



Enhancing speaking skills through task repetition and ChatGPT integration in remedial EFL lessons: An action research approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of integrating ChatGPT with repeated speaking tasks on remedial EFL learners' ($N=17$) speaking skills. The teacher in this study adopted evidence-based teaching through action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) by implementing a test-teach-test approach in a 7-week B1 course in a Turkish university. This involved integrating repeated speaking tasks to identify areas of grammar deficiency, followed by personalized support utilizing ChatGPT. The study employed a mixed-methods approach utilizing pre- and post-intervention data collection, such as questionnaires, speaking exams, and semi-structured interviews. Results indicate significant improvements in task completion and grammatical accuracy with post-test scores (task completion/content: $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.33$; grammar: $M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$) significantly higher than pre-test scores (task completion/content: $M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.47$; grammar: $M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.51$). However, vocabulary and fluency did not show significant changes. Additionally, students' attitudes and motivation towards learning English improved significantly, with post-intervention levels (attitude: $M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.47$; motivation: $M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.71$) showing significant increases from pre-intervention (attitude: $M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.51$; motivation: $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.41$). Combining ChatGPT for grammar use with task repetition significantly boosted students' motivation and speaking proficiency, as evidenced by improved task completion and language use. While vocabulary and fluency require further investigation, initial AI tool use benefits from close guidance. Key recommendations for educators and policymakers are outlined to optimize these benefits.

Keywords

action research, ChatGPT, speaking skills, remedial EFL students, task repetition.

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Introduction

Getting EFL students to speak can be challenging no matter the context, mainly due to the lack of opportunity to use the language outside their classes. For tertiary students in Türkiye, learning English in preparatory courses is an opportunity to compensate for the missed opportunity to improve their speaking skills during their secondary education which they dedicate to preparation for the highly competitive high-stakes University entrance exam. Also, in Türkiye, prevalent teacher-centered methodologies mean that many students have not had much speaking practice (Kırkgöz, 2007; Ulum & Uzun, 2020). For example, Karataş et al.'s (2024) study investigates the teaching methodologies practiced by English teachers in

vocational high schools. The findings reveal a prevalent reliance on teacher-controlled activities, grammar instruction, and traditional assessment methods, highlighting the need for improvements in curricular frameworks, teaching aids, and assessment tools within the English instruction domain. The Turkish education ministry has encouraged teachers to adopt a communicative language teaching approach, but there has been a disconnect between the stated ideal and practice (Çelik, 2016; Kırkgöz, 2007). Consequently, speaking assessment has become a component of summative assessment in secondary schools (MoNE, 2014), while preparatory programs in universities, particularly those adopting EMI instruction, emphasize the effective utilization of productive language skills. In terms of speaking assessment, the term construct is important. Although some experts argue that the term “construct” is limited in its ability to explain behavior observed in assessment settings (Kane, 2013), it also often pertains not only to language ability but also involves content knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 2022). Additionally, constructs typically originate from a specific source or frame of reference, such as a course syllabus, which guides assessment designers in operationalizing them (Bachman & Palmer, 2022). In the context of English preparatory programs in Türkiye, for example, the subject curriculum serves as the basis for this operationalization.

Transitioning to classes that prioritize speaking through a communicative approach informed by CEFR objectives (Council of Europe, 2018) presents a significant challenge for Turkish students entering university. This shift represents a departure from the traditional emphasis on rote memorization in the education system, requiring students to engage actively in language use and communication. Moreover, adults' language acquisition may be constrained by certain factors, such as their previous exposure to English and subsequent levels of self-assurance and motivation to engage with the language (Banli, 2020; Clément et al., 1977). When entering the preparatory program, a placement test determines students' assignment to one of the proficiency levels, according to the descriptors by the Council of Europe's (2018) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Initially, students appear to match their assigned level, but as they advance through the modules, some begin to struggle and fail to keep up with the curriculum. This trend of failures becomes increasingly common as the course progresses (Alghamdi & Siddiqui, 2016). Consequently, many students find it difficult to adjust to this new learning environment, leading to academic struggles and course failures. For remedial students, who already face challenges in developing their speaking skills, the impending transition to English-medium instruction adds further pressure and complexity to their academic journey, which, if negative, may constitute an impediment (Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017).

Remedial B1 students face challenges in speaking and this study tackles these obstacles by employing an action research approach to improve their speaking skills (Talandis & Stout, 2015). Action research provides a pragmatic framework for tackling individual student needs and customizing instruction to address their unique challenges. Through a structured process of data collection, analysis, and intervention, educators can adapt their methods to better serve their students (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013). Talandis and Stout (2015) implement an action research-based strategy to improve conversation skills in an EFL environment, focusing on Japanese university students. The study introduces a new syllabus with personalized topics, increased L1 support, direct instruction of pragmatic strategies, and regular assessment of spoken English, resulting in improved fluency and accuracy in student conversations throughout a year-long intervention. More recently, Banli (2020) investigated young adults' negative attitudes towards speaking in a foreign language in a Turkish EFL context, developing

an action plan to mitigate these attitudes. Through in-class observations and interviews with randomly selected participants, the study reveals that language learning behaviors are influenced by prior experiences and lack of knowledge in both L1 and L2, with teacher attitudes also impacting students' attitudes towards speaking.

The current study is informed by empirical evidence on the usefulness of task repetition and incorporates it pedagogically to target enhanced speaking performance. Baydemir's (2020) study investigates the impact of integrating computer-mediated communication tools, along with task repetition, on learners' speaking development revealing that they positively affect students' speaking performance, particularly in areas such as fluency, comprehension, and structure, while showing less significant effects on vocabulary and pronunciation. Additionally, students generally perceive these interventions positively, highlighting emotional and cognitive benefits to their oral performance. Ahmadian et al. (2017) investigated English language learners' and teachers' perceptions of task repetition and its correspondence, finding both similarities and differences in their views. Thematic analysis showed cognitive and affective engagement among learners during task repetition, highlighting its pedagogic value. In the current study, there is a seven-week action research project conducted with a group of remedial B1 level students at a Turkish state university during the 2023-2024 academic year. The main goal was to boost students' speaking abilities through a tailored intervention aimed at addressing their specific language barriers. This necessitated identifying individual language issues thus leveraging technology effectively to accommodate the diverse range of student needs.

The current study employs ChatGPT as a tool in the classroom to provide learners with personalized support in areas where they face difficulties. Kohnke et al.'s (2023) technology assessment highlights the importance of integrating ChatGPT into language classrooms. It outlines various ways in which ChatGPT can enhance language instruction, offering examples of learning activities for educators and learners. The study by Mollick and Mollick (2023) emphasizes the role of instructors as innovators, leveraging generative AI to create personalized and transformative learning experiences. Bekou et al.'s (2024) study explores the use of ChatGPT in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Morocco, investigating its opportunities and challenges. Through a mixed-methods approach involving a questionnaire and interviews with ELT teachers, the study highlights the benefits of ChatGPT for personalized learning and teachers' professional development, alongside concerns about accuracy and cultural appropriateness. Integrating ChatGPT, is becoming increasingly integral to language education, particularly for addressing the personalized learning needs of remedial students. To avoid pitfalls, there is a necessity for a principled approach to train learners for an effective use to maximize their benefits while mitigating risks. ChatGPT, as a versatile and valuable resource, holds significant promise for fostering interactive and tailored language learning experiences (Kohnke et al., 2023).

The promotion of speaking skills in remedial teaching highlights gaps in both contextual understanding and empirical evidence within the literature. While numerous studies in Turkish higher education have explored issues related to speaking among adult learners (Balemir, 2009; Banlı, 2020; Dalkılıç, 2001; Gül Peker & Erdemir, 2021; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014), none have specifically assessed interventions utilizing ChatGPT to target language difficulties and consequently promote speaking skills in challenging teaching environments with remedial students. Furthermore, existing international studies have examined various aspects of L2 speech production by exploring the impact of various task types (Suzuki et al., 2022), tailored pedagogic interventions (Hunter, 2012; Tavakoli et al., 2018), communication strategy training

(Tsai, 2018), the communicative demands of the tasks influencing the choice of strategies (Pawlak, 2018) or use of technology such as digital storytelling (Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019), and WhatsApp interaction (Akkara et al., 2020). However, there remains a lack of focus on the application of AI-driven tools in remedial contexts. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this empirical and contextual gap by adopting an action research-based approach to investigate the impact of a combined intervention involving task repetition and ChatGPT support on the speaking proficiency of remedial EFL students by addressing the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the intervention contribute to the improvement of L2 students' speaking proficiency?
- 2) How does the intervention impact students' motivation towards learning a foreign language?
- 3) What are students' perceptions of their L2 speaking skill development following the intervention?

Methodology

In line with Burns (1999), this study adopts action research to drive positive change and improvement in educational practice. Action research is characterized by cycles of planning, action, observation, and evaluation/reflection (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013), allowing researchers to closely examine and address specific issues within their educational context. Specifically, this study falls within the realm of Practical Action Research, which aims to both develop educational practices and provide insights into broader issues (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013). Through a single cycle of action research, the study endeavors to enhance students' confidence in speaking. As noted by Nunan (1991), the classroom serves as a dynamic environment where educators can experiment with and evaluate different teaching materials and activities. By leveraging action research, educators can actively engage with their teaching practice to address challenges and foster positive outcomes for their students.

Research context and participants

This study is conducted at the preparatory department of a state university located in one of Türkiye's major metropolitan cities. The preparatory program consists of four terms per year, each focusing on a specific CEFR level, such as A2, B1, B1+, and B2 (Council of Europe, 2018). The curriculum aligns with CEFR objectives at each level, utilizing a coursebook series tailored to CEFR standards. Students are assessed on all four language skills - reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as language use - through assignments and exams. In the event of course failure, students are offered a remedial course utilizing the same coursebook but supplemented with additional in-house support materials. The B1 remedial level spans seven weeks, comprising 19 hours of face-to-face instruction along with asynchronous content delivered via the school's learning management system (LMS).

During the course, students are assigned three core tasks: writing a narrative paragraph, preparing and delivering an oral presentation, and describing a pie chart in writing. They must also complete multimodal assignments on the school's LMS forum, involving video viewing and answering related questions. Mid-term exams test reading, listening, and language use,

while end-of-course exams assess reading, writing, listening, language use, and speaking skills. The speaking assignment and exam together account for 20% of the overall assessment. The speaking component of the end-of-course exam comprises two tasks: describing an experience and expressing an opinion. In the first task, students must describe their experience on a given topic, using provided prompts. They are allotted 1 minute for preparation and 1 minute for speaking. For the second task, students are required to articulate their opinion on a different topic presented, supporting their viewpoint with reasons. Similar to the first task, they have 1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak.

Evaluation of students' speaking performance is conducted using the Speaking Exam Rubric, with two instructors present during the exam. Before conducting speaking exams, there are opportunities for examiners to participate in standardization sessions. The final grade is determined by calculating the average of the scores given by the two instructors. While the learners' overall English proficiency in reading, listening, and writing aligned with the B1 level of the CEFR, their Language Use test scores were notably lower, and their speaking exam performance was also insufficient. In the preparatory program, there are four teaching terms, and teachers' schedules are updated accordingly each term. Upon receiving the schedule indicating 12 hours per week teaching a remedial class, the teacher opted to join a focus group with experienced teachers who had previously taught the remedial groups to gain insights into their challenges. The group revealed that these students tended to be reserved, favored L1 support for grammar explanations, preferred task repetition, consistently achieved low scores in language use exams, and performed poorly in speaking exams. The plan for the intervention was designed accordingly (see The Intervention section).

This study comprised a prep class of 24 students, enrolled in diverse departments, during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Following initial prep class enrollment, 17 students remained committed to the course, consisting of 9 males and 8 females, aged between 18 and 24 years. All participants were in the remedial B1 level course. Student background data indicated limited English exposure during middle school, primarily focusing on grammar, and further restrictions in high school due to university entrance exam preparation. Despite this, all participants expressed a strong desire to improve their English speaking skills, as confirmed by the questionnaire results (see Results section). Participants were fully informed about the study aims and the nature of their involvement, which included completing pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, participating in speaking tasks, and engaging in semi-structured interviews. Written consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time they deemed appropriate.

Data collection tools

Data were collected through a questionnaire conducted before and after the intervention, semi-structured interviews carried out with five students as well as pre/post speaking exam. The questionnaire, adapted from Iwamoto (2015) to suit the context of this study, was designed to assess the impact of the intervention on students' motivation towards learning a foreign language. To enhance the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a comparable group of students ($N=14$) to ensure the clarity and suitability of the items. The

absence of any negative feedback from these students indicated that the questionnaire was well-understood and ready for use. Administered to 17 intermediate (B1) level students in the experimental group, the questionnaire aimed to determine whether the course influenced the group's motivation to speak English more and engage in speaking skills practices in EFL classrooms. The questionnaire consisted of three sections aimed at gathering information on students' attitudes toward learning to speak English (e.g., *"I look forward to my English speaking classes."*), their motivational intensity for L2 speaking (e.g., *"I speak English as much as possible in class."*), and their desire to improve their speaking skills (e.g., *"I wish I could speak English perfectly."*). Participants responded to 30 statements on an agreement scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to gauge their level of agreement with each statement.

Semi-structured interviews carried out with five students, addressed two main questions. Initially, participants discussed whether they had noticed improvements in their speaking skills and elaborated on the factors contributing to any enhancements or hindrances in their progress. Additionally, they were prompted to specify areas such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation where they perceived improvements in their language skills. The speaking exam, administered at both the beginning and end of the intervention, included two tasks aligned with the course assessment requirements (see Research Context) and practiced weekly throughout the course (see The Intervention section). Each task allotted one minute for preparation and one minute for speaking for the students. The first task prompts students to describe an event or experience, offering detailed answers to accompanying sub questions. The second task asks students to express their agreement or disagreement with one idea, providing reasons and examples to support their perspective. The speaking exams were recorded using an audio recorder.

Table 1. Data collection tools

Data Collection Tools	Purpose	Timeline
Questionnaire (adapted from Iwamoto, 2015)	Assess impact of intervention on students' motivation towards learning a foreign language	Pre-intervention: Week 1, Day 1 Post-intervention: Week 7, Day 3
Speaking Exam	Assess speaking skills through two tasks: Task 1: Describe an event or experience Task 2: Express agreement or disagreement with one idea	Pre-intervention: Week 1, Day 3 Post-intervention: Week 7, Day 2
Semi-structured Interviews	Explore students' perceptions of improvements in speaking skills and contributing factors	Post-intervention: Week 8

The intervention

The insights gained from the meeting with other experienced remedial teachers (see Research Context section) enabled the teacher to identify the problem and develop a robust action plan, incorporating interventions to address these issues. Additionally, research tools to collect data and closely monitor students' responses to the intervention were incorporated. To enhance students' speaking skills, the teacher tailored the syllabus to include lesson objectives focused

on repeated use of speaking tasks centered around everyday topics already present in the curriculum. Through principles of grammar instruction (Thornburry, 1999) the Test Teach Test (TTT) approach was employed in the teaching methodology. The rationale behind the choice of TTT was due to its student-centered nature, the test phase allowing students to grasp the necessity of the grammar point, and its adaptability to classes with changing compositions every seven weeks. For both test phases, the same speaking tasks were used. Task repetition, as described by Bygate and Samuda (2005), involves learners repeating the same or slightly modified task over a period of time. Ellis (2005) highlights task rehearsal as a crucial component of task planning, emphasizing its positive impact on performance. Lambert et al.'s study (2017) suggests that repeating the same listening and speaking task right away improves speaking fluency, no matter the student's skill level or the type of task. The theoretical rationale for the effectiveness of task repetition lies in the retention of cognitive content from the initial enactment, which can be reused during subsequent performances (Bygate, 2001). Bygate and Samuda (2005) argue that task repetition facilitates the integration of knowledge and performance, particularly in the conceptualization and formulation phases of the production process.

Students were provided with weekly practice tasks specifically designed to simulate the format of the two exam tasks. These activities, tailored to mirror the exam format and closely aligned with the topics covered in the textbook, offered consistent opportunities for practice. Each lesson was initiated with a paired speaking task. These in-class speaking tasks were designed by the curriculum and assessment team. As students engaged in paired tasks, their teacher closely observed their language use, taking detailed notes to identify challenges and inform subsequent instruction. Each speaking task deliberately incorporated the target language to be taught, such as narrative tenses, or comparatives and superlatives. Following the speaking task, the teacher provided delayed error corrections through various techniques, which provided a transition for the presentation stage focusing on the target language. The teacher employed various methods for introducing the target language, including concept-checking questions, anecdotes, videos, and/or translation activities. Deliberate and purposeful (but very limited) utilization of the native language (L1) was adopted as a pragmatic approach to enhance students' confidence and reduce emotional barriers to learning the second language (Ford, 2009). Controlled practice sessions provided learners with opportunities to use the language accurately in a supervised environment, with further clarification provided as needed. Additionally, students were trained to use/write prompts that would allow them to receive tailored support from ChatGPT (Kohnke et al., 2023), a tool they were trained to utilize effectively as is seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Typical ChatGPT prompts used for improving grammar

Prompts
“Can you explain present perfect tense for a B1 level EFL student, how and when to use it?”
“Can you write a real-life conversation from campus life that contains the present perfect tense present tense?”
“Can you correct my grammar mistakes and explain for me (in basic English)?”
“Can you create some grammar exercises for me to test my grammar on present perfect tense at B1 level?”

Pair work activities were then employed to provide learners with opportunities for less controlled practice, encouraging more fluent language use. Finally, the initial speaking task was repeated at the end of the session. The teacher met the group three times a week, with each teaching session lasting four hours. This cycle was repeated over seven weeks, with recording of speaking tasks (both at the beginning and end of the sessions) and reflection sessions held in weeks 2 and 6 to monitor performance. The end of week 7 was dedicated to summative assessments. The assessments were evaluated immediately using a straightforward analytic rubric. This rubric assessed students' speaking abilities based on the grammatical items covered in the course and the familiar themes presented throughout. Key sub-constructs included task completion within the allotted time, grammatical and lexical accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

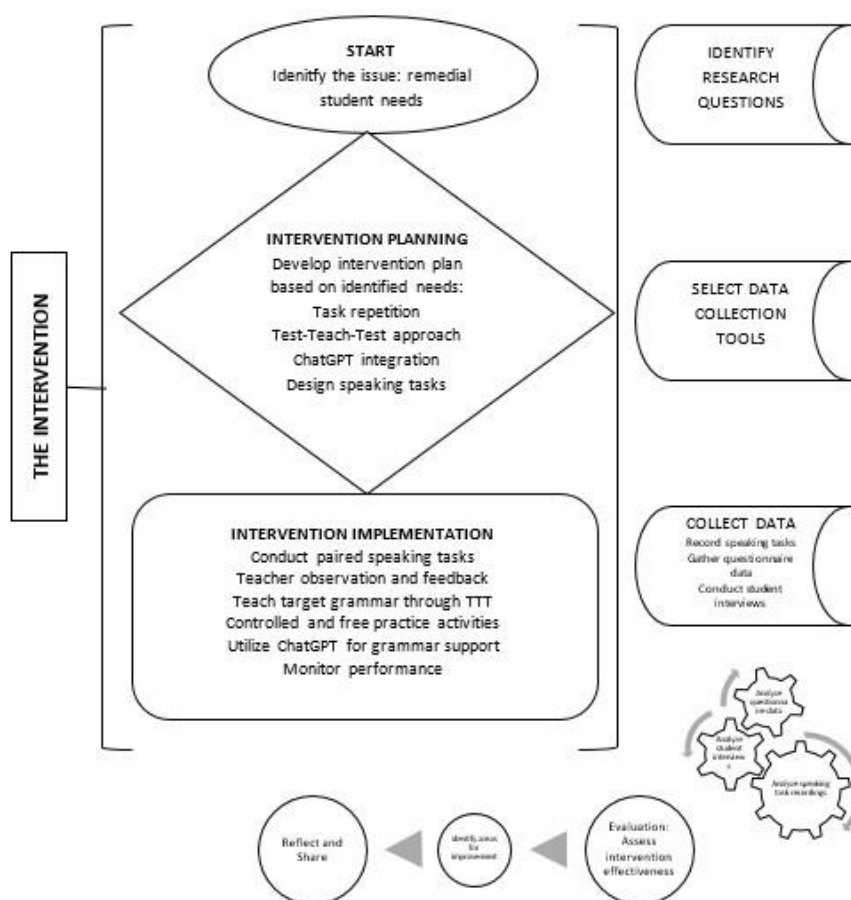


Figure 1. *The intervention process integrated in the action research.*

Data collection and analysis

During the initial data collection phase, an online questionnaire was developed and distributed to students via a QR code displayed on the smartboard. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured as students were not required to provide their names. The questionnaire remained open for two days, during which 17 students completed it. Each participant received a unique code, which was securely stored. These codes served as identifiers while ensuring the

anonymity of personal information. Subsequently, the participants' oral performances were assessed using voice recordings, and their scores were evaluated using a globally recognized language proficiency scale. The scores from both the pre-test, conducted in the first week, and the post-test, conducted in the final week, were compared. Following the analysis of questionnaire data, interview questions were finalized. Subsequently, to examine the participants' perceptions semi-structured interviews with five participants were conducted, with each lasting between 15 to 20 minutes.

SPSS package, more specifically *t*-tests were employed to analyze the differences in the averages of speaking performance results and those derived from the 30-item Likert-type questionnaires both executed before and after the intervention. Thematic content analysis followed Anderson's (2007) suggested steps: identifying relevant descriptions, separating meaningful units, grouping them into categories, and assigning labels to represent each category, thus organizing the entire dataset.

Results

RQ1: To what extent does the intervention contribute to the improvement of L2 students' speaking proficiency with regards to task completion, grammar, vocabulary and fluency sub constructs?

The findings indicated significant improvement in task completion/content and grammar and structure. Specifically, the post-test scores for task completion/content ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.33$) were significantly higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.47$), $t(32) = 5.90$, $p = 0.00$, suggesting that the intervention effectively enhanced students' ability to complete tasks and provide relevant content. Similarly, the post-test scores for grammar and structure ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$) were significantly higher than the pre-test scores ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.51$), $t(32) = 3.34$, $p = 0.00$, indicating that the intervention contributed to improvements in grammatical accuracy and sentence structure. However, the results for vocabulary and fluency showed no significant differences. The post-test scores for vocabulary ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$) were not significantly different from the pre-test scores ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.24$), $t(32) = 1.00$, $p = 0.32$, and the post-test scores for fluency ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$) were not significantly different from the pre-test scores ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.33$), $t(32) = 1.46$, $p = 0.15$. This suggests that while the intervention positively impacted task completion and grammar, it did not significantly enhance vocabulary usage or fluency. These findings highlight the need for additional or targeted strategies to improve these latter aspects of speaking proficiency.

RQ2: How does the intervention impact students' motivation towards learning a foreign language?

This section presents quantitative findings from the L2 speaking motivation questionnaire. The students participated in pre-test and post-test assessments before and after the intervention spanning an eight-week module. Data from these assessments underwent analysis using nonparametric tests and paired samples *t*-tests in SPSS. Means were retrieved and *t*-tests were

calculated. The results provide insights into whether the intervention influenced students' motivation for learning a foreign language.

Attitude toward learning to speak English. The findings from the questionnaire revealed a notable difference between the attitude scores before ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.51$) and after ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.47$) the intervention. Specifically, post-intervention attitude scores were significantly higher than pre-intervention scores, $t(df(32)) = 10.95$, $p = 0.00$.

Motivation for speaking. The findings revealed a noteworthy difference in motivation scores before ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.41$) and after ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.71$) the intervention. Specifically, motivation levels post-intervention showed a significant increase compared to pre-intervention levels, $t(df(32)) = 6.19$, $p = 0.00$.

Desire to learn to speak English. The findings showed no significant difference between the desire values before ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.51$) and after ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.49$) the intervention. More specifically, the statistical analysis revealed that the difference in desire values after the intervention compared to before was not significant, $t(df(32)) = 0.34$, $p = 0.73$.

RQ3: How do students perceive their progress in L2 speaking skills following the intervention?

The interviews conducted with students yielded profound insights into their perspectives on the intervention designed to enhance their speaking skills through task repetition and the integration of ChatGPT. One student said, "*ChatGPT is a very useful tool I wasn't aware of before*" (S1), underlining the necessity of formulating effective prompts for desired responses. They emphasized the criticality of "*retrying prompts*" to ensure optimal outcomes, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the learning process. Additionally, they expressed a keen awareness of their progress, stating, "*we had the opportunity to think about our progress, what hinders, and what are ways to overcome difficulties*" (S1), highlighting a proactive approach to language improvement. Similarly, another student conveyed a strong commitment to improving their English-speaking skills, noting, "*I have a strong desire to improve my English-speaking skills*" (S4). They credited the intervention for aiding in identifying and rectifying grammar mistakes, attributing their enhanced motivation to "*repeating speaking tasks and practicing grammar with ChatGPT*" (S1, S2, S3, S5). However, they acknowledged the need for specificity in prompts, recognizing that "*sometimes ChatGPT answers are difficult for me, sometimes they are too long, so I always need to write – more basic please*" (S5) indicating a discerning approach to utilizing the tool effectively. Conversely, another student's attitude towards learning English was positively transformed by the intervention's practical utility. They valued the opportunity to learn something applicable outside of class and appreciated the supportive class environment provided. Notably, they avoided failing due to attendance issues, indicating a tangible improvement in their academic performance and learning outcomes. However, they also acknowledged the dual nature of task repetition, acknowledging that while it aids memory retention, it can also lead to monotony, stating, "*repeating the same task can help me remember what I want to say, but sometimes it can be boring*" (S3). Furthermore, a student with minimal prior exposure to English lessons in high school welcomed the structured approach of the intervention, contrasting it with the rote learning prevalent in their previous educational experiences. They found clarity in the objectives and appreciated the tangible progress made towards improving language use, indicating a shift towards more meaningful and effective learning methodologies. However, the ChatGPT responses were not always helpful for this

student as “sometimes it gives explanations that are not so good, for example when we learned relative clauses it wasn't helpful” (S4). Lastly, another student emphasized the significance of regular speaking practice, saying, “having regular opportunities to practice speaking is important,” (S2) demonstrating a proactive attitude toward skill development. However, they added that they did not prefer to use ChatGPT “because I cannot type the prompts correctly, so I get wrong answers. I need to read and then decide if I need to rewrite them again and again, so for me, it is not so effective” (S2).

Discussion

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a language intervention aimed at enhancing speaking skills among remedial EFL students, drawing data from three sources. It provides insights into the intervention's impact on students' speaking proficiency, motivation toward learning a foreign language, and their perceptions of progress in L2 speaking skills.

Impact on speaking

This study incorporated pre-test and post-test procedures to assess the impact of a 7-week lesson program, supported by repetitive speaking tasks and ChatGPT assistance. The results of the speaking pre/post tasks indicate significant improvements in two various aspects of speaking proficiency following the intervention. Talandis and Stout (2015) adopt action research to address speaking skills, highlighting the importance of tailored instruction to address contextual needs of the students. Their tailored support among other adopts frequent evaluations of oral proficiency, altogether leading to enhanced fluency and precision of grammar in student dialogues. Mastering English grammar is crucial for language learners, yet applying grammar rules in conversation poses unique challenges (Thornburry, 1999). Turkish EFL learners require resources to enhance speaking accuracy. This study demonstrated that incorporating ChatGPT and repetitive speaking tasks improved sentence complexity and reduced grammatical errors among participants, even though it did not enhance fluency as observed by Talandis and Stout (2015) and Lambert et al. (2017). Not only accuracy of language use is enhanced but also notable enhancements are evident in task completion sub construct operationalized through the subject curriculum (Bachman & Palmer, 2022), reflecting the effectiveness of the tailored approach in addressing students' specific grammar barriers. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the benefits of task repetition (Bygate & Samuda, 2005) and personalized support in promoting speaking skills (Baydemir, 2020; Talandis & Stout, 2015). However, the lack of significant improvement in vocabulary and fluency warrants further exploration. One possible reason for the minimal gains in vocabulary could be the nature of the intervention, which primarily focused on grammar and task completion rather than on introducing and practicing new vocabulary in varied contexts. Additionally, the repetitive nature of the speaking tasks might not have provided enough diversity in language use to significantly impact vocabulary acquisition. For fluency, unlike Lambert et al.'s (2017) approach of using the same tasks immediately, this study employed the same tasks at the beginning and end of the teaching day, which may have hindered fluency development. Additionally, the structured and possibly rigid nature of the tasks (Ellis, 2005) might not have encouraged the spontaneous use of language, which is essential for developing fluency.

Impact on motivation

The intervention has had a positive impact on students' motivation towards learning a foreign language. Both attitude towards learning to speak English and motivation for speaking have revealed significant increases post-intervention. These findings resonate with Banli's (2020) study, which emphasized the role of practical interventions in mitigating negative attitudes towards speaking in a foreign language. On the other hand, Kohnke and colleagues (2023) emphasize the significance of incorporating ChatGPT into language education, delineating its potential to improve language teaching through diverse instructional methods. The incorporation of ChatGPT as a supportive tool likely contributes to this improvement, as it provided personalized assistance and encouraged active engagement with the language learning process. ChatGPT contributes by offering instant and interactive practice sessions (Bekou et al., 2024; Kohnke et al., 2023) supported by interactive learning environment (Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019) and offering scope for informal learning outside the classroom (Akkara et al., 2020). In the current study, learners experienced heightened motivation and involvement while interacting with ChatGPT, as it enabled natural conversations and provided personalized feedback. Remedial students initially have a high desire to improve their English speaking skills but low motivational intensity, which is consistent with Clément et al.'s (1977) finding that motivation to learn a language has a potent component related to self-confidence and prior experience with the language. Students may often exhibit high initial motivation that does not translate into sustained effort without appropriate support (Banli, 2020; Baydemir, 2020; Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017) The intervention positively impacted both their attitude and motivational intensity, similar to the results reported by Siddiqui and Alghamdi (2017), where targeted interventions led to significant improvements in student engagement and motivation. The structured approach in this study effectively addresses the challenges identified in the reviewed studies through the teacher guidance offered for students to utilize effective prompts to tackle their language difficulties. These results emphasize the educational significance of AI technologies in fostering learner independence and delivering customized learning opportunities.

Perceptions on Progress

The qualitative insights gleaned from student interviews offer valuable perspectives on their experiences with the intervention. Students expressed appreciation for the practical utility of the intervention, with several noting its positive impact on their attitudes towards learning English. Participants noted task repetition's effectiveness in understanding processes and enhancing memory, although some cautioned against monotony if tasks remain unchanged. Ellis (2005) suggests tailoring tasks to students' cognitive and linguistic needs. The mixed reactions to task repetition underscore its dual role in language learning. While it aids memory retention, it can also lead to monotony, aligning with Ellis (2005) on the necessity of balancing repetitive practice with engaging, varied activities. Study by Ahmadian et al. (2017) similarly observed 21 intermediate learners benefitting from task repetition for accuracy and fluency, emphasizing the importance of introducing slight variations to maintain engagement. It is important to note that the structured approach of the intervention, combined with the supportive class environment, fosters a sense of progress and achievement among students. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing students' individual needs and providing opportunities for meaningful language use inside and opportunities to extend it outside the classroom

(Akkara, et al., 2020; Kohnke et al., 2023), highlighting the value of teacher-driven AI integration in language teaching (Mollick & Mollick, 2023).

The findings of this study align with previous research highlighting the challenges faced by EFL students in developing speaking skills and contribute to the body of research on the efficacy of targeted interventions in addressing these challenges (Banli, 2020; Baydemir, 2020; Gül Peker & Erdemir; 2021; Hunter, 2012; Talandis & Stout, 2015; Tavakoli et al., 2018). By adopting an action research approach (Banli 2020; Gül Peker & Erdemir; 2021; Talandis & Stout, 2015) and integrating repetitive speaking tasks (Lambert et al., 2017) and ChatGPT as a supportive AI tool (Kohnke et al., 2023), this study builds upon existing literature to offer practical insights into effective language teaching practices. The positive outcomes observed in students' speaking proficiency and motivation suggest the potential of tailored interventions in promoting language learning success. However, this study could benefit from a deeper examination of instances where ChatGPT support may have been limited or ineffective. For instance, one student mentioned encountering difficulties with overly complex or lengthy responses from ChatGPT, suggesting a need for more tailored and adaptive support.

Limitations

Despite the promising findings, several limitations warrant consideration. The relatively small sample size and single-site setting may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample to further explore the effectiveness of similar interventions across different contexts. Additionally, the study focused primarily on short-term outcomes, and longitudinal studies could provide insights by exploring the long-term effects and sustainability of the intervention beyond the study period to gain insights into its lasting impact on students' language learning outcomes and the factors contributing to its continued effectiveness.

Conclusions and Implications

The intervention, embedded in an action research framework, combined repetitive speaking tasks with ChatGPT support to address specific student needs and promote speaking proficiency, motivation, and perceived progress. Improvements were observed in two key areas of speaking proficiency: task completion and grammatical accuracy, suggesting the benefits of task repetition (Baydemir, 2020; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Lambert et al., 2017), and targeted support (Banli, 2020; Gül Peker & Erdemir; 2021; Hunter, 2012; Talandis & Stout, 2015) for development in these areas. Potential factors influencing the outcomes including the lack of vocabulary and fluency development may be attributed to the intervention's primary focus on grammar and task repetition, which may have limited opportunities for vocabulary expansion and spontaneous language use.

To address these issues, future interventions could integrate more comprehensive feedback mechanisms that focus on fluency and vocabulary use, alongside grammar and task completion, which might yield more balanced improvements across all sub constructs of speaking proficiency. Furthermore, the timing of repetitions could be adjusted to yield more optimal results, and a balanced variety of speaking activities could be incorporated. The

integration of ChatGPT proved to be a valuable tool. It provided students with personalized feedback, encouraged active engagement, and facilitated natural conversation practice (Bekou et al., 2024; Kohnke et al., 2023). Providing explicit grammar instruction, complemented by AI tools, can cater to diverse learning styles and enhance overall language proficiency. To mitigate the initial challenges with ChatGPT prompts, close monitoring and scaffolding during the first weeks are recommended.

The intervention demonstrated a positive effect on students' motivation towards learning English, emphasizing the role of practical strategies in mitigating negative attitudes towards speaking (Banli, 2020; Gül Peker & Erdemir; 2021). The study's findings contribute to the growing body of research on effective language teaching practices for EFL speaking skills development. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study, including the small sample size and the specific context of remedial EFL students. Further research with larger and more diverse populations is necessary to generalize the findings.

The structured approach and implementation of the modified English syllabus effectively engaged numerous students, motivating them to exert more effort. They recognized the value of utilizing ChatGPT for personalized assistance and appreciated the benefits of task repetition in enhancing their English-speaking abilities and tracking their progress. By adopting an action research approach and integrating innovative tools like ChatGPT with repetitive speaking tasks, it offers practical insights for educators. Key implications for educators and policymakers include integrating AI tools like ChatGPT into language instruction to enhance personalized learning, ensuring alignment with pedagogical aims and students' needs and preferences. It's crucial to provide close supervision and scaffolding in the initial stages of AI tool usage. Moreover, providing students with ample opportunities for diverse speaking activities, supported by effective feedback mechanisms, is essential. These opportunities should extend beyond the classroom, utilizing generative AI tools. Combining explicit and implicit grammar instruction addresses the need for clear grammar explanations while fostering communicative competence. Creating a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and language experimentation is also vital. Prioritizing continuous professional development allows educators to stay updated on emerging technologies and pedagogical approaches that enhance language teaching practices. Implementing action research as a data-driven approach helps tailor interventions to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching practices. By following these recommendations, educators can create more effective and engaging language learning experiences for their students.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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