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# Speaking practice with ChatGPT in preparation for a short-term study abroad programme: A case study

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Developing oral proficiency is essential for learners participating in short-term intensive English as a Foreign Language study abroad programmes, as effective communication is critical in authentic contexts. However, Japanese students rarely have or take opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom. This paper reports on a case study where a student used the ChatGPT mobile application for speaking practice over three months in preparation for a one-month intensive study abroad programme. The transcripts of conversations were collected and coded for positive responses (in English and Japanese), negative responses (e.g., misunderstandings or non-responses), and communication strategy use. Overall, the student showed a decrease in the number of times communicative strategies were used over the three months, and an increase in the use of clarification questions was observed. These results suggest improvements in comprehension and fluency. Sentences used by the student became more complete, correct, and native-like. Some of the difficulties perceived by the participant in using ChatGPT for speaking and listening practice are reported. Directions for future research are also noted.

**Keywords:** ChatGPT, ChatGPT mobile application, speaking practice, study abroad preparation, oral fluency

## Introduction

Improving oral proficiency prior to participating in short-term intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study abroad programmes is vital for learners because successful communication is necessary in real-life situations. However, Japanese students often lack opportunities to practice speaking beyond the classroom. Chatbots such as ChatGPT can be introduced to provide personalized learning opportunities and immediate access when needed (Labadze et al., 2023; Toriida, 2024).

Research suggests that AI-powered voice chatbots can significantly improve

learners' conversation skills and self-directedness (Kang & Sung, 2024), and language ability and willingness to communicate (Shafiee Rad, 2024). A systematic review also noted benefits including increased confidence, engagement, personalized learning, and reduced anxiety (Cislowska & Pena-Acuna, 2024).

Some recent research in Japan reports on the use of ChatGPT for speaking practice. For example, Ross and Dennison (2023) used ChatGPT with medical students for initial medical evaluation practice. Aiba et al. (2024) reported successful use of ChatGPT to support engineering master's students preparing for English Q&A sessions at English academic conferences, when the right prompts and configurations were used. Sandu and Cussen (2025) researched the use of ChatGPT as a conversational partner to practice advanced speaking skills in preparation for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) exchanges. The students' perceptions included an increased willingness to speak, reduced anxiety, and a perceived improvement in their ability to understand and participate in live interactions with native speakers. Finally, Yamazaki (2025) investigated the impact of AI (Mimi Chatbot) and in-person practice on fluency and performance. She found that 87.5% of her eight students strongly or somewhat agreed that AI can be an effective tool to communicate in English. They listed numerous reasons for this, including having a conversation partner at any time, not feeling anxious or embarrassed about making mistakes, and time and cost efficiency. However, no studies have been found that focus on the use of ChatGPT for speaking and listening practice for the specific purpose of preparing Japanese students for intensive EFL study abroad and homestay programmes.

This case study examines whether practicing speaking using the ChatGPT application's voice setting can enhance speaking and listening abilities among Japanese university learners preparing for a one-month intensive EFL study abroad and homestay programme.

The research question guiding this study was:

- Can speaking and listening practice using the ChatGPT App be beneficial for students preparing to participate in such a programme?

## Methods

### *Participants*

Two Japanese learners planning to participate in a one-month intensive ESL programme in Canada were invited; however, only one participant granted permission to access their data. The participating student, Mr. Q, was placed in a low-intermediate class based on four placement tests (Reading, Listening, Writing, and Grammar).

### *Procedure*

Both students downloaded the free ChatGPT mobile application and were instructed on how to use its speaking function. The following standard prompt was provided: "I am a beginner learner of English. I want to practice English. Please speak in easy English. Please ask me one question at a time." The learners were encouraged to use the app daily for 10–15 minutes. In addition, the researcher held weekly one-on-one

speaking practice sessions (30–60 minutes) from May to July. At the end of these sessions, the researcher asked the students how their ChatGPT speaking practice was going and provided some guidance. Guidance included suggestions, such as telling ChatGPT the topic they wanted to practice and prompting ChatGPT to change the topic of conversation.

Data collection and analysis

After completing the programme in Canada, the ChatGPT conversation transcripts of Mr. Q were compiled into a Word document, labelled by month and conversation number (e.g., May 1, June 1, etc.). ChatGPT was also tasked with presenting each transcript in table format and to estimate conversation length. The researcher manually read and coded the transcripts for positive responses, in English and Japanese, to ChatGPT questions asked in English, negative responses, in English and Japanese (e.g., misunderstandings or non-responses), and communication strategies such as language adjustments and clarification requests.

Post-trip feedback was also collected using a questionnaire that used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree), evaluating perceptions of speaking, listening, continued usage, and contextual helpfulness.

Results and discussion

Overall use of ChatGPT

The overall data is presented in Table 1. Mr. Q had 79 conversations with ChatGPT over the three-month period, for an estimated total practice time of 21 hours and 19 minutes. Eng○ refers to the number of times he correctly answered ChatGPT’s questions in English, while Jap○ refers to correctly answered questions in Japanese. Eng✖ and Jap✖ refer to incorrectly answered questions and/or when he asked ChatGPT to repeat or say in easier English because of not understanding.

Table 1. ChatGPT overall use

| Month | Times used | Estimated total time | Eng○ | Jap○ | Eng✖ | Jap✖ | Comstrat | Repeat/<br>more slowly | Easier/<br>simpler |
|-------|------------|----------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|------------------------|--------------------|
| May   | 20         | 512 m (8h 32m)       | 180  | 32   | 59   | 4    | 64       | 28                     | 17                 |
| June  | 24         | 345 m (5h 45m)       | 92   | 17   | 22   | 3    | 27       | 7                      | 6                  |
| July  | 35         | 422 m (7h 2m)        | 75   | 76   | 21   | 4    | 16       | 1                      | 6                  |
| Total | 79         | 1279 m (21h 19m)     | 347  | 125  | 102  | 10   | 107      | 36                     | 29                 |

A clear decrease in the number of times Mr. Q needed to ask for repetition (say more slowly/say in easier English) can be seen over the three months. It is worth noting

that the 59 instances of Eng[CROSS] in May included 45 instances where he asked for repetition or to say in easier English. Thus, Mr. Q did not respond correctly in English 14 times. In June, this number was nine, and in July, it increased again to 14. Similarly, by July, Mr. Q started to use more Japanese to keep the conversations going. Two things are worth noting regarding these results. First, by July, the topics of conversation were becoming more complex, and Mr. Q reported not having the language needed to express himself, so he answered more often in Japanese. He also said that he did this to help his listening skills, as ChatGPT, by July, would repeat in English what he had said in Japanese. At the same time, the number of incorrectly answered questions increased as the topics and language needed became more difficult.

### *Communicative strategy use*

Table 2 presents the number and type of communicative strategies used by Mr. Q over the course of three months.

**Table 2.** Use of communicative strategies

| Month | Times used | Repeat/say more slowly | Easier/simpler | Speak English | Clarification | Change topic/reset |
|-------|------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| May   | 64         | 28                     | 17             | 6             | 1             | 12                 |
| June  | 27         | 7                      | 6              | 6             | 0             | 8                  |
| July  | 18         | 1                      | 6              | 1             | 5             | 5                  |
| Total | 109        | 36                     | 29             | 13            | 6             | 26                 |

As noted in the previous section, the data shows a clear decrease in communicative strategies used from 64 in May, 27 in June, and 18 in July. In addition, there was an increase in clarification questions asked, from 1 in May to 5 in July. There was also a reduction of instances where Mr. Q asked to change the topic over the three months. These findings show improved comprehension and fluency.

### *Improvements in accuracy*

Tables 3 and 4 show improvements of accuracy in language use over the course of the three months. Table 3 includes examples of sentences used by Mr. Q for the purpose of asking ChatGPT to repeat or say more slowly what it had just uttered.

**Table 3.** Mr. Q’s example sentences asking ChatGPT to repeat or speak more slowly

| Month | Example sentence                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May   | Please slow talk and repeat.<br>Sorry, more slow down speed.<br>One more please.<br>Sorry one more.                                                                          |
| June  | Sorry?<br>Please ask me one more time.                                                                                                                                       |
| July  | Sorry, I don’t know what do you say.<br>Oh Sorry. I don’t know what you are saying.<br>Sorry, I don’t know what do you mean.<br>I’m sorry, I can’t understand you say to me. |

A clear improvement can be seen from May to July, where sentences are more accurate and increasingly native-like. During the one-on-one speaking practice sessions, Mr. Q was told that saying “Sorry?” was an easy and natural way to ask someone to repeat. He applied this in his conversations.

Table 4 displays examples of what Mr. Q said to ChatGPT when he wanted it to rephrase what it had said in easier English.

**Table 4.** Mr. Q’s example sentences asking ChatGPT to rephrase in easier/simpler English

| Month | Example sentences used                                                                   |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May   | Say that more easy.<br>Say to more simple please.                                        |
| June  | Sorry, you talk so difficult. More easy English please.<br>Stay tuned on simple English. |
| July  | Please ask me in more simple English.                                                    |

Again, Mr. Q used more accurate and native-like sentences over the three months.

*Mr. Q’s perceptions of advantages and constraints*

The results of the post-programme survey are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Post-programme survey

| Question                                                                 | Result |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Using ChatGPT helped me improve my speaking skills                       | 4      |
| Using ChatGPT helped me improve my listening skills                      | 4      |
| I will continue to use ChatGPT from now on to practice English           | 4      |
| Using ChatGPT for English speaking practice was helpful for me in Canada | 3      |

In a semi-structured interview after the one-month intensive EFL programme, Mr. Q noted that he liked speaking practice using ChatGPT because it provided additional

speaking and listening exposure, flexible accessibility, and it helped him speak more spontaneously. However, he also noted that interactions occasionally felt one-sided, the range of topics was repetitive, ChatGPT sometimes responded at a higher language level than he could understand, and that sometimes “weird things happened” (hallucinations). The interview also revealed two reasons Mr. Q rated the helpfulness of the practice as 3 while in Canada. Unfortunately, his homestay family did not engage him and the other Japanese homestay students in conversation. They were an older couple who hosted four male Japanese students. They appeared to be more interested in financial gain than in supporting the students’ experience. Also, during the programme, when classmates found out Mr. Q was studying to become a Buddhist monk like his father, they were very interested in talking about that topic. However, he had not practiced talking about this topic much when using ChatGPT. In short, Mr. Q reported that he did not have many opportunities to talk about his own or his homestay family’s preferences or topics of interest during his time in Canada.

## Implications and conclusions

Mr. Q’s data shows that it is possible for students to use ChatGPT in preparation for a one-month intensive EFL study abroad and homestay programme to gain valuable speaking and listening practice while improving accuracy and fluency. However, using ChatGPT in this way may not be appropriate for students of lower English proficiency, as also noted by Du & Daniel (2024). ChatGPT responses were often above the level specified in the prompts. Perhaps future prompts should specify a CEFR level for the responses. In this study, ad-hoc guidance was provided by the researcher based on the weekly student reports of their impressions of the ChatGPT app use. However, in future research, more guidance should be provided to help students anticipate and reduce the perceived problems and frustrations experienced. In this study, additional guidance was given during the one-on-one speaking practice that the student found useful and had not previously considered.

While the limitations of this study are obvious, as only the data from one student was used and the coding was done by one researcher, the results suggest that ChatGPT has strong potential as a supplementary tool for speaking and listening practice for EFL learners preparing for short-term intensive EFL study abroad programmes. For this specific purpose, there is also a need to develop chatbots that can simulate various situations likely to be faced during intensive EFL classroom and homestay programmes. Further research, using better prompts for a variety of likely classroom and homestay situations, is needed.

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## Author biodata

**Marie-Claude Toriida** is a teacher-researcher dedicated to enhancing teaching and learning contexts to support student success. She has taught in Japan and in the Middle East. Her research interests include corpus development, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and the use of ChatGPT for language education.