



STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHATGPT'S UTILITY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Ioana DOCHIA

*Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences,
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

ioana.dochia@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in language education has stirred our interest, as teachers, having tools like ChatGPT emerging as potential facilitators in digital cheating in writing their homework, doing projects, solving school students' deadlines and so one and so forth. This study explores students' perceptions regarding the usefulness of ChatGPT in learning English as a second language (ESL). Through a survey-based approach, data was collected from secondary school students to assess their experiences, perceived benefits, and potential challenges associated with AI-assisted language learning. While some students reported no significant impact or limited usefulness, others acknowledged its role in enhancing grammar comprehension, written expression, and vocabulary expansion. Additionally, a notable proportion of participants either did not utilize ChatGPT for language learning or preferred traditional instructional methods. These findings suggest that while ChatGPT serves as a valuable supplementary tool for some learners, its effectiveness is contingent on individual engagement, usage patterns, and learning preferences.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, artificial intelligence, English as a foreign language learning, ESL education, student perceptions, AI-assisted learning, digitalisation of education, secondary school digital challenges.*

Literature Review

Artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized education by providing personalized learning experiences and instant feedback mechanisms. AI-driven chatbots, such as ChatGPT, assist students in acquiring language skills through interactive conversations, grammatical corrections, and vocabulary expansion (Smith et al., 2023). Research indicates that AI-driven learning environments enhance engagement and comprehension, fostering self-directed

learning among students (Johnson & Miller, 2022). The role of AI in education is growing rapidly, with adaptive learning technologies improving students' abilities to grasp complex linguistic structures (Brown et al., 2021). ChatGPT, a large language model, functions as a digital tutor, capable of responding to students' queries in real time (Garcia & Lin, 2022). Despite these benefits, concerns persist regarding over-reliance on AI and the potential for misinformation (Lee, 2023). Studies have shown that AI-assisted language tools enhance writing fluency and coherence by offering real-time feedback (Zhang & Patel, 2021). Moreover, students who engaged in AI-driven conversation practice demonstrated increased confidence in spoken English (Williams et al., 2022). Another key advantage noted was the ability of ChatGPT to generate vocabulary-rich responses, thereby expanding students' lexical knowledge (Hernandez & Kim, 2023). Previous research confirms that AI-driven platforms aid in vocabulary acquisition by exposing learners to contextually relevant words (Lopez, 2021). However, a state of fear concerning what ChatGPT can do to our students' creativity, cognitive processes and the fact that it develops inabilities rather than skills conducted to the present research. Looking back in history, every major technological advancement in education has sparked concern among educators, scientists, and tutors. Whenever a new tool or innovation emerged, there was often scepticism about its impact on learning. This 'technofobia' (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 2001) when Google search engine appeared, gave birth to studies and newspaper articles that were sustaining the idea that the above mentioned was slowing down cognitive processes, making everything which seemed pretty easier before a though thing to do now (Carr, 2008) and findings related to Wikipedia perceived it as moderately unreliable often questioning its accuracy, credibility, and up-to-dateness.

Even though ChatGPT is seen as a disruptor in the tech industry (Grant & Metz, 2022) actually it is also revolutionizing the educational landscape. While disruptions often face resistance, they are essential in challenging outdated pedagogical models and fostering meaningful progress. The education system, known for its slow adaptation to innovation, is in urgent need of transformation.

Historically, classrooms have remained largely unchanged for decades, with traditional teaching methods persisting despite technological advancements. Ferster (2014) suggested that if a student from the 19th century walked into a modern-day classroom, they would still recognize its structure and teaching style. This observation holds true, particularly in second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) instruction, where conventional methods often overshadow emerging digital tools. Education, perhaps more than any other field, stands to

benefit from groundbreaking innovation. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea of conducting classes entirely online seemed implausible to many educators (Bunk et al., 2015). Yet, the global crisis forced an abrupt shift to digital platforms, reshaping the way teachers and students engage with learning materials.

Although educators initially faced difficulties regarding online teaching (Le et al., 2022), afterwards they tried to get the advantaged out of it and implement the good parts of the model in teaching (Kim et al., 2022). The unexpected acceleration of digital education has had a lasting impact, reinforcing the idea that innovation in teaching is not just desirable but inevitable (Amit et al., 2022). As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, tools like ChatGPT have the potential to personalize learning, enhance student engagement, and make education more accessible. While challenges remain, particularly concerning over-reliance on technology and ethical considerations, the opportunities AI presents cannot be ignored. The question is no longer whether AI should be integrated into education but how to harness its potential responsibly and effectively.

Problem statement

The present research investigates students' perception on the uses, benefits or inconveniences that ChatGPT has to offer. In order to better understand the students' needs for covering their school challenges and the motivation behind their actions, feedback it's the key provider for what these game-changing tool have to offer. Feedback plays a crucial role in the educational system, fostering student growth and improving learning outcomes. Research indicates that "effective feedback enhances learning more than any other single factor" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Gathering student feedback on their use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, is essential for educators to understand how these technologies impact learning. Research suggests that "student voice is a crucial element in shaping effective teaching practices and ensuring technology is used ethically and productively" (Cook-Sather, 2020, p. 14). By actively seeking input from students, teachers can identify whether AI tools are enhancing critical thinking or being used merely for shortcuts. This feedback allows educators to adapt their teaching strategies, ensuring that technology supports rather than hinders deep learning. Moreover, open discussions about AI usage promote responsible and transparent academic practices, fostering digital literacy in modern classrooms. In order to find the necessary answers I did a sociolinguistic inquiry that had as a research tool a questionnaire. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do secondary school students perceive the usefulness of ChatGPT in learning English?
2. What types of activities do students use ChatGPT for?
3. Does the use of ChatGPT influence students' motivation in language learning? By answering these questions, this research contributes to the understanding of AI's role in education and its potential benefits and limitations.

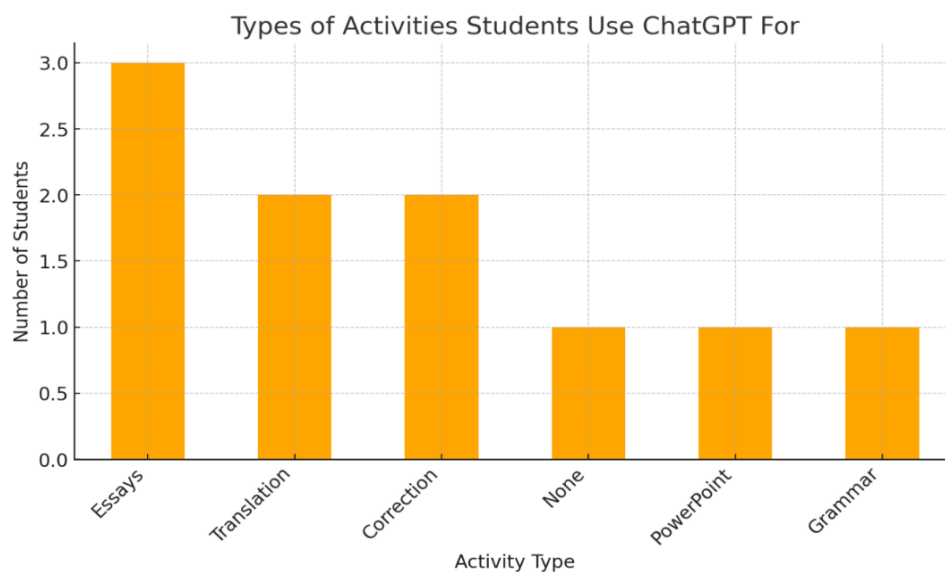
Methodology

A survey was conducted among secondary school students to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions assessing ChatGPT's usefulness, open-ended responses regarding its perceived benefits, and multiple-choice questions about the types of activities students engaged in. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and graphical representations. A number of 80 students answered the questions, all being from the same high school, but different levels.

Findings

Student Usage Patterns

Survey responses indicate that a majority of students, approximately 70%, have used ChatGPT at least occasionally for English learning, while a smaller percentage, around 30%, reported never using it. The primary activities for which students utilized ChatGPT included essay and composition writing assistance (30%), followed by text translation (25%), grammar explanations (20%), PowerPoint presentation help (15%) and conversation practice (10%).



Perceived Usefulness

Students provided varied ratings on ChatGPT's usefulness:

- 30% rated it as very useful (5/5 on the Likert scale);
- 40% found it somewhat useful (3-4/5);
- 30% considered it minimally or not useful (1-2/5).

These results align with studies by Luck in et al. (2022), which suggest that AI tools in education are effective when used as supplements rather than replacements for traditional learning methods.

Motivation and Learning Engagement

When comparing digital learning tools to traditional methods, 60% of students agreed that ChatGPT made learning more engaging, while 40% still preferred conventional textbooks and exercises. 60% of respondents felt more motivated to learn English using digital tools compared to traditional methods. This supports research by Holmes and Tuomi (2023), which highlights the role of interactive AI in enhancing student motivation.

Discussion

The study's findings suggest that while ChatGPT is a valuable tool for many students, it is not universally accepted. Some students feel that relying on AI may hinder their independent thinking and problem-solving skills. Educators should consider integrating AI into the curriculum in a balanced way to ensure it complements rather than replaces traditional learning and also teachers should guide students in using ChatGPT effectively. Results show that a hybrid approach ensures deeper learning. In order to develop students' critical thinking skills we should encourage students to verify AI-generated responses. Moreover, schools should provide training for effective use, to implicate ourselves to educate students on optimizing ChatGPT's potential.

Challenges and Limitations Despite its advantages, students expressed concerns about ChatGPT's limitations. Some found it unreliable for nuanced grammatical explanations, preferring traditional teacher-led instruction (Nguyen, 2023). Others mentioned that ChatGPT's responses occasionally contained factual inaccuracies, aligning with research that highlights the risk of AI-generated misinformation in educational settings (Thompson, 2022).

Additionally, students acknowledged that reliance on ChatGPT for assignments might reduce independent critical thinking skills. This aligns with studies cautioning against overuse of AI tools, which may lead to a decline in problem-solving abilities (Martinez et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This research provides insights into the benefits and limitations of using ChatGPT for English learning. ChatGPT has emerged as a valuable tool in English language education, providing students with real-time assistance and personalized learning opportunities. However, the study highlights the importance of integrating AI in a balanced manner to prevent over-reliance and ensure the development of independent learning skills. Future research should explore the long-term effects of AI-based learning tools on language proficiency and critical thinking and explore best practices for integrating AI into classrooms. While many students find it helpful for grammar, writing, and translation, concerns about over-reliance remain. By adopting the above-mentioned strategies, educators can harness the benefits of AI while mitigating its limitations, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded and effective learning experience.

Since we are surrounded by digital natives, meaning our students, we should adapt to technology in general, not only in the classroom, taking into account that nowadays we can do things using technology that we could not have done before and the things that we have already done have become easier using technology. We should avoid staying in the Luddites zone, those who opposed to technological improvement, and create a positive relationship with digital technology. Technology can enhance the quality of learning and offer greater advantages for both students and teachers

References

- Amit, S., Karim, R., & Kafy, A. A. (2022). Mapping emerging massive open online course (MOOC) markets before and after COVID-19: A comparative perspective from Bangladesh and India. *Spatial Information Research*, 30(5), 655-663. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41324-022-00463-4>
- Brown, L., et al. (2021). Adaptive learning technologies. *Education & AI Review*.
- Bunk, J., Li, R., Smidt, E., Bidetti, C., & Malize, B. (2015). Understanding faculty attitudes about distance education: The importance of excitement and fear. *Online Learning*, 19(4), n4. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1079611>
- Evans, M. (2021). Digital learning strategies. *International Review of Education*.
- Ferster, B. (2014). *Teaching machines: Learning from the intersection of education and technology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Garcia, M., & Lin, D. (2022). Chatbots in language learning. *Applied Linguistics Journal*.

- Grant, N., & Metz, C. (2022, December 21). A new chat bot is a 'code red' for Google's search business. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/21/technology/ai-chatgpt-google-search.html>
- Hernandez, S., & Kim, J. (2023). Vocabulary expansion through AI. *Educational Linguistics*.
- Holmes, W., & Tuomi, I. (2023). *AI in Education: Challenges and Opportunities*. Oxford University Press.
- Hutchby, I., & Moran-Ellis, J. (2001). *Children, technology and culture: The impacts of technologies in children's everyday lives (1st ed.)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315011387>
- Johnson, R., & Miller, T. (2022). Personalized learning with AI. *International Journal of AI in Education*.
- Kim, K. J. (2022). Moving forward: embracing challenges as opportunities to improve medical education in the post-COVID era. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01451-7>
- Lee, P. (2023). Risks of AI in education. *Journal of Digital Learning*.
- Le, V. T., Nguyen, N. H., Tran, T. L. N., Nguyen, T. L., Nguyen, A. T., & Nguyen, M. T. (2022). The interaction patterns of pandemic-initiated online teaching: How teachers adapted. *System*, 105, 102755. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102755>
- Lopez, A. (2021). AI in lexical acquisition. *Journal of Language Technology*.
- Luckin, R., et al. (2022). *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Martinez, C., et al. (2023). Critical thinking and AI. *Cognitive Learning Studies*.
- Nguyen, H. (2023). AI versus traditional teaching. *Education Research Quarterly*.
- Roberts, J. (2023). Balancing AI and teacher instruction. *Pedagogical Innovations*.
- Smith, J., et al. (2023). The impact of AI in education. *Journal of Educational Technology*.
- Taylor, D. (2022). The ethics of AI in education. *Educational Policy Review*.
- Thompson, B. (2022). Misinformation in AI learning. *AI & Society*.
- Williams, K., et al. (2022). Conversational AI for English learners. *Language Learning Journal*.
- Zhang, Y., & Patel, R. (2021). AI-assisted writing tools. *Computers in Education*.