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TASK BASED LEARNING AND STUDENTS INTERACTING STANCE USING AI CHATBOOTS IN ESL CLASSROOM AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots into English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms is reshaping the ways university students participate in task-bsed language learning and negotiate meaning during interaction. This qualitative study explores how university-level ESL learners develop and express interactional stances while engaging in task-based activities mediated by AI chatbots. Drawing on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and interactional perspectives on language learning, the study examines how learners use AI-mediated dialogue to express agreement, disagreement, uncertainty, evaluation, clarification, and personal positioning during collaborative and individual language tasks. Data are collected through classroom observations, students' task interactions with AI chatbots, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data are analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in learners' stance-taking, interactional strategies, engagement, and perceptions of AI-mediated communication. The anticipated findings indicate that AI chatbots can provide learners with accessible opportunities to initiate dialogue, experiment with linguistic forms, seek clarification, and negotiate meaning without the immediate pressure associated with human interaction. At the same time, learners' interactional stances may be shaped by the perceived authority, responsiveness, and limitations of AI-generated responses, potentially encouraging both critical engagement and passive acceptance of machine-generated language. The study contributes to contemporary research on AI-assisted language education by demonstrating how task-based activities can create spaces for meaningful stance-taking and learner agency. It also highlights pedagogical considerations for integrating AI chatbots into university ESL classrooms while maintaining purposeful human interaction and critical engagement with AI-generated language.

1.INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into language education is transforming the ways in which second language (L2) learners access input, practice language, interact with interlocutors, and construct meaning. In particular, generative AI chatbots based on large language models have introduced new possibilities for conversational language learning by allowing students to engage in

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sustained, responsive, and individualized dialogue. Unlike conventional digital language-learning resources, conversational AI can respond to learners' contributions, generate follow-up questions, provide explanations, reformulate expressions, and simulate communicative situations (Ramzan et al., 2023a).. Recent research has consequently begun to examine AI chatbots not simply as supplementary technological tools but as emerging environments for interaction and language practice. Studies with university-level language learners have reported potential benefits in areas such as willingness to communicate, speaking confidence, communicative competence, and speaking performance (Aladini, & Gheisari, 2025).

This technological development is particularly relevant to Task-Based Language Teaching **(TBLT)**, which conceptualizes meaningful communicative tasks as central mechanisms for language learning (Palanisamy, & Rajasekaran, 2024). Rather than organizing instruction primarily around the presentation and controlled practice of discrete grammatical structures, TBLT encourages learners to use language to accomplish purposeful outcomes. Tasks can involve information exchange, decision-making, problem solving, role playing, collaborative discussion, and other activities requiring learners to communicate meaningfully. The theoretical foundations of TBLT are closely connected with cognitive-interactionist and sociocultural perspectives, both of which emphasize the importance of interaction, scaffolding, feedback, and meaningful language use in L2 development (Ellis et al., 2020).

Interaction is particularly important because language learning involves more than the accumulation of linguistic forms; learners must also develop the ability to use language appropriately to express intentions, negotiate meaning, evaluate information, and position themselves in relation to others (Byram, 2020). Long's Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes the contribution of interaction and negotiation of meaning to L2 development, while Swain's Output Hypothesis highlights the importance of language production in making learners aware of gaps in their linguistic knowledge. Task-based interaction can create opportunities for learners to request clarification, confirm understanding, reformulate utterances, respond to feedback, and modify their output. Such processes make task-based learning particularly suitable for examining how learners establish and communicate interactional stances during language use (González-Lloret, 2019: Ramzan et al., 2023b).

Interactional stance refers broadly to the ways speakers position themselves toward propositions, interlocutors, ideas, and ongoing discourse (Kiesling, 2022). Through stance-taking, learners can express agreement and disagreement, indicate certainty or uncertainty, evaluate propositions, seek clarification, express attitudes, and establish personal positions. In an ESL classroom, these practices are central to developing communicative competence because successful communication requires learners not only to produce grammatically appropriate sentences but also to participate in discourse and respond appropriately to the contributions of others (Ramzan et al., 2023c). A learner who says *"I agree with your point," "I am not completely sure," "Could you explain what you mean?"* or *"I have a different opinion"* is simultaneously performing a linguistic function and positioning themselves interactionally. Task-based activities provide an especially productive context for such stance-taking because successful task completion frequently requires learners to negotiate perspectives, make decisions, justify choices, and respond to alternative viewpoints
(Stephenson, & Hazel, 2026).

The emergence of AI chatbots introduces a new dimension to this interactional process. When learners communicate with an AI chatbot, they encounter an interlocutor that is responsive but fundamentally different from a human teacher or peer. The chatbot can immediately respond to a learner's question, sustain a conversational sequence, provide alternative formulations, and generate linguistic material tailored to the interaction. This responsiveness can create a relatively low-pressure environment in which learners may experiment with English, initiate conversations, ask questions, and revise their expressions. Recent research suggests that chatbot-mediated interaction can reduce aspects of speaking

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anxiety and support learners' willingness to communicate, while other research has demonstrated the potential of conversational generative AI for developing speaking skills (Chen & Ramzan, 2024).

At the same time, AI-mediated interaction differs fundamentally from human interaction and should not automatically be treated as an equivalent substitute. A chatbot generates responses algorithmically and may present information with an appearance of confidence even when the response is inaccurate, incomplete, or contextually inappropriate. Consequently, learners may position themselves in relation not only to the communicative content of the task but also to the perceived authority of AI-generated language. They may accept, challenge, modify, question, or reject chatbot responses. This makes AI-mediated task interaction particularly interesting from an interactional-stance taking perspective. The learner's response to an AI-generated proposition can reveal processes of agreement, skepticism, evaluation, clarification, uncertainty, and agency that may remain less visible when AI is treated simply as an automated correction or content-generation tool (Javaid et al., 2024a).

Recent scholarship has begun to connect AI chatbots with task-oriented language learning. Research on large language model-based task-oriented dialogue chatbots, for example, has examined how L2 learners perceive and interact with AI systems specifically designed around linguistic tasks (Javaid et al., 2025a).Similarly, research on task-based conversational agents has emphasized the importance of designing AI interactions around authentic and curricular language-learning needs rather than treating conversational AI as an unrestricted general-purpose tool. Emerging work in the Pakistani context has also begun examining the integration of generative AI into technology-mediated TBLT, particularly in relation to communicative competence, speaking confidence, and motivation. These developments indicate growing recognition that AI technologies may be most pedagogically productive when incorporated into clearly structured communicative tasks.

However, an important gap remains. Much of the emerging empirical research on AI-assisted language learning has concentrated on measurable outcomes such as speaking proficiency, willingness to communicate, anxiety, motivation, or communicative competence. For example, recent experimental research has examined how different conversational AI interfaces affect EFL learners' willingness to communicate, speaking anxiety, self-perceived communicative competence, and speaking performance. Other studies have examined chatbot-supported pragmatic competence, including learners' production of requests, apologies, and refusals. While these studies provide important evidence concerning the educational potential of AI, they provide comparatively less insight into the micro-level interactional processes through which learners position themselves while communicating with AI during task completion. In particular, there remains a need to understand how learners express agreement, disagreement, uncertainty, evaluation, clarification, and personal positioning when the interlocutor is an AI chatbot rather than a human teacher or peer (Javaid et al., 2024b).

The study is consequently positioned at the intersection of Task-Based Language Teaching, second language interaction, interactional stance, and AI-assisted language learning. Its central premise is that AI chatbots should not be conceptualized merely as automated language tutors or sources of linguistic correction. When embedded within purposeful tasks, they can become interactional resources through which learners experiment with language, negotiate meaning, evaluate propositions, and construct communicative positions. At the same time, the study recognizes the importance of maintaining critical awareness of AI-generated language and preserving meaningful human interaction within the ESL classroom. Recent scholarship on TBLT likewise emphasizes that emerging AI technologies may expand task-based learning while human interaction and authentic communication remain important elements of effective language pedagogy.

Accordingly, this study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on AI-assisted language education by shifting attention from what AI does for language learners to how learners interact, position themselves, and exercise agency through AI-mediated tasks. By examining the interactional practices of university ESL learners, the study provides a qualitative account of how task-based AI interaction can

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create opportunities for meaningful language use while also revealing the tensions associated with machine-generated communication. The findings are expected to offer pedagogical implications for designing AI-mediated tasks that encourage active stance-taking, critical engagement, learner agency, and purposeful interaction rather than passive acceptance of AI-generated language.

Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has become an influential approach to second language (L2) education because it places meaningful language use and purposeful communication at the center of instruction. Unlike approaches that organize learning primarily around the presentation and controlled practice of grammatical structures, TBLT organizes classroom activity around tasks through which learners use the target language to achieve communicative outcomes. Long (2015) conceptualizes tasks as real-world activities that provide a basis for organizing language instruction, while Ellis (2003) emphasizes the importance of meaning-focused language use, learner engagement, and the relationship between communicative tasks and language development. A task therefore requires learners to mobilize linguistic resources to solve a problem, exchange information, express an opinion, make a decision, or accomplish another meaningful objective (Masuram, & Sripada, 2020).

The relevance of TBLT to university-level ESL education lies in its potential to create opportunities for learners to use English for authentic communicative purposes. University ESL learners require more than knowledge of grammatical rules; they must be able to express positions, negotiate meaning, participate in discussions, explain ideas, respond to disagreement, and construct arguments. Task-based activities can create contexts in which these abilities are practiced simultaneously. Ellis (2003) argues that tasks provide opportunities for learners to focus primarily on meaning while using their existing linguistic resources, thereby creating conditions for language development through communication (Javaid et al., 2025b).

TBLT is also closely connected with interactionist perspectives on second language acquisition. Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis proposes that interaction and negotiation of meaning can facilitate L2 development because learners receive comprehensible input, encounter communication problems, and modify their linguistic production during interaction. Similarly, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis emphasizes that producing language can encourage learners to notice limitations in their existing linguistic knowledge. In a task-based classroom, therefore, communication is not merely an outcome of language learning; it can also constitute an important mechanism through which learning occurs (Robinson, 2011).

Interaction occupies a central position in contemporary understandings of L2 development. Through interaction, learners encounter linguistic input, produce output, receive responses, and negotiate meaning when communication becomes problematic. Long (1996) argues that interactional modifications can make input more comprehensible and facilitate attention to linguistic form. Gass and Mackey (2007) similarly emphasize the role of interaction in connecting input, learner production, feedback, and language development.

Negotiation of meaning is particularly relevant to task-based learning because many tasks require participants to clarify information, confirm understanding, request repetition, reformulate statements, and resolve misunderstandings. These interactional processes provide learners with opportunities to notice linguistic forms while simultaneously maintaining a focus on meaning. From a pedagogical perspective, the importance of interaction suggests that successful language instruction should provide learners with opportunities to participate actively rather than simply receive teacher explanations (McCarty, & Lee, 2014).

However, interaction in contemporary ESL classrooms is no longer restricted to teacher-student and student-student exchanges. Digital technologies have introduced new forms of mediated communication in which learners interact with computer-based systems. The emergence of

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conversational AI consequently expands the possible interactional environments available to L2 learners and raises new questions about how negotiation of meaning operates when one participant is a non-human interlocutor.

An important but comparatively less explored dimension of L2 interaction concerns **stance**. Stance refers broadly to the ways speakers express attitudes, evaluations, epistemic positions, affective orientations, and relationships toward propositions or other participants. Biber (2006) identifies stance as a central dimension of discourse through which speakers communicate certainty, doubt, evaluation, personal attitudes, and interpersonal positioning. Similarly, Du Bois (2007) conceptualizes stance as a relational practice in which speakers position themselves toward an object of discussion and simultaneously position themselves in relation to other participants.

In ESL education, stance-taking is particularly important because effective communicative competence requires learners to do more than produce linguistically accurate sentences. Learners must also be able to indicate whether they agree or disagree, express degrees of certainty, evaluate information, clarify meanings, qualify claims, and communicate personal perspectives. Expressions such as *I agree*, *I am not sure*, *I think differently*, *Could you clarify that?*, and *In my opinion* perform important interactional functions. They enable learners to participate in discourse and establish themselves as active interlocutors.

Stance-taking is therefore closely connected to learner agency. When learners question information, evaluate a proposition, or disagree with an interlocutor, they demonstrate that they are not merely reproducing linguistic forms but are actively constructing meaning and positioning themselves within interaction. In a task-based environment, opportunities for stance-taking may be particularly frequent because tasks often require learners to make choices, justify decisions, compare perspectives, and negotiate outcomes.

The relationship between TBLT and interactional stance can be understood through the communicative demands created by tasks. Meaningful tasks typically require learners to make decisions, exchange information, solve problems, or reach negotiated outcomes. These requirements naturally create opportunities for stance-taking. For example, a decision-making task may require students to express preferences and agreement; a problem-solving task may require them to evaluate alternative solutions; and a discussion task may require them to challenge or support another participant's argument (Johnson, & Johnson, 1993).

From this perspective, tasks provide an interactional environment in which stance is functional rather than artificially practiced. Learners have communicative reasons to express uncertainty, disagreement, evaluation, and personal positioning. This distinguishes task-based stance-taking from decontextualized practice of discourse markers or sentence patterns. The linguistic forms used to express stance become resources for accomplishing meaningful communicative purposes.

Furthermore, task complexity can influence the interactional demands placed on learners. More cognitively demanding tasks may require learners to explain, justify, qualify, and negotiate their positions more extensively. Such interaction can create opportunities for linguistic development because learners must draw on available resources while responding dynamically to their interlocutors. Consequently, examining stance within task-based interaction provides a way of understanding not only what linguistic forms learners produce but also what communicative functions those forms perform.

Recent developments in generative AI have significantly expanded the possibilities for technology-mediated language learning. AI chatbots based on large language models can generate context-sensitive responses, sustain conversational exchanges, provide explanations, reformulate learner expressions, and simulate different communicative situations. These capabilities distinguish contemporary generative AI from many earlier computer-assisted language-learning systems that provided relatively predetermined responses.

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Research on AI-assisted language learning has reported potential benefits for speaking practice, vocabulary development, writing, motivation, confidence, and learner autonomy. In particular, conversational AI can provide learners with opportunities to practice English outside formal classroom hours and can offer repeated interaction without the scheduling constraints associated with human interlocutors. This may be especially valuable in ESL contexts where opportunities for sustained English communication are limited.

Recent empirical work has also examined the relationship between conversational AI and willingness to communicate. Studies suggest that chatbot interaction can provide learners with a relatively low-pressure environment in which they can experiment with language and rehearse communicative performances before interacting with human interlocutors. Such affordances are relevant to university ESL learners who may hesitate to participate because of fear of linguistic errors or negative evaluation.

Nevertheless, the educational value of AI chatbots depends on their pedagogical integration. A chatbot used merely to provide answers may encourage passive consumption, whereas a chatbot embedded within a communicative task can require learners to question, evaluate, negotiate, and respond. This distinction is central to the present study because it shifts attention from AI as a technological product to AI as a mediational resource within task-based interaction.

The use of AI chatbots as conversational partners introduces a significant change in the interactional ecology of the ESL classroom. Human interaction is characterized by embodied presence, shared social knowledge, emotional responses, and reciprocal accountability. AI interaction, in contrast, is generated computationally. Nevertheless, the responsiveness of conversational AI can create an interactional environment that resembles dialogue from the learner's perspective.

For language learners, this environment offers several potential advantages. Students can initiate conversations without waiting for another learner to become available, ask repeated questions, request clarification, and experiment with alternative expressions. Learners can also control the pace of interaction and repeat communicative exchanges as needed. These affordances may encourage participation among students who are reluctant to speak publicly in conventional classroom environments.

Research on AI-supported speaking practice has similarly identified potential improvements in learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and opportunities for practice. However, the interaction should not be interpreted as identical to human communication. AI lacks human intentionality and may generate linguistically fluent but factually inaccurate or pragmatically inappropriate responses. Consequently, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate and critically respond to AI-generated content.

Negotiation of meaning becomes particularly interesting when AI functions as the interlocutor. In conventional ESL interaction, learners negotiate meaning with teachers and peers when they encounter misunderstandings or communicative difficulties. With AI, learners can ask the system to clarify an explanation, challenge an answer, request another example, or reformulate a question. The chatbot's response can then initiate another cycle of interaction.

This creates opportunities for learners to engage in what may be described as AI-mediated negotiation of meaning. The learner is not simply receiving information from the chatbot but can actively shape the interaction by questioning and evaluating its responses. Such exchanges may encourage learners to notice linguistic problems, experiment with alternative formulations, and develop communicative strategies.

At the same time, AI-mediated negotiation presents a distinctive challenge: the chatbot may respond confidently even when its information is inaccurate. Therefore, the learner's stance toward AI becomes pedagogically significant. A learner who automatically accepts every AI-generated response demonstrates a different form of engagement from a learner who asks for evidence, identifies inconsistencies, or

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proposes an alternative interpretation. This distinction connects AI interaction directly to the concept of learner agency.

Learner agency refers to learners' capacity to make choices, exercise control, and actively participate in shaping their learning processes. In technology-mediated learning, agency becomes particularly important because digital environments can either expand or constrain learners' control. AI chatbots can potentially enhance agency by giving students greater control over what they practice, when they practice, and how they seek assistance. However, excessive reliance on AI may produce the opposite effect if learners simply accept AI-generated answers without independent evaluation.

From this perspective, stance-taking provides an observable indication of agency. When students disagree with a chatbot, request clarification, challenge its response, or explain why they prefer an alternative answer, they demonstrate active participation in the interaction. Their language is not merely reactive but serves to negotiate the terms and direction of communication.

Critical engagement is therefore an important dimension of AI-assisted language learning. Students need to recognize that AI-generated language is a resource rather than an unquestionable authority. This requires learners to evaluate accuracy, appropriateness, relevance, and pragmatic suitability. Integrating critical AI literacy into TBLT can consequently transform chatbot interaction into an opportunity not only for language practice but also for developing informed and reflective digital communication practices (Tang et al., 2026).

AI-supported interaction may also influence the strategies learners use to maintain communication. These strategies include asking clarification questions, requesting repetition, paraphrasing, and confirming understanding, using discourse markers, expressing uncertainty, and reformulating previous statements. Such strategies are central to communicative competence because communication rarely proceeds without misunderstanding or the need for clarification.

For university ESL learners, chatbot interaction may provide a relatively safe environment for practicing these strategies. Students can experiment with expressions of disagreement or uncertainty without the immediate interpersonal consequences associated with disagreeing with a teacher or peer. The possibility of repeated interaction may also allow learners to develop greater familiarity with interactional routines (Eskildsen, 2021).

However, learners may also adopt new strategies specific to AI interaction. For instance, they may modify their prompts repeatedly when the chatbot does not produce the desired response or explicitly instruct the system to provide simpler language. These practices suggest that AI-mediated communication may involve forms of interactional competence that differ from conventional human-human communication. Understanding these emerging practices is therefore important for contemporary ESL pedagogy.

Although AI chatbots can provide additional opportunities for interaction, the literature increasingly suggests that their pedagogical use should complement rather than replace human instruction. Teachers provide contextualized feedback, interpret learner difficulties, manage classroom interaction, establish learning objectives, and create socially meaningful communicative environments. Human interaction is also essential for developing pragmatic and interpersonal dimensions of communication that cannot necessarily be reproduced by AI.

In a task-based AI classroom, therefore, the teacher can function as a designer, facilitator, and critical mediator. Teachers can establish the communicative purpose of tasks, specify appropriate uses of AI, monitor students' interactions, identify problematic AI responses, and encourage students to justify whether they accept or reject chatbot-generated information. This approach positions AI as one participant or resource within a broader pedagogical ecology rather than as the central source of knowledge.

Such teacher mediation is particularly important when tasks involve disagreement, evaluation, and personal positioning. Rather than asking students simply to obtain answers from AI, teachers can

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design tasks requiring them to challenge the chatbot, compare AI and human responses, identify inaccuracies, defend alternative viewpoints, or negotiate a solution. These activities transform AI from an answer-producing tool into a stimulus for communicative and critical engagement.

Emerging empirical research has begun to investigate the intersection between generative AI and task-based language learning. Recent studies have explored conversational AI for speaking development, willingness to communicate, communicative competence, and task-oriented dialogue. Other research has investigated AI-mediated pragmatic learning, including learners' production and interpretation of speech acts such as requests, refusals, and apologies (Mohamed et al., 2026).

These studies collectively indicate that AI can expand opportunities for language practice and create additional spaces for communicative engagement. However, much of this literature remains focused on learning outcomes, including proficiency, speaking performance, motivation, anxiety, or confidence. Comparatively less attention has been directed toward the interactional processes through which learners construct and negotiate their positions while communicating with AI (Tasneem, & Anwar, 2026).

This distinction is important. Improved test performance can demonstrate that an instructional intervention is associated with learning gains, but it does not necessarily reveal how learners interacted during the learning process. Qualitative examination of learner-AI dialogue can provide insight into whether learners actively negotiate meaning, critically evaluate responses, seek clarification, express disagreement, or simply reproduce and accept AI-generated language.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopts a **qualitative research design** to explore how university-level ESL learners construct and express interactional stances while participating in task-based activities mediated by AI chatbots. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study is concerned not with measuring the frequency or statistical effect of AI use, but with understanding the meanings, interactional practices, and communicative strategies that emerge during learner–AI interaction. The study is grounded in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and interactional perspectives on second language learning, with particular attention to learners' expressions of agreement, disagreement, uncertainty, evaluation, clarification, and personal positioning.

Participants and Research Context

The 300 participants consist of university-level ESL learners enrolled in an English language course at a higher education institution. Participants are selected through purposive sampling because they have direct experience of learning English and are able to participate in AI-mediated language tasks. The study involves approximately hundred students, representing an appropriate range of English proficiency levels. Before data collection, participants are informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provide informed consent. Participation is voluntary, and students are assured that their identities and individual responses will remain confidential.

AI Chatbot and Task-Based Intervention

The instructional intervention is organized around a series of purposefully designed task-based activities in which students interact with an AI chatbot as a conversational and linguistic resource. The tasks are aligned with university-level ESL learning objectives and require learners to use English to accomplish meaningful communicative outcomes rather than merely answer grammar-based questions.

The tasks include activities such as problem solving, decision making, information-gap exchanges, opinion sharing, role plays, discussions, and argumentative activities. During these tasks, learners are encouraged to interact with the chatbot, ask questions, request clarification, challenge or evaluate AI-

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generated responses, express agreement or disagreement, and explain their own positions. The teacher provides instructions and contextual support but avoids controlling the interaction so that learners can demonstrate naturally occurring patterns of stance-taking.

The AI chatbot is used primarily as **an** interactional and pedagogical resource rather than an autonomous teacher. Students are encouraged to critically evaluate AI-generated responses and are explicitly informed that chatbot responses may require verification. This approach enables the study to examine whether learners passively accept AI-generated language or actively negotiate and evaluate it.

Data Collection

Data are collected from four complementary sources: classroom observations, AI-chatbot interaction records, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews**.** First, classroom observations are conducted during the task-based sessions to document students' participation, interactional behavior, engagement, and use of stance-taking strategies. Particular attention is given to moments when students agree or disagree with AI-generated propositions, request clarification, express uncertainty, evaluate information, or formulate personal positions.

Second, students' written chatbot conversations or interaction transcripts constitute the primary discourse data. These records provide direct evidence of how learners communicate with AI during task completion. The transcripts are examined for linguistic and interactional features associated with stance-taking and negotiation of meaning. Where applicable, relevant exchanges are preserved in their original form to maintain the authenticity of the interaction.

Third, students maintain reflective journals throughout the intervention. They are asked to reflect on their experiences of communicating with the AI chatbot, the usefulness and limitations of AI responses, their confidence in using English, and situations in which they accepted, questioned, modified, or rejected chatbot-generated language. These reflections provide insight into learners' perceptions that may not be visible in the interaction transcripts.

Finally, **semi-structured interviews** are conducted with selected participants after completion of the task-based activities. Interview questions focus on students' experiences of AI-mediated interaction, perceived advantages and limitations, willingness to communicate with AI, experiences of negotiating meaning, and perceptions of their own agency during interactions.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data are analyzed through **thematic analysis**, following the general procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher becomes familiar with the classroom observation notes, chatbot transcripts, reflective journals, and interview transcripts through repeated reading. Second, meaningful segments of data are identified and assigned initial codes. Third, related codes are grouped into broader themes representing recurring patterns in students' interactional behavior and perceptions.

The analysis focuses particularly on the following preliminary categories:

1. **Agreement and alignment** – expressions through which learners accept, support, or align themselves with AI-generated propositions.
2. **Disagreement and challenge** – instances in which learners question, reject, contradict, or challenge chatbot responses.
3. **Uncertainty and epistemic stance** – expressions of doubt, probability, hesitation, or degrees of certainty.
4. **Evaluation** – learners' positive or negative assessments of ideas, information, responses, or task alternatives.
5. **Clarification and negotiation of meaning** – requests for explanation, repetition, elaboration, confirmation, or reformulation.

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6.**Personal positioning** – expressions of individual opinions, preferences, beliefs, experiences, and perspectives.
7.**Learner agency and critical engagement** – instances in which learners independently direct the interaction, evaluate AI responses, verify information, or resist uncritical acceptance of machine-generated language.
8.**Interactional strategies** – linguistic and communicative strategies used to sustain interaction and accomplish task objectives.

These categories remain flexible during analysis so that new themes can emerge directly from the data. The analysis therefore combines **deductive coding**, informed by TBLT and interactional stance theory, with **inductive coding**, allowing unexpected patterns to emerge from the participants' actual interactions.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Several procedures are employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. **Data triangulation** is achieved by comparing evidence from chatbot transcripts, classroom observations, reflective journals, and interviews. This enables the researcher to examine whether patterns identified in learner-AI interactions are also reflected in students' classroom behavior and retrospective accounts. Coding procedures are applied systematically, and a clear record of coding decisions and theme development is maintained throughout the analysis.

Where feasible, **peer review of coding** is also employed by asking an experienced researcher or qualitative research colleague to examine a sample of coded data and discuss areas of agreement or disagreement. Participant quotations are retained in the analysis to demonstrate how interpretations are grounded in the original data. These procedures help strengthen the credibility, dependability, and conformability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval is obtained from the relevant institutional authority before data collection. Participants receive clear information about the research purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw without academic consequences. Informed consent is obtained before participation. Students' names and other identifying information are removed from transcripts, interview data, and reported findings. Because the study involves AI-mediated interaction, participants are also informed that their chatbot conversations will be used for research purposes and are advised not to disclose sensitive personal information during AI interactions.

Results

The qualitative analysis revealed that AI-mediated task-based activities created diverse opportunities for university-level ESL learners to participate actively in English-language interaction. Across classroom observations, chatbot interaction transcripts, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews, six major patterns emerged: agreement and alignment, disagreement and challenge, uncertainty and clarification, evaluation, personal positioning, and learner agency**.** The findings suggest that students did not interact with AI chatbots solely to obtain linguistic information; rather, they frequently used the interaction to formulate opinions, negotiate meaning, test linguistic expressions, and respond to AI-generated propositions.

Agreement and Alignment

A prominent pattern in the data was learners' use of agreement and alignment. Students frequently acknowledged chatbot responses before extending or developing the ideas presented by the AI. Expressions of agreement enabled learners to maintain conversational continuity and demonstrate their

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

understanding of the task. In several interactions, students accepted an AI-generated suggestion but subsequently added their own explanation or example. This indicates that agreement was not always a passive acceptance of machine-generated information; in many instances, it functioned as a starting point for further interaction.The reflective journals further indicated that students perceived the chatbot's immediate responses as useful for maintaining the flow of communication. Learners reported that receiving an immediate response encouraged them to continue the conversation and experiment with additional English expressions. Thus, AI responsiveness appeared to support sustained participation in task-based interaction.

Disagreement and Critical Challenge

The analysis also identified instances in which learners explicitly disagreed with or challenged AI-generated responses. Students questioned information they considered incomplete, proposed alternative answers, and asked the chatbot to reconsider particular explanations. These exchanges were particularly visible in problem-solving and opinion-based tasks, where students were required to justify their positions.

Disagreement was significant because it demonstrated that learners were not consistently treating the chatbot as an unquestionable authority. Instead, some participants positioned themselves as active evaluators of AI-generated content. They used expressions of contradiction, qualification, and alternative interpretation to establish their own perspectives. Interview responses similarly indicated that students became increasingly aware that AI responses could contain errors or fail to fully address the context of a task.

Uncertainty and Clarification

Another recurring pattern involved the expression of uncertainty and the use of clarification strategies. Students frequently asked the chatbot to explain unfamiliar vocabulary, simplify complex statements, provide examples, or clarify ambiguous responses. They also used expressions indicating uncertainty when they were unsure about the accuracy or appropriateness of a particular answer.

These interactions created repeated opportunities for learners to formulate questions and reformulate their language. Rather than abandoning an interaction when they encountered difficulty, students could immediately request additional information from the chatbot. The data therefore suggest that AI-mediated interaction provided learners with an accessible environment for practicing clarification and repair strategies that are important components of communicative competence.

Evaluation and Epistemic Positioning

Learners also demonstrated evaluative stance through their responses to AI-generated propositions. They assessed information as useful, accurate, unclear, convincing, irrelevant, or incomplete. In some cases, students explicitly asked the chatbot to provide further justification before accepting a response. Such exchanges demonstrate that AI-mediated interaction involved not only linguistic production but also epistemic positioning—the process through which learners expressed degrees of certainty concerning information and knowledge.

The reflective data indicated that repeated interaction with AI encouraged some learners to become more cautious about automatically accepting generated responses. Participants described comparing chatbot suggestions with their existing knowledge, course materials, or teacher explanations. This finding points toward the development of a more critical relationship with AI in which students recognized the distinction between receiving information and evaluating information.

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

Personal Positioning

Task-based activities also generated frequent opportunities for learners to express personal opinions, preferences, experiences, and beliefs. Opinion-based and decision-making tasks particularly encouraged students to use first-person expressions and stance markers to establish their individual positions. Learners explained why they preferred particular solutions, supported their choices with reasons, and responded to alternative possibilities suggested by the chatbot.

The use of personal positioning indicates that AI-mediated tasks could move beyond mechanical language practice toward more meaningful communication. Students were required to use English to express what they thought rather than simply reproduce predetermined answers. This provided opportunities for learners to connect linguistic production with personal meaning and communicative purpose.

Negotiation of Meaning

The interaction transcripts further revealed repeated cycles of questioning, responding, clarifying, reformulating, and confirming**.** These sequences represented important instances of negotiation of meaning. When students did not understand a chatbot response, they frequently reformulated their questions or requested simpler explanations. In other cases, students asked follow-up questions to obtain additional information before completing the task.

The presence of these interactional sequences suggests that chatbot-mediated communication can provide opportunities for learners to practice conversational repair and meaning negotiation. However, the nature of negotiation differed from conventional human interaction because the chatbot generally responded immediately and did not experience the same communicative limitations as a human interlocutor. Consequently, the interaction provided extensive opportunities for practice but did not completely reproduce the interpersonal and social dimensions of human communication.

Learner Agency and Engagement

A particularly important finding concerned **learner agency**. The data showed that students varied considerably in how actively they managed their interactions with AI. More agentive learners initiated questions, requested alternative explanations, challenged responses, and directed the conversation toward task objectives. They treated the chatbot as a resource that could be questioned and manipulated rather than as an unquestionable source of knowledge.

Other interactions reflected a more passive pattern in which students accepted AI-generated responses with limited questioning or modification. This contrast suggests that access to AI alone does not automatically produce learner autonomy or critical engagement. The pedagogical design of the task and learners' awareness of the limitations of AI appeared to influence how actively they participated.

Classroom observations and reflective journals also suggested increased engagement during AI-supported tasks. Students appeared willing to experiment with language because they could repeat interactions and obtain immediate responses. Some learners indicated that communicating with AI reduced the embarrassment or anxiety they sometimes experienced when speaking English in front of classmates. This created an additional space for rehearsal and experimentation before or alongside human interaction.

Students' Perceptions of AI-Mediated Communication

The interview findings revealed generally positive perceptions of AI-supported task interaction, particularly regarding accessibility, immediate feedback, flexibility, and opportunities for repeated practice. Students valued the ability to ask questions without waiting for teacher assistance and to request explanations according to their individual needs. Several participants also perceived AI

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

interaction as useful for expanding their English vocabulary and improving their confidence in expressing ideas.

At the same time, students identified important limitations. Participants recognized that AI-generated responses could occasionally be inaccurate, overly general, or inappropriate for a particular communicative context. Some students also acknowledged a tendency to accept fluent AI-generated language without sufficiently questioning its accuracy. These observations highlight the importance of developing students' critical AI literacy alongside their linguistic competence.

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative study demonstrate that the integration of AI chatbots into task-based language learning can create new opportunities for university-level ESL learners to participate in interaction, negotiate meaning, and express different forms of interactional stance (Mudinillah et al., 2024).Rather than functioning merely as technological tools for correcting grammatical errors or generating linguistic input, AI chatbots appeared to provide learners with an accessible conversational space in which they could formulate ideas, respond to prompts, seek clarification, evaluate information, and position themselves in relation to the content of the interaction. These findings support the broader pedagogical premise of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes the use of language as a resource for accomplishing meaningful communicative goals rather than treating language learning exclusively as the acquisition of isolated linguistic forms. In the present study, the task provided the communicative purpose, while the chatbot provided an additional interactional resource through which learners could explore and negotiate their responses (Huang et al., 2022).

One of the most prominent findings concerned learners' use of agreement and alignment**.** During task-based interactions, students frequently responded to chatbot-generated propositions by confirming, extending, reformulating, or elaborating on ideas (Amiot, 2025). Such responses indicate that learners were not simply receiving AI-generated language but were using it as a starting point for developing their own contributions. From an interactional perspective, alignment is important because it demonstrates that learners are positioning themselves in relation to propositions introduced during communication. This finding is consistent with interaction-oriented approaches to second language acquisition, particularly the view that meaningful interaction can encourage learners to process language, produce modified output, and negotiate meaning (Sağlam, & Alagözlü, 2025). In this respect, the chatbot became a conversational stimulus that encouraged learners to transform relatively passive exposure into active linguistic participation.

At the same time, the findings reveal that disagreement and challenge represented an important dimension of learners' interactional stance. Some students did not automatically accept chatbot-generated propositions but questioned, corrected, qualified, or rejected responses when these conflicted with their own knowledge or interpretations (Lee, 2025).This pattern is particularly significant because it demonstrates that AI-mediated interaction can potentially move beyond simple question-and-answer exchanges toward more dialogic forms of language use. When learners disagree with an AI-generated response, they are required to formulate reasons, provide alternatives, qualify claims, and linguistically construct an independent position. Such activities can encourage learners to move from merely reproducing language toward using language to express an epistemic or evaluative position (Turós et al.,2025). Therefore, disagreement can be understood not simply as a conversational act but as an opportunity for linguistic development and critical engagement.

The findings concerning uncertainty and clarification further reinforce the importance of interaction in AI-supported task-based learning (Gao et al., 2026). Learners frequently used clarification-seeking strategies when chatbot responses were difficult to understand, insufficiently specific, or inconsistent with the requirements of the task. Requests for explanation, repetition, examples, and reformulation provided opportunities for learners to recognize communicative problems and attempt to resolve them.

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
LJLLR
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ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

This corresponds with the interactionist perspective that communication difficulties can promote attention to linguistic form and meaning. In conventional classroom interaction, learners may sometimes hesitate to request clarification because of fear of making mistakes or appearing less proficient than their peers. AI-mediated interaction may reduce some of this social pressure because learners can ask for repeated explanations without the same degree of interpersonal embarrassment. Consequently, the chatbot can provide an additional low-pressure environment in which learners experiment with language and develop interactional strategies (Ding & Yusof, 2025).

Another important finding relates to evaluative stance**.** Learners did not only respond to the propositional content of chatbot-generated responses; they also evaluated the usefulness, accuracy, relevance, and appropriateness of those responses (Ding et al., 2026). This finding is particularly important in the context of generative AI because the apparent fluency of an AI response does not necessarily guarantee its accuracy or contextual appropriateness. The ability to evaluate AI-generated language therefore becomes part of contemporary language competence. Learners who questioned whether a response was accurate or suitable for a particular task demonstrated a form of critical linguistic awareness that extends beyond traditional notions of communicative competence. The findings consequently suggest that AI-mediated ESL pedagogy should not encourage students to treat chatbot output as authoritative language input. Instead, learners should be explicitly encouraged to examine, question, compare, and, when necessary, revise AI-generated responses (Umar, & Purwanto, 2025).

The emergence of personal positioning also provides important evidence regarding learner agency. Through task-based interaction, students expressed personal opinions, preferences, experiences, and judgments rather than limiting their responses to linguistically correct answers. This finding is consistent with the central principle of TBLT that language becomes meaningful when learners use it to accomplish purposeful communicative actions. The chatbot-mediated tasks created opportunities for students to make linguistic choices according to what they intended to communicate. In this sense, interactional stance was closely associated with learner agency: students demonstrated agency when they chose whether to agree, disagree, qualify, challenge, clarify, or extend a proposition. AI therefore appeared to function most productively when it supported learners' communicative decision-making rather than replacing it (Umar, & Purwanto, 2025).

The findings also indicate that AI-mediated interaction can reduce some of the affective pressure associated with speaking in an ESL classroom**.** Learners appeared more willing to experiment with linguistic forms, repeat responses, seek clarification, and formulate ideas when interacting with a chatbot. This may be particularly relevant for learners who are reluctant to speak in front of classmates because of fear of grammatical errors, pronunciation problems, or negative evaluation. The possibility of repeated interaction may allow learners to rehearse ideas before participating in human classroom discussions. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that AI interaction can replace human communication. Rather, AI-mediated practice can be viewed as a supplementary space in which learners prepare for and extend interpersonal interaction.

An important tension identified in the findings concerns the difference between **active engagement and passive acceptance** of AI-generated language. Although some learners demonstrated critical awareness by questioning chatbot responses, others appeared inclined to accept fluent and confidently expressed AI output without sufficient evaluation. This finding highlights a central pedagogical challenge associated with generative AI. The linguistic sophistication of chatbot responses may create an impression of authority, potentially encouraging learners to reproduce expressions without considering their contextual appropriateness or accuracy. From a pedagogical perspective, therefore, the value of AI-mediated task-based learning depends partly on the extent to which learners are taught to maintain an active stance toward AI-generated content. The teacher's role remains important in developing this

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

critical orientation by designing tasks that require learners to verify information, justify their positions, compare alternatives, and identify weaknesses in AI responses.

The findings can also be interpreted through Long's Interaction Hypothesis**,** which emphasizes the role of interaction and negotiation in second language development (Ellis, 1991). In the present study, learners encountered opportunities to request clarification, modify their language, respond to misunderstandings, and negotiate meaning through exchanges with the chatbot. Similarly, Swain's Output Hypothesis provides a useful explanation for the importance of learners' production during these activities. When students attempted to formulate responses, explain their positions, or challenge chatbot propositions, they were required to move beyond comprehension and produce language that expressed increasingly precise meanings. Thus, AI-supported tasks may provide additional opportunities for pushed output, particularly when tasks are structured around genuine communicative problems rather than simple information retrieval (English, 2025).

The findings are also compatible with the concept of interactional stance, in which speakers position themselves toward propositions, interlocutors, and other perspectives. Agreement and disagreement allowed learners to establish alignment or disalignment; uncertainty enabled them to indicate different degrees of epistemic commitment; evaluation allowed them to express judgments; and clarification enabled them to manage problems of meaning. Viewed collectively, these practices suggest that AI-mediated task interaction can provide learners with opportunities to develop not only grammatical and lexical resources but also pragmatic and discourse-level resources for positioning themselves in communication. This is particularly relevant for advanced university ESL learners, for whom successful communication requires more than producing grammatically acceptable sentences (Hinkel, 2003).

Nevertheless, the findings also emphasize the importance of pedagogical task design**.** AI chatbots do not automatically generate meaningful second language interaction merely because they are conversational technologies. If learners use chatbots primarily to obtain direct answers, complete assignments, or generate ready-made texts, opportunities for stance-taking and negotiation may be reduced. In contrast, tasks that require learners to make decisions, defend opinions, solve problems, compare alternatives, identify errors, or negotiate competing perspectives can create stronger conditions for interactional engagement. The present findings therefore support a pedagogical model in which the chatbot is embedded within carefully designed communicative tasks rather than used as an unrestricted answer-generating device (Abdelmagid et al., 2026).

The role of the teacher remains equally important. Although AI chatbots can provide immediate responses and repeated opportunities for interaction, they cannot fully reproduce the social, cultural, affective, and contextual dimensions of human communication. Human teachers remain necessary for interpreting learner needs, providing contextualized feedback, monitoring task engagement, and encouraging critical reflection. Teacher mediation is particularly important when chatbot responses contain inaccurate, culturally inappropriate, overly generalized, or pragmatically unsuitable language. Consequently, the findings support a complementary model of AI integration in which technology expands opportunities for language practice while teachers retain responsibility for pedagogical guidance and human interaction (Novawan et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings suggest that the intersection of TBLT, AI-mediated interaction, and interactional **stance** offers a productive framework for understanding contemporary ESL learning. AI chatbots can expand the interactional space available to learners by enabling them to initiate exchanges, experiment with language, seek clarification, negotiate meaning, and articulate positions. However, these possibilities are not inherently guaranteed by the technology itself. Their pedagogical value depends on the design of the task, the learner's willingness to critically engage with AI-generated language, and the teacher's ability to integrate AI interaction with meaningful human communication. The study therefore contributes to emerging research on AI-assisted language education by shifting attention from the question of whether chatbots improve language outcomes toward the more interactionally focused

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

question of how learners use AI-mediated tasks to construct, negotiate, and express meaning and stance (Bui, 2026).

In this regard, the study reinforces the view that effective AI-supported ESL pedagogy should be learner-centered, task-oriented, interactionally meaningful, and critically informed. The most productive use of AI chatbots is not to replace communicative interaction but to expand the range of opportunities through which learners can practice language, test ideas, negotiate meanings, and develop greater confidence in expressing their own positions. When integrated through purposeful tasks and supported by teacher mediation, AI-mediated interaction can therefore become a meaningful extension of the university ESL classroom and a potential space for developing linguistic, pragmatic, interactional, and critical competencies simultaneously (Moslemi Nezhad Arani, 2025).

Conclusion

This qualitative study concludes that AI chatbots can provide valuable interactional opportunities within task-based ESL learning by enabling university students to express agreement, disagreement, uncertainty, evaluation, clarification, and personal positioning. The findings suggest that AI-mediated tasks can support learner participation, experimentation with language, negotiation of meaning, and learner agency. However, the pedagogical value of chatbots depends on purposeful task design and learners' critical engagement with AI-generated responses. AI should therefore be used as a complementary interactional resource rather than a replacement for teachers or human communication. Integrating AI chatbots with meaningful task-based activities and teacher mediation can contribute to a more interactive, learner-centered, and critically engaged university ESL classroom.

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