning. The incorporation of AI into educational settings has emerged as a result of the utilization of information and communication technology to improve teaching and learning methods (Chinonso et al., 2023). AI-driven technologies play a positive role in enhancing EFL students' enjoyment of learning English (Huang & Zou, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024), their confidence (Yildiz, 2024), and their willingness to communicate (Huang & Zou, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024), while also mitigating anxiety (Zhang et al., 2024).

One of the AI technologies that has been shown to help students practice language proficiency is chatbots. Chatbots, like other AI applications, are new industrial developments that allow language learners to connect with intelligent machines in an educational setting (Çakmak, 2022). Duong and Suppasetseree (2024) argued that the AI chatbot's ability to offer unrestricted time for students to think and speak creates a relaxed atmosphere during conversations, enhancing students' comfort, confidence, and motivation to speak English. Given the significance of AI chatbots, ChatGPT was utilized for the present study. At its core, ChatGPT is an AI language model that can interact with users and provide answers to intricate questions in a human-like manner (Rawas, 2024), and it can significantly enhance both students' speaking ability (Yildiz, 2024) and overall communication skills (Kanoksilapatham & Takrudkaew, 2025).

The AI chatbot activities employed in this study aimed to support students with vocabulary and speaking practices, particularly through conversations regarding topics such as traveling in the province or guiding visitors to various places in the province, thereby highlighting the importance of incorporating local contexts into speaking practices through the use of AI chatbots.

3. Local Context Integration

Incorporating local contexts into EFL education in Thailand is essential, particularly in the context of technological advancement. As English continues to be widely used across the world and regionalization becomes more prominent, distinct cultural and national identities have attenuated (Kanoksilapatham, 2020). In the study by Mandaria et al. (2022), teachers agreed that utilizing locally relevant content in educational materials is advantageous for fostering students' intrinsic motivation to acquire knowledge. Furthermore, Jayantini et al. (2024) asserted that incorporating local values into EFL activities significantly enhances Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), particularly in Indonesia. Similarly, in Thailand's various contexts, employing local content such as cultural and tourist attractions is desirable, as the integration of local content can enhance students' vocabulary and speaking skills. Within the scope of this study, AI chatbot activities refer to activities involving students' conversations with an AI chatbot about local tourism. The AI functioned as a listener, allowing students to explain traditions and festivals, temples, natural attractions, textiles, and food of the province where they were studying.

Methodology

1. Research Design

The research design for this study was a mixed-method approach involving the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data included scores from a vocabulary test administered both before and after learning local tourism practices with an AI chatbot (ChatGPT), scores from English speaking skills tests given before and after learning, and attitude questionnaires regarding learning through the AI chatbot. The qualitative data were collected from a focus-group interview with 15 of the 54 participants.

2. Participants

The study participants were 54 second-year university students majoring in English who were enrolled in an English course in the second semester of the 2025 academic year, selected using the purposive sampling method. The course is a mandatory course for English majors at the university where the researchers conducted the study and is designed to support students' English communication on local tourism in a province in the north of Thailand, where the university is located. This course promotes knowledge of various places and cultures within the province, making the integration of local tourism and AI into the teaching and learning activities suitable for this group of participants while simultaneously aligning with the course objectives.

3. Research Instruments

3.1 Vocabulary Test

This study utilized a vocabulary pre-test and post-test to answer the first research objective regarding the effectiveness of an AI chatbot on the development of students' English vocabulary knowledge. The vocabulary questions were identical in both the pre-test and post-test, with target vocabulary drawn from the course reading passages, which were written by lecturers in the School of Liberal Arts at the university where the study was conducted. The test consisted of 50 words selected from five passages (10 words per passage) that included topics such as the province's traditions and festivals, temples, natural attractions, textiles, and food, which themes aligned with those of the study. For instance, in the temple theme, the words 'religious', 'ceremony hall', and 'make merit' were introduced. The vocabulary was selected and subsequently approved by two tourism instructors and three English instructors to ensure its appropriateness for the students. Introducing theme-based vocabulary in this way aimed to improve students' general vocabulary knowledge while enabling them to use these words in their tourism-oriented speaking practices with AI. Each of the 50 multiple-choice questions provided four options with one correct answer. Using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, the test items were validated by three experts who were English teachers in the Faculty of Liberal Arts with at least 13 years of experience teaching English to Thai university students. Every item achieved an IOC score higher than 0.5; however, some adjustments were made according to the experts' feedback.

3.2 Speaking Test

This study utilized a speaking pre-test and a post-test for collecting quantitative research data to address the second research objective regarding the use of the AI-Chatbot (ChatGPT) on students' English-speaking skills. Both the pre-test and post-test consisted of four questions related to describing local traditions and festivals, places such as temples and natural attractions, textiles, and food. Similar to the vocabulary test, the IOC was conducted for the speaking test, and all items achieved an IOC score higher than 0.5, as validated by the three experts. Each student answered

all questions in approximately 15-20 minutes, and two English teachers evaluated their speaking performances.

Regarding the speaking rubric, as the course was designed to equip students with English communication skills and to support them at the B1 CEFR level, the speaking rubric was adapted from the B1 CEFR speaking rubric by Cambridge Assessment English (2021), which covers grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication, with five points allocated to each category, for a total of 20 points.

3.3 Attitude Questionnaire

To examine students' attitudes toward improving their vocabulary knowledge and speaking skill through the use of an AI chatbot, as well as their perceptions and concerns regarding the use of AI chatbots in educational contexts, an attitude questionnaire was utilized. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items divided into three sections: (1) students' attitudes toward vocabulary knowledge development, (2) students' attitudes toward speaking skill development through the use of an AI chatbot, and (3) students' perceptions and concerns regarding using AI chatbots in educational contexts. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (rating of 5) to strongly disagree (rating of 1). Initially, 27 items were created; however, based on the experts' feedback and IOC scores, two questions were removed for a final number of 25 items with an IOC score higher than 0.5.

3.4 Focus Group Interview

To further examine students' attitudes and gather qualitative data, a focus group interview was conducted with 15 students who were randomly selected. The interview consisted of eight questions across three themes similar to those in the attitude questionnaire. The items were vetted by the three experts, and the IOC scores of all items were higher than 0.5. The interview session lasted approximately one hour.

3.5 AI-Chatbot Activities

The AI chatbot activities were speaking tasks that students performed using an AI chatbot, specifically ChatGPT, to enhance their vocabulary and speaking skills related to local tourism. These activities were designed to align with the content and course objectives, aiming to develop both students' English communication skills up to the B1 CEFR level and their knowledge of local tourism in the province. The content in the AI-chatbot activities consisted of five themes: (1) Traditions and Festivals, (2) Temples, (3) Natural Attractions, (4) Textiles, and (5) Food. For each theme, students learned relevant vocabulary drawn from reading passages through a combination of lecture and pronunciation activities and then practiced their speaking skills and vocabulary knowledge with the AI chatbot. The chatbot was assigned the role of a tourist asking questions of the tour guides (students) rather than that of giving information by explaining places or cultures to them. In this setting, students were encouraged to speak rather than listen passively. Each theme was practiced over four hours during the second semester of the 2025 academic year, totaling 20 hours between December 2025 and February 2026.

4. Data Collection

Having obtained ethical approval for this research from the human ethics committee at the participating university, the researchers administered the pre-tests for vocabulary and speaking skills. Subsequently, the AI-chatbot activities were implemented four hours a week over a five-week period, totaling 20 hours. Post-tests were then conducted to assess the improvement in students' vocabulary and speaking skills, following which the attitude questionnaire was distributed to the students. Fifteen students were then randomly selected to participate in a focus group interview.

Finally, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the instructional activities.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the vocabulary and speaking tests (pre-test and post-test), completed by a sample of 54 participants before and after participating in the AI-Chatbot-integrated learning activities, were analyzed. First, tests of normal distributions were conducted prior to selecting further statistical analysis. The results revealed that these were in normal distribution. Therefore, a paired sample t-test was conducted to determine the differences before and after the intervention.

Regarding the quantitative data from the students' responses in the attitude questionnaire, mean scores and standard deviation were employed, and the results were analyzed based on the proposed interval ranges by Pimentel (2010), i.e., 4.20–5.00 = strongly agree, 3.40–4.19 = agree, 2.60-3.39 = neutral, 1.80–2.59 = disagree, and 1.00–1.79 = strongly disagree.

For qualitative data, the content analysis method was employed using data from the students' responses in the interview, which was analyzed based on three themes: improving speaking skills, enhancing vocabulary knowledge, and students' perceptions of the integration of AI tools into educational contexts.

Results

1. Comparison of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Scores

Concerning the first research objective, to compare students' vocabulary knowledge before and after using the AI chatbot in the classroom, a paired-samples t-test was used. The results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Comparison of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Scores (N=54)

	N	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig.
Pre-test	54	23.17	4.42	-15.119	53	0.000
Post-test	54	32.83	4.84			

Table 1 presents the students' vocabulary scores before and after learning with an AI-chatbot. The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test were 23.17 (SD = 4.42) and 32.83 (SD = 4.84), respectively. This difference was statistically significant ($t = -15.119$, $p < 0.05$), demonstrating a marked improvement in the students' vocabulary knowledge after participating in the activities.

2. Comparison of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores

In order to address the second research objective, to compare students' English-speaking skills before and after using the AI chatbot in the classroom, a paired-samples t-test was used similar to those of the vocabulary scores. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Comparison of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores (N=54)

	N	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig.
Pre-test	54	11.54	2.13	-17.901	53	0.000
Post-test	54	15.53	1.97			

The results of the paired-samples t-test showed that students' speaking scores improved significantly from the pre-test ($M = 11.54$, $SD = 2.13$) to the post-test ($M = 15.53$, $SD = 1.97$). This difference was statistically significant ($t = -17.901$, $p <$

0.05), suggesting that students considerably improved their speaking skills after participating in the activities.

3. Students' Attitudes toward Improving Speaking Skills and Vocabulary through an AI Chatbot (ChatGPT) in the Classroom

3.1 Students' Attitudes Based on Questionnaire Responses

In order to address the third research objective, to investigate students' attitudes toward improving vocabulary and speaking skills using the AI chatbot in the classroom, quantitative data from the use of an attitude questionnaire were analyzed. Mean and standard deviation were presented, and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Students' Attitudes toward Improving Speaking Skills and Vocabulary through an AI Chatbot Based on Questionnaire Responses (N=54)

Statements	M	SD	Interpre-tation
Attitudes toward Vocabulary Improvement			
1. I think thematic categorization of vocabulary, such as ways of life, festivals, temples, natural attractions, clothing, and food, should be encouraged in English for Tourism or English for Local Tourism classrooms.	4.33	0.64	SA
2. I think accurate pronunciation should be presented along with the vocabulary using online dictionaries.	4.07	0.77	A
3. I think having sufficient vocabulary can support learning other English skills.	4.35	0.62	SA
4. I think the vocabulary taught in this course supported my speaking skills when I had conversations about traveling in this province with the AI chatbot.	4.19	0.78	A
5. Focusing on vocabulary development, I tried using the lesson vocabulary with the AI chatbot.	4.11	0.69	A
6. I think ChatGPT made learning vocabulary more interactive.	3.91	0.87	A
7. I feel more confident using the vocabulary that I have learnt after practicing with the AI chatbot.	3.83	0.77	A
8. I improved my vocabulary after practicing with the AI chatbot.	3.81	0.83	A
Attitudes toward Speaking Skills Improvement			
9. I think speaking skills should be encouraged in English for Tourism classrooms.	4.31	0.61	SA
10. I think speaking skills are important for tour guides.	4.57	0.60	SA
11. While speaking with the AI chatbot, I tried to pronounce words correctly.	4.22	0.66	SA
12. While speaking with the AI chatbot, I tried to use correct grammar.	3.85	0.88	A
13. While speaking with the AI chatbot, I tried to maintain interaction with the AI chatbot.	4.04	0.78	A
14. I think the speaking topics related to traveling in this province, used in speaking with AI activities, were interesting.	4.02	0.84	A
15. I think the AI chatbot helped me improve my ability to talk about this province as a tour guide.	4.07	0.77	A
16. While speaking with the AI chatbot, I tried to organize my ideas when describing food, ways of life, festivals, clothing, and places in this province.	4.06	0.71	A

Statements	M	SD	Interpre-tation
17. I feel more confident after having conversations with the AI chatbot about traveling in this province.	3.94	0.86	A
18. I improved my speaking skills after practicing with the AI chatbot.	3.94	0.79	A
Attitudes toward the Use of AI Chatbots in Educational Contexts			
19. I think AI chatbots should be used in English classrooms.	4.00	0.80	A
20. I think AI chatbots cannot replace English teachers.	4.22	0.88	SA
21. In this technological world, I think we should learn how to use AI chatbots and other AI tools in educational contexts.	3.98	0.84	A
22. I think I will continue using ChatGPT in learning English.	4.19	0.70	A
23. As I explored ChatGPT in class, I would like to explore other AI chatbots or AI tools for learning English.	3.96	0.85	A
24. I am concerned about privacy and data security issues when using AI chatbots.	3.89	0.82	A
25. I am concerned that AI chatbots provide me with unreliable answers or content.	3.87	0.85	A
Total	4.07	0.49	A

*Interpretation: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 3 displays the findings from students' responses to the attitude questionnaire. The statements in the questionnaire involved three important areas: students' attitudes toward their vocabulary improvement, speaking skills improvement, and general attitudes toward the use of AI chatbots.

Regarding vocabulary improvement, students indicated that having sufficient vocabulary can support learning other English skills (item 3; M = 4.35, SD = 0.62), and expressed that the thematic categorization of vocabulary, such as ways of life, festivals, temples, natural attractions, clothing, and food should be encouraged in English for Tourism or English for Local Tourism classrooms (item 1; M = 4.33, SD = 0.64). Furthermore, they responded that the lesson vocabulary supported their speaking skills during conversations with the AI chatbot about travelling in the province (item 4; M = 4.19, SD = 0.78). The lowest mean score of 3.81 (SD = 0.83) occurred with item 8, about improving vocabulary through practicing with the AI chatbot; nonetheless, this score falls within the 'agree' level of interpretation.

With respect to improving speaking skills, students responded that these are important for tour guides (item 10; M = 4.57, SD = 0.60) and should be encouraged in English for Tourism classrooms (item 9; M = 4.31, SD = 0.61). Moreover, while practicing, students made noticeable efforts to pronounce words correctly (item 11; M = 4.22, SD = 0.66). Their obvious pronunciation efforts contrasted with their attempts to use correct grammar, which received the lowest mean score (item 12; M = 3.70, SD = 0.88).

According to students' overall attitudes toward the use of AI chatbots for improving their English ability, they commented that AI chatbots cannot replace human English teachers (item 20; M = 4.22, SD = 0.88), however, they would continue using ChatGPT for learning English (item 22; M = 4.19, SD = 0.70), and expressed their opinion that AI chatbots should be used in English classrooms (item 19; M = 4.00, SD = 0.80). Finally, although items 24 and 25 received the lowest mean scores in this

section, the results indicate that students had some concerns regarding privacy and data security while using AI (M = 3.89, SD = 0.82), as well as AI providing unreliable answers (M = 3.87, SD = 0.85).

3.2 Students' Attitudes Expressed in the Focus Group Interview

To further examine students' attitudes toward enhancing their vocabulary and speaking skills through AI-based conversation activities, a focus group interview was conducted with 15 of the 54 total participants. The interview consisted of six questions categorized into three themes: improving speaking skills, enhancing vocabulary knowledge, and integrating AI tools into educational contexts. The following are excerpts from the interview.

Theme 1: Vocabulary Knowledge Development through AI-integrated Language Practice

In the focus group interviews, students discussed their perspectives on learning vocabulary through thematic categories such as food, festivals, temples, clothing, and natural places.

> *"I think learning vocabulary by theme or category makes it easier to remember. I can also apply the words I've learned to real-life situations. For example, when tourists or foreigners visit the lake (the biggest lake of the province), I think I can communicate with them and actually use the vocabulary in a real context." (Student 3)*
> *"For me, grouping the vocabulary into categories makes it much easier to understand. The teacher also teaches us pronunciation, so I can pronounce the words correctly when practicing with the AI, and I think I can actually use them in real life." (Student 7)*
> *"I think I can use the vocabulary in real-life situations. For example, in a shopping mall, if foreign tourists ask about local food or traditional clothes, I think I can easily explain these to them." (Student 10)*

Students believed that learning vocabulary thematically made the words easier to understand and remember (Students 3 and 7). Furthermore, they noted that they could apply the words they learned to real-life situations (Students 3, 7, and 10), such as in situations where they would be able to explain local food and traditional clothes to tourists using the thematic vocabulary (Student 10). This suggests their positive attitudes toward thematic vocabulary learning.

Regarding vocabulary practice with the AI chatbot, students described this as beneficial.

> *"I think it really helps improve my vocabulary. Practicing with the AI allows me to practice new words all the time, and I can also use the words I already know to practice speaking more often." (Student 1)*
> *"I feel like it really helps because I can practice anytime. Plus, I don't have to worry about making mistakes or being judged." (Student 11)*
> *"For me, when I talk to the AI, I get to learn new words. If there's any vocabulary I don't understand, I just ask the AI to explain it further. Besides that, I also ask the AI to find synonyms for those words, so they are much easier to remember." (Student 3)*

Students reported that practicing with the AI helped them improve their vocabulary as it allowed them to practice both new words (Students 1, 3, and 11) and words they already knew (Student 1). Although the lessons were designed to allow practice in class, students remarked that they were able to practice with the AI anytime (Student 1). During the conversations with the AI chatbot, students also

asked the AI to explain the vocabulary and find synonyms for the words (Student 3). This indicates that students benefited from learning vocabulary with the AI chatbot by engaging in independent exploration of the vocabulary.

Theme 2: Speaking Skill Development AI-integrated Language Practice

Regarding students' speaking practice in local tourism contexts, they reported that they could improve different aspects of their speaking skills.

> *"I believe it definitely improves my fluency. The more I speak, the more natural it gets. I don't have to constantly think of the vocabulary because I've practiced it enough to automatically remember it." (Student 12)*
>
> *"It really helps me speak more fluently and naturally. I also feel a lot more confident when speaking. Plus, the way I construct sentences becomes much more natural, too." (Student 2)*
>
> *"For me, I get to practice my pronunciation, so I speak more clearly. I also learn the grammar and get to practice constructing sentences." (Student 1)*
>
> *"I think practicing speaking often really helps me organize my thoughts. It helps me to speak more smoothly, and I also feel a lot more confident to communicate." (Student 5)*
>
> *"Besides practicing grammar, I feel like I've gained other skills, too, like organizing my thoughts. Practicing speaking in a tourism context has taught me how to sequence information properly, such as how to introduce a place or talk about its history." (Student 10)*
>
> *"I feel that I've practiced how to describe various topics related to tourism. Before, I struggled with making long sentences. However, with practice, I can now express my ideas much more clearly and understandably." (Student 9)*

Given the importance of practicing various topics related to local tourism with AI, students indicated that they were able to communicate their thoughts more clearly, fluently, and naturally (Students 2, 9, and 12). The speaking activities also allowed them to improve their pronunciation (Student 1) and grammar (Students 1, 10, and 12). Practicing speaking in a tourism context also helped them with their ability to organize their ideas, as they could sequence information properly (Students 5 and 10). These findings reflect students' favorable attitudes toward engaging in speaking practices.

With regard to engaging in conversations with the AI chatbot, specifically on the topic of the local province, the students shared the following opinions.

> *"It really boosts my confidence and feels like true practice for becoming a guide. I get to introduce the attractions and important highlights of the province." (Student 13)*
>
> *"Practicing with AI helps me explain tourist attractions just like a real guide. Plus, I can also describe the local food in the province much more clearly." (Student 5)*
>
> *"Using AI has really helped me expand my vocabulary related to the province. Acting as a tour guide for the AI allows me to explain various locations, culture, and traditions. Ultimately, it serves as an excellent way to understand and learn the province's culture. " (Student 8)*
>
> *"It allowed me to practice describing the province's landmarks and culture, including the scenic lake, various temples, as well as the local traditions and the people." (Student 11)*

Students stated that practicing with the AI chatbot allowed them to act as real tour guides while the AI played the role of a tourist. Consequently, they gained more confidence in describing various locations, local cultures, traditions, and food (Students 5, 8, 11, and 13). For example, they were able to clearly describe the largest lake in the province and other details, suggesting that students improved their speaking skills by acting as a tour guide with the AI chatbot.

Theme 3: Attitudes toward Integrating AI into Educational Contexts

Regarding the importance of integrating AI into educational contexts, students reported the following attitudes:

> *"I think AI helps people who are shy or afraid of making mistakes practice speaking. It really reduces the pressure, which is helpful for people who lack the confidence to speak." (Student 9)*
>
> *"We can practice with the AI anytime, and it can also give us feedback." (Student 4)*

Regarding their perceptions of AI-integrated language practice, students reported that interacting with the chatbot created a low-pressure environment, enabling shy students or those afraid of judgment to express their ideas more freely, thereby boosting their speaking confidence (Student 9). Additionally, they noted that they could easily request feedback from the AI during their practice sessions (Student 4).

Although students expressed positive attitudes toward integrating AI into educational contexts, they also reported certain concerns regarding its use.

> *"It didn't transcribe everything. The other day, I spoke to it, and it couldn't catch specific terms. I said the name of a district in the province, but it was transcribed as 'Busan' in Korea." (Student 2)*
>
> *"I think it lacks communication with real people. AI lacks emotions, facial expressions, and real human reactions." (Student 12)*
>
> *"If we only use ChatGPT, we miss out on collaborating with others. We don't get to practice with teachers, and we don't practice speaking or working together with our friends." (Student 8)*

Importantly, unlike practicing with real people, AI lacks emotions, facial expressions, and natural reactions (Students 8 and 12). Students reported that excessive dependence on AI use might lead them to lose opportunities to practice collaboration skills with their peers, teachers, and other people. Moreover, the AI could not accurately transcribe specific local proper nouns, such as the names of districts in the province (Student 2).

Discussion

This study, employing a mixed-methods research design, investigated students' improvement in their vocabulary and speaking skills by comparing their pre-test and post-test scores before and after engaging in local tourism conversations through AI chatbot activities with ChatGPT. This study also aimed to examine students' attitudes toward the use of AI in learning English. The findings revealed that students significantly improved their vocabulary and speaking skills after participating in these activities, and they held positive attitudes toward the use of AI. The positive results observed in this study have a variety of implications for English language education, discussed below.

Regarding vocabulary improvement, ChatGPT can significantly contribute to students' vocabulary acquisition. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the benefits of ChatGPT in students' language learning, including vocabulary (Esteban et al., 2025; Kanoksilapatham & Takrudkaew, 2025). Using ChatGPT, students can expand their lexical knowledge by encountering new words and exploring different definitions of terms (Esteban et al., 2025; Kanoksilapatham &

Takrudkaew, 2025), as well as synonyms and antonyms (Esteban et al., 2025). In this study, thematic vocabulary was first introduced, and students were encouraged to practice the words with ChatGPT. Through this activity, students benefited from exploring new words spoken by the AI, allowing them to engage in local tourism conversations with ChatGPT using new words and the words they already knew. During AI-human conversations, ChatGPT could suggest and explain new words, helping students expand their vocabulary. Consequently, students noted that they could apply the words they learned to real-life situations, for instance, explaining local food and traditional clothes to tourists. This suggests that ChatGPT assisted in students' vocabulary acquisition.

As students acknowledged in the study, speaking skills are important for tour guides and should be encouraged in English learning contexts, such as the English for Tourism course used in this study. This underscores that ChatGPT can assist with practicing speaking skills and aligns with findings in other studies, where utilizing ChatGPT was shown to enhance students' speaking skills (Kanoksilapatham & Takrudkaew, 2025) and speaking self-efficacy (Yildiz, 2024). In the present study, students reported the benefits of practicing the role of a tour guide with AI by describing various locations, local cultures, traditions, textiles, and food, such as being able to describe the largest lake as one of the most well-known attractions in the province. Therefore, local contexts can be integrated into language learning, including English practices with AI. Furthermore, students demonstrated favorable attitudes toward engaging in speaking practices in a low-pressure environment, enabling shy students or those afraid of judgment to express their ideas more freely, thereby helping them to speak more confidently. Clearly, AI-speaking activities can reduce foreign language anxiety and effectively enhance EFL students' language enjoyment and willingness to communicate (Zhang et al., 2024). In line with this, Yildiz (2024) mentions that ChatGPT creates a friendly learning environment that reduces students' stress and enhances their speaking confidence.

While the results of using AI chatbot activities appear positive, students did report several challenges. First, participants remarked that AI chatbots like ChatGPT cannot fully replace human English teachers and peers, partly because their primary limitation is their inability to convey emotion in reactions (Celik et al., 2025). Unlike interactions with real people in face-to-face settings, practicing with AI deprives students of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and natural affective reactions, as well as the opportunity to develop collaborative skills with their peers, teachers, and colleagues. Therefore, the researchers suggest that teachers involve learning supports beyond ChatGPT alone. Kanoksilapatham and Takrudkaew (2025) emphasize ChatGPT's potential as a valuable resource in language education, especially when guided by teacher support and oversight. The second challenge that this study's participants reported was ChatGPT's inability to accurately transcribe specific local proper nouns, thereby hindering effective communication. This is in line with findings by Duong and Suppasetseree (2024), who reported the AI chatbot's limitations in voice recognition, noting specifically that it could not recognize Vietnamese names. Despite the observed limitations of ChatGPT, the present study suggests that it can be integrated effectively into educational contexts to enhance students' language learning, especially when supplemented with teacher support.

Conclusion

The positive impact of integrating AI into language learning is widely acknowledged. In this study's focus on local tourism, university students played the role of tour guides for AI and practiced vocabulary and speaking skills to describe local traditions and festivals, temples, natural attractions, textiles, and food. The results revealed that practicing local tourism conversations with AI improved students' vocabulary and

speaking skills. Students also expressed positive attitudes toward improving language proficiency through AI chatbot activities using ChatGPT. Regarding vocabulary, this study suggests that AI can function as a crucial platform for students to practice vocabulary by discussing local contexts such as natural and religious attractions, traditions and festivals, textiles, and food. Given the positive impact of AI in improving speaking, AI chatbot activities provide a low-pressure learning environment that enhances students' speaking confidence. Furthermore, despite students' positive attitudes toward utilizing AI in language learning, the role of the teacher should not be underestimated. Teacher guidance and support remain essential for ensuring a well-rounded, complete language learning experience.

In addition to this study's contributions, some important limitations should be considered. First, since the research was conducted with a single group, the findings may not be generalizable to all EFL contexts. Second, the course content for this study was limited to the local context of a province in northern Thailand; hence, the findings do not reflect outcomes in different, more general contexts. Finally, the study focused on existing gaps in conducting research related to integrating local context into language learning with a focus on vocabulary and speaking skills, and other important influencing variables, such as reading and writing, were not included.

Declaration of AI Use

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools (ChatGPT and Gemini) were utilized in the language editing stage of this manuscript to refine grammar and spelling. These tools were not used to generate hypotheses or write conclusions. All AI suggestions were carefully reviewed by the authors before the manuscript was proofread by a native English-speaking American university lecturer, after which the authors reviewed the final manuscript.

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