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THE USE OF CHATGPT IN DEVELOPING WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR BEGINNER EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract:
The rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence tools has prompted language educators across Southeast Asia to reassess conventional instructional frameworks. This study investigates the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT as an interactive conversational scaffold for developing workplace communication skills among beginner-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners enrolled at a private university in Can Tho City, Vietnam. Adopting a quasi-experimental design sustained over fourteen weeks, the study divided thirty first-year undergraduate students into two groups: an experimental cohort that engaged in structured ChatGPT-assisted speaking and writing tasks simulating authentic professional scenarios, and a control cohort that received equivalent instruction through conventional classroom-based approaches. Pre-test and post-test assessments measuring professional email composition, oral presentation clarity, and task-based conversational accuracy were administered to both groups. Quantitative data were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with six participants drawn from the experimental group. Statistical analysis revealed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's workplace communication performance relative to the control group. Qualitative findings further indicated that learners valued the immediacy of AI feedback, the low-anxiety practice environment the tool afforded, and the contextual relevance of professionally framed prompts. Nevertheless, participants reported persistent concerns regarding over-reliance on AI-generated output, limited metalinguistic explanation, and unequal access to stable internet connectivity. The implications of these findings extend to curriculum designers, language instructors, and institutional policymakers who are navigating the integration of AI-assisted tools into foundational English programmes.

Keywords: ChatGPT, artificial intelligence in language teaching, workplace communication, EFL, beginner learners, generative AI, Vietnam

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1. Introduction

The intersection of artificial intelligence and English language education has emerged as one of the most consequential research frontiers of the present decade. Within the Vietnamese higher education context, where English proficiency remains both a governmental priority and a persistent pedagogical challenge, the appearance of large language model (LLM)-driven tools such as ChatGPT has introduced new possibilities for learner engagement that merit systematic empirical scrutiny. Unlike earlier computer-assisted language learning (CALL) platforms that operated largely on rule-based logic, contemporary generative AI systems produce naturalistic, contextually responsive output, thereby approximating the conversational dynamism that has traditionally required a human interlocutor.

For beginner EFL learners — particularly those entering university without a productive oral communicative foundation — workplace communication represents a category of language use that is simultaneously high-stakes and remote from their immediate lived experience. Professional settings demand a register, vocabulary set, and interactional logic that differ substantially from the informal English exposure these learners accumulate outside of formal instruction. The challenge for educators, therefore, is not merely to develop general communicative competence but to scaffold learners' entry into domain-specific communicative practice in ways that are motivating, iterative, and low-stakes enough to permit risk-taking.

ChatGPT, released publicly by OpenAI in November 2022, offers a conversational interface capable of responding to an extensive range of professional prompts, correcting linguistic errors, modelling target discourse structures, and generating contextualised feedback in real time. Its accessibility via mobile devices and its tolerance for repeated interaction without the social anxiety associated with speaking to human evaluators position it as a potentially transformative resource for learners operating at the threshold of communicative competence. However, the extent to which such tools genuinely advance measurable workplace communication skills — as opposed to merely increasing learner confidence or engagement — remains insufficiently documented, particularly for Vietnamese university populations.

This study was conducted at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, an institution with a declared commitment to technology-integrated pedagogy and a student body composed primarily of first-year undergraduates whose English proficiency at entry typically corresponds to the A2–B1 range of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The rationale for situating this investigation within a beginner-to-elementary cohort rests on the premise that early-stage learners are precisely the population most susceptible to fossilisation of communicative habits, and thus the most likely to benefit from high-volume, low-stakes interactive practice of the kind that AI-mediated dialogue can provide.

1.1 Research Rationale

Despite the rapid uptake of ChatGPT among university students globally, empirical research into its disciplined classroom application for EFL skill development in the lower Mekong Delta region remains nascent. The present researcher's prior classroom observations suggested that beginner learners at FPT University frequently disengaged from workplace role-play simulations when these activities were conducted in the conventional face-to-face format, citing anxiety, insufficient vocabulary, and a perceived absence of authentic communicative purpose. These observations motivated the hypothesis that an AI conversational partner, by providing persistent, non-judgmental, and professionally relevant interactional practice, might address precisely the affective and linguistic gaps that constrained learner participation in the traditional setting.

Furthermore, a review of the existing literature reveals that while AI-assisted language learning has been studied in relation to general writing development (Kohnke *et al.*, 2023), grammar acquisition (Fitria, 2023), and reading comprehension, the specific application of ChatGPT to workplace communication training for beginners remains an underexplored domain. The present study seeks to address this gap by offering both quantitative and qualitative evidence of ChatGPT's pedagogical impact within a tightly controlled quasi-experimental design.

1.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Does the integration of ChatGPT into EFL instruction significantly improve beginner learners' workplace communication skills compared to conventional instruction?
- **RQ2:** What are the beginner EFL learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a tool for developing workplace communication competence?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Workplace Communication as a Pedagogical Target in EFL

Workplace communication has long been acknowledged as a distinct and consequential register within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research. Drawing on the work of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), workplace discourse encompasses a broad spectrum of communicative acts — from formal written correspondence such as emails and reports to face-to-face negotiations, telephonic exchanges, and presentation delivery. For EFL learners at the beginner level, the challenge of acquiring this register is compounded by limited lexical range, insufficient syntactic flexibility, and an underdeveloped pragmatic awareness of professional norms across cultures (Belcher, 2009).

In the Vietnamese university context specifically, English for workplace communication has been incorporated into foundational curricula with increasing frequency, driven by national policy directives that position English language proficiency as central to the country's economic integration ambitions (Nguyen, 2011). However, the

gap between curricular intention and learner outcome persists, with many graduates reporting that their formal English education did not adequately prepare them for the communicative demands of professional environments (Le, 2019). This disconnect between academic English instruction and occupational communicative readiness motivates the search for supplementary pedagogical tools capable of bridging the two domains.

2.2 Generative AI in Language Education

The integration of artificial intelligence into language learning environments predates the emergence of large language models, having evolved through stages from early CALL applications through intelligent tutoring systems and automated writing evaluation platforms. However, the release of generative AI tools — most prominently OpenAI's ChatGPT — represents a qualitative shift in what AI-mediated language interaction can offer. Unlike its predecessors, ChatGPT produces contextually coherent, syntactically varied, and stylistically adaptive output that closely approximates the register and register-switching behaviours of a proficient human interlocutor (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023).

Early empirical investigations into the educational applications of ChatGPT have yielded broadly encouraging, if contextually variable, results. Kohnke *et al.* (2023) found that Chinese university students who used ChatGPT as a writing feedback tool demonstrated measurable gains in syntactic complexity and reduced error density in their academic writing over an eight-week intervention period. Similarly, Fitria (2023) reported that Indonesian EFL learners who employed ChatGPT for grammar correction exercises exhibited improved accuracy scores on standardised assessments relative to peers who used conventional textbook-based correction methods. These findings suggest that the tool's capacity for immediate, individualised, and infinitely patient feedback may address some of the structural limitations of large-class instruction in resource-constrained settings.

Nevertheless, critical perspectives on the pedagogical deployment of generative AI counsel caution. Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010), writing prophetically of technology integration in language classrooms, argued that the mere presence of digital tools does not guarantee pedagogical transformation; what matters is the quality of task design that mediates learner interaction with those tools. This principle applies with particular force to ChatGPT, whose open-ended architecture can as readily support passive text consumption as productive skill development, depending on how instructors structure learner engagement with the system.

2.3 AI-Mediated Interaction and the Affective Dimension of EFL Learning

A recurring theme in the literature on technology-assisted language learning is the potential of digital environments to reduce the affective barriers — principally anxiety, inhibition, and fear of evaluation — that constrain productive language use in face-to-face settings (Chun, 2016). Young (1991) identified six primary sources of foreign

language anxiety, several of which — including fear of instructor evaluation and peer comparison — are substantially attenuated in interactions with non-human interlocutors. If ChatGPT can function as what Krashen (1982) termed a low-anxiety input environment, its contribution to language acquisition may operate as much through affective mediation as through direct linguistic instruction.

For beginner learners specifically, the relationship between affective state and communicative risk-taking is particularly salient. Research by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) established the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale as a diagnostic instrument for identifying learners for whom anxiety constitutes a significant learning obstacle, and subsequent research has consistently identified beginner-level learners as disproportionately vulnerable to communicative inhibition. The potential of AI-mediated dialogue to lower the perceived stakes of communicative practice — by offering interactional partner patience and freedom from social embarrassment — thus represents a theoretically grounded argument for its inclusion in foundational EFL curricula.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Sociocultural Theory and Scaffolded Interaction

This study draws its primary theoretical orientation from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, and specifically from the construct of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learners acquire new competencies most effectively through interaction with a more knowledgeable other who provides calibrated assistance — or scaffolding — that enables performance at a level slightly beyond the learner's current independent capability. In the context of this study, ChatGPT is conceptualised as a technologically mediated scaffold: a consistently available, endlessly patient, and professionally informed interlocutor who can model target communicative behaviours, respond to learner-initiated queries, and adjust the complexity of output in response to the learner's demonstrated proficiency level.

The applicability of sociocultural theory to AI-mediated learning environments has been explored by several researchers, including Lantolf and Thorne (2006), who argued that mediation — the process by which cultural tools and artefacts shape cognitive development — is not inherently restricted to human-to-human interaction. Digital tools that exhibit responsive, adaptive, and goal-directed communicative behaviour may thus serve a genuinely mediational function within the Vygotskian sense, provided that learners engage with them in ways that involve effortful meaning construction rather than passive reception.

2.4.2 Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning

The instructional design of the ChatGPT-assisted intervention in this study is additionally informed by the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). CLT, as articulated by Canale and Swain (1980) and subsequently refined through the work of Bachman (1990), foregrounds the development of communicative competence — the capacity to use language

appropriately, accurately, and effectively in authentic social contexts — as the primary goal of language instruction. TBLT operationalises this principle by organising instruction around the completion of meaningful, goal-directed tasks that require learners to mobilise all available linguistic resources in the service of real-world communicative purposes (Ellis, 2003).

The workplace simulation tasks through which learners in the experimental group engaged with ChatGPT in this study — including professional email drafting, meeting participation role-plays, and oral presentation practice — were designed in accordance with these theoretical commitments. Each task presented learners with an authentic professional scenario, required them to produce target-appropriate communicative output, and invited them to use ChatGPT's responses as a basis for iterative self-correction and refinement.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design. Quasi-experimental research is appropriate when the full randomisation of participants across conditions is neither logistically feasible nor ethically desirable within an institutional instructional context (Creswell, 2012). The mixed-methods architecture enables the researcher to triangulate the quantitative findings from pre-test and post-test assessments with the qualitative insights derived from semi-structured learner interviews, thereby achieving a more comprehensive account of both the magnitude and the experiential texture of the instructional intervention's effects.

Both experimental and control groups underwent identical assessment conditions, including the same pre-test instrument at the commencement of Week 1 and the same post-test instrument at the conclusion of Week 14. The sole variable differentiating the two groups was the instructional modality: the experimental group engaged with ChatGPT-mediated workplace communication tasks as a supplement to in-class instruction, while the control group completed equivalent tasks through conventional peer interaction and instructor-led feedback procedures.

3.2 Participants

Thirty first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the General English for Communication course at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, participated in the study. Participants were assigned to two groups of fifteen students each on the basis of their scores on an institutional English placement assessment, ensuring that both groups demonstrated equivalent entry-level proficiency at the commencement of the study. The majority of participants fell within the A2 CEFR band at the point of entry, with a small number demonstrating low-B1 competence.

Participant ages ranged from 18 to 20 years. All participants were enrolled in degree programmes with a technology-oriented emphasis — including information

technology, digital business, and software engineering — and had declared familiarity with general digital tool usage, though fewer than a quarter reported prior deliberate engagement with AI-assisted language learning platforms before the commencement of the study.

3.3 Instructional Procedures

3.3.1 The ChatGPT-Assisted Group (Experimental)

Students in the experimental group were introduced to ChatGPT during an orientation session in Week 1, during which the instructor modelled appropriate prompt construction for professional English practice purposes. Students were trained to formulate prompts that specified a professional scenario (e.g., responding to a client inquiry), a target register (formal written English), and a feedback request (e.g., identifying grammatical errors and suggesting more professional vocabulary alternatives). This prompt literacy training was considered essential to ensuring that learners engaged with the tool in a goal-directed, linguistically effortful manner rather than passively consuming AI-generated output.

Each week, students completed one structured out-of-class ChatGPT task aligned with the communicative theme of the in-class lesson. Tasks were categorised into three domains: written workplace communication (professional email drafting, memo writing), oral workplace communication (simulated job interviews, telephone role-plays prompted via text), and hybrid tasks (preparing and delivering a short presentation using ChatGPT-assisted outline development and language review). All task outputs were submitted to the instructor for formative review, and representative examples were discussed collectively in subsequent class sessions.

3.3.2 The Conventional Group (Control)

Students in the control group followed the same course syllabus and were exposed to the same professional communication themes as their experimental counterparts. However, their practice activities were conducted exclusively through traditional classroom mechanisms, including pair and group role-play exercises, peer-reviewed writing tasks, and instructor-delivered feedback sessions. Homework assignments in the control group involved textbook-based exercises and handwritten task responses equivalent in time demand to the ChatGPT tasks assigned to the experimental group.

Table 3.1: Comparison of instructional arrangements across the two groups

Feature	ChatGPT Group (Experimental)	Conventional Group (Control)
Weekly out-of-class tasks	ChatGPT-assisted professional scenarios	Textbook-based exercises & peer role-play
Feedback source	Immediate AI feedback + instructor review	Instructor and peer feedback
In-class activities	Discussion of AI-generated outputs; gap analysis	Conventional pair/group role-play

Interaction type	Human–AI (asynchronous, text-mediated)	Human–Human (face-to-face and written)
Assessment	Pre-test (Wk 1) and Post-test (Wk 14)	Pre-test (Wk 1) and Post-test (Wk 14)

3.4 Assessment Instruments

3.4.1 Workplace Communication Tests

The pre-test and post-test instruments were designed to assess three dimensions of workplace communication competence: written accuracy and professional register (evaluated through an email composition task), oral clarity and task completion (evaluated through a two-minute professional self-introduction and scenario response), and interactional appropriateness (evaluated through a role-played workplace dialogue). A three-point rubric was applied to each dimension, yielding a maximum composite score of nine points per learner per test administration. The rubrics were piloted with a small group of students outside of the main participant cohort and reviewed by two experienced English for Specific Purposes instructors for content validity. Cronbach's alpha for the composite instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .887$, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 3.2: Assessment rubric dimensions and score descriptors

Dimension	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
Written Accuracy & Register	Frequent errors; informal vocabulary predominates; professional intent unclear	Occasional errors; mostly appropriate register; generally intelligible	Minimal errors; consistently professional register; fully intelligible
Oral Clarity & Task Completion	Limited vocabulary; frequent hesitation; task partially completed	Adequate vocabulary; some hesitation; task substantially completed	Appropriate vocabulary; fluent delivery; task fully and appropriately completed
Interactional Appropriateness	Unable to sustain dialogue; inappropriate discourse markers; no turn management	Can sustain basic dialogue; some appropriate discourse markers	Manages turns effectively; appropriate discourse markers; sociopragmatically appropriate

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants selected purposively from the experimental group on the basis of their variability in post-test performance — two from the upper performance range, two from the middle range, and two from the lower range — in order to capture diverse experiential perspectives on the ChatGPT-assisted learning process. Interviews were conducted in English with Vietnamese clarification permitted, lasted between twenty and thirty-five minutes each, and were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. Interview data were transcribed

verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis following the six-stage framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 3.3: Interview questions and their alignment with research questions

Interview Question	Research Question	Theoretical Lens
How would you describe your experience of using ChatGPT to practise professional English?	RQ1, RQ2	Sociocultural Theory
In what ways, if any, do you think ChatGPT helped improve your workplace English compared with classroom activities alone?	RQ1	CLT / TBLT
What challenges did you encounter when using ChatGPT for your English tasks?	RQ2	Affective Filter Hypothesis
Would you recommend ChatGPT as a learning tool to other students at your level? Why or why not?	RQ2	Sociocultural Theory
What advice would you offer to a teacher considering using ChatGPT in a beginner English class?	RQ2	CLT / TBLT
How do you imagine AI language tools developing in the future, and what role might they play in your professional life?	RQ2	Sociocultural Theory

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results: Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparisons

An Independent Samples T-Test was conducted to compare the pre-test scores of the two groups prior to the commencement of the intervention. As shown in Table 4.1, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups at the pre-test stage ($p = .067$), confirming that both cohorts entered the study at equivalent levels of workplace communication proficiency.

Table 4.1: Pre-test score comparison between the two groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
ChatGPT Group (Experimental)	15	4.87	1.126	.291	.067
Conventional Group (Control)	15	5.13	1.187	.307	

Following the fourteen-week intervention, post-test scores were subjected to a further Independent Samples T-Test. The results, presented in Table 4.2, demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p = .001$). The experimental group achieved a mean post-test score of 7.47 (S.D. = .915), while the control group recorded a mean of 6.27 (S.D. = 1.033). This difference indicates that the ChatGPT-assisted instructional condition was associated with a meaningfully superior outcome in workplace communication performance.

Table 4.2: Post-test score comparison between the two groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
ChatGPT Group (Experimental)	15	7.47	.915	.236	.001
Conventional Group (Control)	15	6.27	1.033	.267	

A Paired Samples T-Test was additionally conducted within each group to assess the extent of pre-to-post improvement. Results confirmed that the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement from pre-test to post-test ($p = .000$), whereas the improvement recorded for the control group did not reach statistical significance ($p = .174$). These within-group findings reinforce the interpretation that the ChatGPT-assisted intervention, rather than general instructional exposure, was the primary driver of the experimental group's superior performance trajectory.

Table 4.3: Within-group improvement comparison (Paired Samples T-Test)

Group / Test Point	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
ChatGPT Group: Pre-test → Post-test	15	1.126 → .915	.291 → .236	.000
Control Group: Pre-test → Post-test	15	1.187 → 1.033	.307 → .267	.174

4.2 Qualitative Results: Thematic Analysis of Learner Interviews

Thematic analysis of the six interview transcripts yielded five primary themes, each supported by multiple participant accounts. These themes are reported below with representative verbatim extracts.

Table 4.4: Summary of interview themes and sub-codes

Theme	Sub-code	Indicative Participant Language
Theme 1: Low-anxiety practice environment	Reduced speaking fear; non-judgmental feedback	No fear of making mistakes with ChatGPT
Theme 2: Relevance of professional scenarios	Authentic context; vocabulary transfer	I learned words I actually need for work
Theme 3: Immediacy and quality of feedback	Real-time correction; polite suggestions	It corrected my email and explained why
Theme 4: Challenges and limitations	Over-reliance; metalinguistic gaps; connectivity	Sometimes I just copied the answer
Theme 5: Recommendations and future outlook	Conditional endorsement; teacher role critical	Good tool, but the teacher must guide us

Theme 1: Low-Anxiety Practice Environment

Five of the six interviewees spontaneously identified the reduced anxiety associated with AI-mediated interaction as a salient benefit of the ChatGPT-assisted tasks. Unlike face-to-face classroom role-plays, which several participants described as intimidating due to

peer observation and instructor evaluation, the ChatGPT interaction was characterised as a space in which linguistic risk-taking felt safe and repeatable.

> *"I am not afraid when I practise with ChatGPT. If I make a mistake, I can just try again. In class, I feel embarrassed when my teacher looks at me. With ChatGPT, I can make many mistakes, and it does not judge me."* (Interviewee 2)

> *"I wrote the email five times before I felt it was professional enough. I would never do that in class because there is no time, and I would feel ashamed to show so many bad versions. "* (Interviewee 4)

Theme 2: Relevance of Professional Scenarios
Participants consistently expressed appreciation for the professional framing of the tasks, contrasting them favourably with the generic communicative topics they associated with their previous English learning experiences. Several interviewees noted that the workplace vocabulary they encountered through ChatGPT interactions felt purposeful in a way that textbook vocabulary had not.

> *"In my old English class, we talked about hobbies and family. But now I need to write to clients. ChatGPT gave me words like 'I would like to bring to your attention' and 'please find attached.' These are real words for my future job."* (Interviewee 1)

Theme 3: Immediacy and Quality of Feedback
The immediacy of ChatGPT's feedback was identified by all six participants as a qualitatively distinct advantage over conventional classroom feedback mechanisms, where instructor responses to individual writing or speaking performance were necessarily delayed and often brief due to class size constraints. Participants also valued what they perceived as the politeness and constructive orientation of AI-generated feedback.

> *"When I send my email draft, ChatGPT shows me the corrected version and tells me which sentences are too informal. My teacher cannot do this for fifteen students at the same time."* (Interviewee 5)

Theme 4: Challenges and Limitations
Despite broadly positive assessments, participants identified three categories of challenge: first, a tendency toward over-reliance — copying AI output without genuine comprehension; second, a perceived absence of metalinguistic explanation that would have enabled deeper rule internalisation; and third, practical barriers relating to inconsistent internet access and, for some participants, difficulty formulating effective prompts in English.

"Sometimes I was lazy. I just asked ChatGPT to write the whole email and I copied it. I know this is wrong but it was easy. I think the teacher needs to check more carefully." (Interviewee 3)

"ChatGPT tells me my sentence is wrong but not always why it is wrong. I want to understand the grammar rule, not just see the correct version." (Interviewee 6)

Theme 5: Recommendations and Future Outlook

Four of the six interviewees indicated they would recommend ChatGPT as a supplementary learning tool, though their endorsements were consistently conditional upon the maintenance of meaningful instructor oversight. Participants were aware that the tool's effectiveness depended substantially on the quality of the tasks their instructor assigned and the guidance they received in interpreting AI feedback.

"I think ChatGPT is a good partner for learning English, but only if the teacher designs good tasks. If the teacher just says 'use ChatGPT,' students will not learn properly. The teacher is still very important. (Interviewee 1)

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The quantitative findings of this study provide evidence that ChatGPT-assisted instruction, when embedded within a structured task-based framework, can yield statistically significant gains in beginner EFL learners' workplace communication performance over a fourteen-week period. The magnitude of the improvement observed in the experimental group — a mean post-test score of 7.47 compared to 6.27 for the control group, alongside a highly significant within-group improvement trajectory ($p = .000$) — is consistent with the findings of comparable interventions in adjacent research contexts. Kohnke *et al.*'s (2023) investigation of ChatGPT-assisted writing development among Chinese university students similarly reported that the immediacy and consistency of AI feedback conferred a measurable advantage over conventional instructor-mediated feedback alone, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels whose errors were frequent and whose need for repeated corrective exposure was high.

The qualitative data offer a theoretically coherent account of the mechanisms underlying these quantitative effects. The theme of low-anxiety practice environment maps directly onto Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which predicts that conditions of reduced anxiety and heightened motivation optimise the conditions for language acquisition by lowering the psychological barriers to input processing. The consistent finding that participants felt safer taking linguistic risks with ChatGPT than in face-to-face classroom contexts suggests that the tool functions, at least in part, by modifying the affective conditions of practice rather than solely by providing additional corrective input.

The theme of perceived relevance of professional scenarios reinforces the TBLT principle that tasks framed around authentic communicative purposes generate greater learner investment and deeper vocabulary engagement than decontextualised practice exercises. The participants' observations that ChatGPT-mediated workplace tasks introduced them to professional lexical items they expected to use in their careers suggest that AI-assisted task design can function as an effective bridge between foundational EFL instruction and the domain-specific communicative demands of professional employment.

However, the theme of over-reliance identified in the qualitative data introduces a critical qualification to this broadly optimistic picture. Several participants acknowledged that the ease of obtaining polished AI-generated output created a temptation to substitute consumption for production — a behaviour that, if habituated, would undermine the very learning processes the tool is intended to support. This finding aligns with the concern articulated by Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) that the pedagogical value of technology integration is contingent on the quality of task design that mediates learner engagement, and implies that instructors bear a heightened responsibility in ChatGPT-assisted learning environments to structure tasks in ways that necessitate genuine productive effort rather than passive appropriation.

5.2 Implications

The findings carry several practical implications for language educators operating in contexts comparable to that of FPT University, Can Tho. Most fundamentally, they suggest that ChatGPT can function as a viable and productive supplementary resource for beginner EFL learners' workplace communication development, provided that its integration is purposeful, scaffolded, and subject to ongoing instructor oversight. The tool should not be deployed as a standalone learning resource or as a means of reducing instructor workload; its value lies in the way it extends the volume, variety, and contextual authenticity of learner communicative practice beyond what is achievable within the constraints of conventional classroom instruction.

Curriculum designers should consider embedding explicit prompt literacy training — the capacity to formulate task-appropriate, linguistically demanding prompts — as a preliminary component of any ChatGPT-assisted learning sequence. Participants who struggled to construct effective prompts derived considerably less benefit from their AI interactions, suggesting that prompt construction represents a learnable metalinguistic skill with direct implications for learning outcomes. Assessment instruments should also be designed to foreground original production rather than AI output reproduction, thereby creating structural incentives for learners to engage with the tool in a generative rather than extractive manner.

5.3 Limitations

This study carries several limitations that constrain the generalisability of its findings. The sample size of thirty participants, while adequate for a quasi-experimental design

within a single institutional context, is insufficient to support broad generalisations across the Vietnamese university sector. The fourteen-week duration of the intervention, while substantive, may not have been sufficient to capture the full trajectory of AI-assisted learning effects, particularly with respect to oral fluency development, which is known to exhibit slower and more variable improvement curves than written accuracy.

Additionally, the study's reliance on self-selected interview participants from the experimental group, while analytically appropriate for the qualitative strand of the mixed-methods design, means that the voices of learners who encountered significant difficulties with the ChatGPT-assisted tasks may be underrepresented in the qualitative findings. Future research should incorporate structured reflection journals or anonymous questionnaires to capture a wider range of learner experiences, including those of participants who found the AI-mediated learning process unhelpful or frustrating.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Several directions for future inquiry emerge from the present study. Longitudinal investigations tracking the persistence of ChatGPT-assisted learning gains beyond the immediate intervention period would provide valuable evidence regarding the durability of AI-mediated skill development. Comparative studies examining the differential effectiveness of ChatGPT-assisted instruction across CEFR proficiency levels — from A1 through to B2 — would help to map the conditions under which AI scaffolding is most and least beneficial. Finally, research examining the specific prompt engineering strategies most conducive to learner production quality, rather than AI output quality, would contribute directly to the practical task design knowledge available to language instructors who seek to integrate generative AI tools into their pedagogical repertoires responsibly and effectively.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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