

EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF CHATGPT IN EFL WRITING: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study explores the potential pedagogical benefits and challenges of incorporating ChatGPT, an advanced AI language model, into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing exercises, focusing on students' perceptions. Conducted with 20 Vietnamese EFL students from two higher education institutions, the research employed a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. The theoretical frameworks of Constructivist Learning Theory and the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) underpinned the analysis. The findings revealed several benefits of using ChatGPT, including enhanced engagement in writing exercises, improved writing skills, increased learner autonomy, and exposure to diverse language uses. These benefits align with constructivist principles of active learning and TAM's emphasis on perceived usefulness and ease of use. However, challenges were also noted, including an over-reliance on technology, concerns about the accuracy and appropriateness of the AI-generated content, limitations in creative expression, and ethical and privacy issues. These challenges highlight the need for balanced integration of AI in language learning and careful consideration of its pedagogical implications. Given the limitations of the study, such as the small and homogenous sample size and the sole use of qualitative methods, future research is recommended to include a larger, more diverse population and to employ quantitative methods for a more comprehensive understanding. Comparative studies on different AI tools and their long-term effects, as well as investigations into the perspectives of other stakeholders, are also suggested. This research underscores the transformative potential and challenges of integrating ChatGPT in EFL writing, advocating for a nuanced approach to harnessing AI in education.

Keywords: *Challenges, ChatGPT, EFL writing, opportunities, students perceptions, Vietnamese higher education*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational contexts, particularly in language learning, has been a growing field of interest (Chen et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2023). Among the various AI tools available, ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI, has gained significant attention for its potential application in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing exercises. The integration of AI technologies like ChatGPT into educational settings marks a transformative shift in how language learning is approached, offering new opportunities for personalized and interactive learning experiences. However, it also presents challenges that need to be addressed, such as ensuring equitable access and maintaining the quality of human-centric educational values. This study underscores the importance of a balanced approach to leveraging AI in education, one that enhances learning outcomes while

safeguarding the principles of inclusive and comprehensive education. Therefore, this study aims to explore the pedagogical benefits and challenges of incorporating ChatGPT into EFL writing exercises from the perspective of the learners themselves (Bok & Cho, 2023; Song & Song, 2023).

Language learning, especially in EFL contexts, has long been focused on developing proficiency in the four key skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Writing, however, poses unique challenges due to its complex nature involving syntax, semantics, and the need for creative expression (Ningsih et al., 2021; Subandowo & Sárdi, 2023). The advent of AI-based tools like ChatGPT offers an innovative avenue for language educators to enhance the learning experience. ChatGPT, with its advanced language processing capabilities, can assist students in generating ideas, structuring sentences, and even correcting grammatical errors (Alawida et al., 2023). Therefore, this could potentially lead to an enriched learning environment where students feel more supported and empowered in their writing endeavors.

However, the incorporation of such AI tools in educational settings is not without its challenges. For instance, a case study revealed that Arabian students tended to over-rely on AI for problem-solving, which diminished their engagement in deeper learning processes (Alharbi & Khalil, 2023). Similarly, in an Asian context, educators raised concerns about the authenticity of AI-generated responses in literature classes, questioning whether such content could truly capture the nuances of human emotion and cultural specificity (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Additionally, a European study highlighted the challenge of integrating AI in schools with limited digital infrastructure, suggesting that disparities in technological access could exacerbate educational inequalities (Gabriel et al., 2022). Concerns about over-reliance on technology (Elbanna & Armstrong, 2024), the authenticity of AI-generated content (Elkhatat et al., 2023), and the potential impact on students' critical thinking and creativity (Guo & Lee, 2023) are prevalent. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these tools in different cultural and educational contexts is yet to be fully understood.

This study, therefore, focuses on the students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in their EFL writing exercises. It seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) what are the perceived benefits of using ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises? and 2) what challenges do students face when incorporating ChatGPT into their writing process?

By centering the study around students' perceptions, it aims to provide insights into the practical application of AI in language learning and contribute to the broader discourse on the role of technology in education. Thus, this investigation is crucial for understanding the potential of AI tools like ChatGPT in shaping future language learning methodologies and curriculums.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pedagogical Benefits of AI in Language Learning

Several studies have highlighted AI's role in improving writing skills. AI tools like ChatGPT offer immediate feedback, which is crucial for language learners (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). This instant feedback mechanism can lead to improvements in grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing structure (Lingard, 2023; Song & Song, 2023). Research by Delgado et al.

(2020) emphasizes how AI tools foster learner autonomy. They enable students to explore language learning independently, outside the traditional classroom setting. AI's interactive nature is found to increase student engagement and motivation (Nazari et al., 2021). The novelty and technological aspects of tools like ChatGPT often result in higher levels of interest among students. AI tools provide exposure to various dialects and cultural nuances of the English language, which can be beneficial for EFL students (Baskara, 2023; Farrelly & Baker, 2023). Thus, the literature collectively underscores the multifaceted impact of AI in education, demonstrating how tools like ChatGPT not only enhance writing skills through immediate feedback but also foster learner autonomy, increase engagement and motivation, and expose students to the rich diversity of dialects and cultural nuances within the English language.

Challenges of Using AI in Language Learning

A growing concern is the over-reliance on AI tools for language learning. Lee et al. (2024) argued that excessive dependence can hinder the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in language learners. The accuracy of AI-generated content is not always guaranteed. Studies by Baidoo-Anu and Ansah (2023) and Chiu et al. (2023) have shown instances where AI tools provided incorrect or inappropriate language suggestions. There is a risk that the use of AI in language learning could limit students' creative expression. As Barrett and Pack (2023) pointed out, reliance on AI-generated responses may impede the development of students' own writing styles. The use of AI in education also raises ethical and privacy concerns, particularly in terms of data security and the consent to use student data for AI learning (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). Hence, the existing research has revealed growing apprehensions about the potential downsides of AI in language learning, highlighting how excessive reliance may stifle critical thinking and creativity, with instances of inaccurate content further complicating learning, alongside ethical and privacy concerns related to data security and consent.

Students' Perceptions of AI in EFL Writing Exercises

Central to this literature review is the examination of students' perceptions of using AI tools like ChatGPT in EFL writing. Studies show mixed reactions; while some students appreciate the instant feedback and guidance (Nazari et al., 2021), others express concerns about the loss of traditional learning elements and over-reliance on technology (Tokayev, 2023).

In summary, the literature presents a multifaceted view of the role of AI in EFL writing exercises. While there are clear benefits in terms of enhanced writing skills, engagement, and autonomous learning, challenges related to dependency, accuracy, creativity, and ethical considerations cannot be overlooked. Understanding students' perceptions is crucial in addressing these challenges and harnessing the benefits of AI in EFL education.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the pedagogical benefits and challenges of incorporating ChatGPT into EFL writing exercises, focusing on students' perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). At the heart of this inquiry are semi-structured interviews, which offer a balance between guided questions and the flexibility for participants to express their views in depth. This approach is particularly suited to understanding the nuanced perspectives and experiences of students in an educational setting influenced by an emerging technology like ChatGPT.

This study is anchored in two primary theoretical frameworks that provide a comprehensive basis for understanding the integration of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. The first framework is the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed by learners as they interact with their environment (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory is particularly pertinent to our study as it sheds light on how students might assimilate and interpret new information and skills they acquire while interacting with AI tools like ChatGPT. It suggests that the learning process is active and subjective, with students building their understanding based on their experiences with the technology.

The second theoretical framework guiding this study is the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM is instrumental in evaluating how students perceive and engage with technology, particularly in educational settings (Davis, 1985). It posits two main factors that influence the adoption and effective use of a technological tool: its perceived ease of use and its perceived usefulness. In the context of this study, TAM is applied to explore how students perceive the user-friendliness and practicality of ChatGPT, specifically in enhancing their EFL writing skills. By evaluating these perceptions, the study aims to understand the extent to which students are willing to accept and integrate this AI technology into their learning process. Together, these two frameworks provide a multifaceted lens through which the complexities of integrating AI in language learning can be understood and analyzed.

Participants

In this study, the participant selection was meticulously undertaken to encapsulate a wide-ranging representation of students engaging with ChatGPT in their EFL exercises. The research encompassed a total of 20 Vietnamese EFL students, who were drawn from two distinct higher education institutions in Vietnam. This strategic choice was made to ensure a broad spectrum of experiences and backgrounds in the context of using AI tools like ChatGPT in language learning. The sample was balanced in terms of gender, comprising 10 female and 10 male students. This gender parity was crucial for obtaining a comprehensive and unbiased understanding of the different perspectives and experiences related to the use of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. By including students from two separate institutions, the study aimed to capture the potential variations in student experiences that could arise due to differences in institutional cultures and available resources. This variety in the participant group was essential for gaining a holistic view of the impact and perception of AI integration in EFL education across different educational settings.

In conducting this research, ethical considerations were given paramount importance. Prior to the commencement of the study, all participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose and nature of the research, and informed consent was obtained. This consent process included assurances of confidentiality and anonymity to protect the identity and privacy of the participants. The participants were also informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Special attention was paid to ensure that the data collection and analysis processes adhered to ethical guidelines, respecting the dignity and rights of all participants. This ethical rigor not only ensures the integrity of the research process but also reinforces the credibility of the findings derived from this study.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, designed to elicit in-depth responses from participants regarding their experiences with using ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. The interview protocol consists of 10 carefully crafted questions, distributed across five key areas to ensure a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences. This meticulous distribution aimed to facilitate a broad examination of the subject matter, covering aspects such as the practical application of ChatGPT in writing exercises, assessing the frequency and contexts in which ChatGPT was employed. The interviews also probed into the perceived benefits of using ChatGPT, focusing on its impact on enhancing grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing structure. To ensure a balanced view, questions were designed to unearth the challenges and limitations encountered by learners, including the accuracy of AI-generated content and integration hurdles. Additionally, the interviews sought personal anecdotes and subjective feedback to understand ChatGPT's influence on creativity, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. The final segment of questions addressed ethical and privacy concerns, touching on data security and the consent issues related to employing AI tools in education. This structured approach to the interviews aimed to derive a nuanced insight into ChatGPT's role in EFL writing exercises, ensuring a thorough exploration of all pertinent experience dimensions. Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted with a small subset of participants. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the effectiveness and clarity of the interview questions and to make necessary revisions. Based on feedback from the pilot study, the interview questions were refined to better capture the nuanced perspectives of the students. Some of the revised interview questions included inquiries such as, "How do you feel ChatGPT has influenced your writing skills in English?" and "Can you describe any challenges you have faced while using ChatGPT for your writing exercises?"

Each interview was conducted in a setting that was comfortable and convenient for the participants, often within quiet areas of their respective institutions, to ensure a conducive environment for open and honest dialogue. The lengths of the interviews varied, but they typically lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, providing ample time for participants to elaborate on their experiences and thoughts. To ensure ease of communication and accuracy in conveying personal opinions, all interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of the participants. This choice was crucial as it allowed the participants to express

themselves more freely and accurately, without the potential language barrier that might arise when using a second language. For the subsequent analysis, the interview responses were translated into English, with care taken to preserve the original meaning and context of the participants' statements. This process ensured that the data analysis was grounded in an accurate and authentic representation of the participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews in this study was conducted using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun et al., 2023). This approach allowed for a flexible and detailed exploration of the dataset, providing a rich and complex account of the participants' experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT in their EFL writing exercises.

The process of thematic analysis began with a meticulous review of the interview transcripts. Each transcript was read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the depth and breadth of the content. Initial codes were generated by noting down recurrent ideas, concepts, and patterns of meaning that appeared across the interviews. These initial codes were then collated into potential themes, carefully examining how they formed a coherent pattern that captured significant aspects of the data.

Subsequently, these themes were reviewed and refined. This stage involved checking the themes against the dataset to ensure they accurately represented the interview responses. Themes were then defined and named, which involved a detailed analysis of each theme and the overall story they told about the data. This naming and defining of themes were crucial in providing a clear and concise description of what each theme represented and how they related to the research questions.

The thematic analysis was both an iterative and reflective process, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences and perspectives. The resulting themes provided a nuanced understanding of the students' perceptions, the benefits and challenges they encountered while using ChatGPT in their EFL writing practices, and the broader implications for the use of AI in language learning. This methodological approach was fundamental in drawing meaningful insights from the qualitative data, thereby contributing significantly to the understanding of the integration of AI tools like ChatGPT in educational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Benefits

Enhanced Engagement in Writing Exercises

A significant finding from this study was the enhanced engagement in writing exercises reported by the participants. Out of the 20 interviewees, 15 (8 females and 7 males) explicitly mentioned experiencing increased engagement and interest in their EFL writing tasks after incorporating ChatGPT. This finding was particularly illustrated by the excerpts from the

participants' interviews. For instance, a female participant noted, "Using ChatGPT made writing exercises more interactive and less monotonous. I found myself looking forward to these sessions." Similarly, a male participant expressed, "The AI tool turned writing from a solitary task into something more dynamic. It felt like I was having a conversation, which made it more engaging."

These experiences can be understood through the lens of the Constructivist Learning Theory. The interactive nature of ChatGPT aligns with the constructivist perspective that learning is an active, contextual process. The participants' engagement increased as they were not just passively receiving information but actively interacting with the AI, constructing knowledge through this dynamic exchange. This interaction reflects a key aspect of constructivism, where learning is seen as a process of active engagement with the environment. Furthermore, from the perspective of the TAM, these experiences highlight the perceived usefulness and ease of use of ChatGPT as a learning tool. The participants found ChatGPT helpful in enhancing their writing skills, making the learning process more enjoyable and less intimidating. This perception of usefulness and ease of use, as suggested by TAM, is crucial in determining the acceptance and continued use of technology in educational contexts. The positive responses indicate that the students not only accepted ChatGPT as a part of their learning process but also found it to be an engaging and beneficial tool, thus supporting the effective integration of AI in EFL writing exercises.

Improved Writing Skills

Another key benefit identified in the study was the improvement in writing skills, as reported by a majority of the participants. Of the 20 students interviewed, 17 (9 females and 8 males) specifically mentioned experiencing an enhancement in their writing abilities. This improvement was evident in various aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and overall structure. One female student shared, "My vocabulary has definitely expanded. I am using words and phrases I would not have thought of before using ChatGPT." A male participant echoed this sentiment, stating, "My grammar and sentence structures have improved. The AI prompts me to correct errors and suggests better ways of phrasing my ideas."

These improvements in writing skills can be analyzed through the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learners construct their knowledge through experiences. In this context, the interaction with ChatGPT provided a practical, hands-on experience for students to refine their language skills. By receiving immediate feedback and suggestions from the AI, students were actively involved in the learning process, constructing and reconstructing their understanding of the English language. From the TAM perspective, the improvement in writing skills can be attributed to the perceived usefulness of ChatGPT in the learning process. The students recognized ChatGPT as an effective tool for enhancing their language proficiency, which in turn motivated them to utilize the technology more extensively in their writing exercises. This perception of usefulness is a critical factor in TAM, influencing the students' acceptance and engagement with the technology. The positive feedback and noticeable improvements in their writing skills reinforced their belief in the

utility of ChatGPT, leading to a more sustained and effective use of this AI tool in their EFL education.

Fostering Learner Autonomy

A notable benefit that emerged from the study was the fostering of learner autonomy, as mentioned by 14 participants (7 females and 7 males). These students highlighted how using ChatGPT in their EFL writing exercises empowered them to take more control over their learning process. A female participant described her experience: “I started exploring topics and writing styles independently. ChatGPT was like a guide, but I was making the decisions.” Similarly, a male student stated, “It allowed me to learn at my own pace, test out ideas, and see immediate results, which made me feel more in charge of my learning.”

The Constructivist Learning Theory offers a lens to understand this increase in learner autonomy. According to this theory, learning is an active, self-directed process. The use of ChatGPT aligns with this by providing a platform where students can independently experiment, make decisions, and see the consequences of their actions in real-time. This autonomous exploration is crucial in constructivist learning, as it enables students to construct their understanding based on personal experiences and interactions with the tool. Furthermore, from the perspective of the TAM, the enhancement of learner autonomy can be seen as a result of the perceived ease of use of ChatGPT. The students found the AI tool user-friendly and adaptable to their individual learning styles and needs. This ease of use encouraged them to engage more deeply with the tool, experiment independently, and take more responsibility for their learning outcomes. TAM suggests that when users find a technology easy to use, they are more likely to explore its full potential, leading to a more personalized and autonomous learning experience. Thus, the findings indicate that ChatGPT not only supported the students in improving their language skills but also played a significant role in promoting their autonomy as learners, a key factor in successful language acquisition.

Exposure to Diverse Language Uses

An interesting benefit that emerged from the interviews was the exposure to diverse language uses, as indicated by 12 participants (6 females and 6 males). These students highlighted how ChatGPT provided them with insights into different styles, dialects, and cultural nuances of the English language. One female student remarked, “ChatGPT introduced me to various ways of expressing the same idea, which was fascinating and very educational.” A male participant shared a similar experience, stating, “I was exposed to different English usages, not just what is in textbooks. It made me more aware of the language’s diversity and real-world applications.”

This benefit can be understood through the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning as a process shaped by the learner’s interactions with their environment. In this case, ChatGPT served as an interactive environment that exposed students to a range of linguistic expressions and cultural contexts. This exposure is a crucial aspect of constructivist learning, as it allows students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the language by encountering and engaging with its diverse uses. From the TAM perspective, this exposure to diverse language uses can be seen as an aspect of the perceived

usefulness of ChatGPT. The tool's ability to present various linguistic styles and cultural elements likely enhanced its perceived value as an educational resource. This perception, as suggested by TAM, is crucial for the acceptance and effective use of technology in learning. By providing a broad range of linguistic inputs, ChatGPT not only aided in the practical application of language skills but also enriched the students' learning experience, making it more relevant and engaging. This aligns with TAM's emphasis on the importance of usefulness in determining a user's attitude towards and engagement with a technological tool. Thus, the findings suggest that ChatGPT's ability to offer a window into the diverse aspects of the English language significantly contributed to its acceptance and effectiveness as a learning aid in EFL contexts.

Challenges

Over-Reliance on Technology

One of the challenges that emerged from the study was the concern over students developing an over-reliance on technology, specifically ChatGPT, for their writing tasks. This issue was highlighted by 13 of the 20 participants (7 females and 6 males). They expressed apprehension that continuous dependence on AI for writing assistance could potentially impede the development of independent writing skills. A female student voiced her concern, stating, "Sometimes I feel I am getting too dependent on ChatGPT for ideas and corrections. I worry about how I would manage without it." Echoing this sentiment, a male participant mentioned, "Relying on ChatGPT makes me question if my writing improvements are genuinely my own skills or just the AI's assistance."

This challenge can be analyzed through the lens of the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of learners actively constructing their knowledge. An over-reliance on AI tools like ChatGPT might lead to a more passive learning approach, where students become accustomed to receiving assistance rather than developing their own problem-solving and critical thinking skills. This situation could potentially undermine the fundamental constructivist principle of active and self-directed learning. From the TAM perspective, this challenge reflects concerns about the long-term impact of the perceived ease of use of the technology. While TAM suggests that ease of use is a positive factor in technology adoption, in this case, it may lead to an excessive dependency, where students find the technology so user-friendly and helpful that they become overly reliant on it for their learning tasks. This over-reliance could inadvertently diminish the perceived usefulness of the tool in fostering independent language skills, which is a key component of effective language learning. Thus, addressing the balance between leveraging the benefits of AI tools and nurturing independent language skills emerges as a crucial consideration in the integration of technologies like ChatGPT in educational contexts.

Accuracy and Appropriateness of Content

Another challenge identified in the study was related to concerns about the accuracy and appropriateness of the content provided by ChatGPT. This issue was raised by 10 participants (5 females and 5 males), who expressed doubts about the reliability of the language suggestions and feedback given by the AI tool. A female student mentioned, "At

times, the suggestions from ChatGPT did not seem accurate, which made me question its reliability.” A male participant shared a similar concern: “I encountered instances where ChatGPT provided responses that were contextually inappropriate or culturally misaligned.”

The Constructivist Learning Theory provides a framework to understand the implications of these concerns. This theory emphasizes the construction of knowledge through interaction with accurate and meaningful experiences. When the accuracy or appropriateness of the content is questionable, it could lead to misconceptions or misunderstandings, potentially hindering the effective construction of language knowledge. This challenge underscores the importance of ensuring that AI tools like ChatGPT offer reliable and contextually relevant content to support constructive learning experiences. From the perspective of the TAM, the concerns about content accuracy and appropriateness directly impact the perceived usefulness of the technology. TAM posits that for technology to be effectively integrated into learning, users must perceive it as beneficial and reliable. When students encounter issues with the accuracy or appropriateness of the AI-generated content, it can diminish their trust in the tool and reduce its perceived utility. This reduction in perceived usefulness can, in turn, affect the students’ willingness to use the technology and their overall learning experience. Therefore, ensuring the accuracy and appropriateness of the content provided by AI tools like ChatGPT is critical for maintaining students’ trust and the effective implementation of such technologies in educational settings.

Limited Scope for Creative Expression

The study also identified a challenge related to the limited scope for creative expression when using ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. This concern was voiced by 8 of the 20 participants (4 females and 4 males). These students felt that relying on AI for writing assistance could potentially restrict their own creative writing processes. One female participant expressed, “While ChatGPT is helpful, I sometimes feel it directs my writing too much, limiting my own creative input.” A male student shared a similar view, “I am concerned that using AI too much might make my writing less original, as I might end up relying on standard responses from the tool.”

This challenge can be examined through the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of personal experience and creativity in learning. The theory advocates for an active, exploratory learning process, where students engage creatively with the material. An over-reliance on AI-generated responses could lead to a more passive learning approach, potentially stifling students’ creative thinking and personal expression, which are vital components of effective language learning and writing development. From the perspective of the TAM, this issue touches on the balance between the perceived ease of use and the tool’s impact on the learning process. While ChatGPT may be easy to use and helpful in certain aspects of writing, its influence on students’ originality and creative expression is a concern. If students perceive that their creative autonomy is being compromised, this could negatively impact their overall perception of the tool’s usefulness in the learning process. It highlights the need for careful integration of AI tools like ChatGPT in educational settings, ensuring that they support rather than replace the creative aspects of

learning and writing. Addressing this challenge involves fostering an environment where AI tools are used as aids to enhance learning, not as substitutes for the students' own creative and critical thinking skills.

Ethical and Privacy Concerns

The study further revealed concerns regarding ethical and privacy issues associated with the use of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. This challenge was brought up by 6 of the 20 participants (3 females and 3 males), who expressed apprehension about how their data and interactions with the AI tool were being handled and stored. A female participant voiced her concerns, stating, "I am not sure how my data, like my writing samples and the feedback I get, is being used or who has access to it." Similarly, a male participant mentioned, "I worry about the privacy of my work. Is it confidential, or can it be accessed by others without my consent?"

These concerns align with ethical considerations highlighted in the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of a safe and secure learning environment. For effective constructivist learning, students need to feel confident that their educational interactions are private and protected. When concerns about data privacy and ethical use arise, it can create an environment of distrust, which may hinder the open and explorative nature of the learning process. From the perspective of the TAM, ethical and privacy concerns impact the perceived ease of use and usefulness of the technology. If students are worried about their privacy and the ethical implications of using an AI tool like ChatGPT, they may be less inclined to fully engage with it, affecting its overall effectiveness as a learning aid. The model suggests that for technology to be accepted and effectively integrated into educational practices, users must trust that it is safe and that their personal information is secure.

Discussion

Benefits

The findings of this study on the incorporation of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises among Vietnamese students provide both corroborations and contrasts with existing literature, offering new insights into the field of AI-assisted language learning. A significant similarity with previous studies is the enhanced engagement in writing exercises, which aligns with research emphasizing the role of AI in increasing student motivation and interest (Nazari et al., 2021). The active, interactive learning experience reported by our participants, as framed by the Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), reinforces the notion that AI tools can transform learning from a passive to an active process. However, this study extends the existing literature by specifically highlighting how ChatGPT, as an AI conversational agent, changes the nature of EFL writing from a solitary to a more dynamic activity. This aspect, coupled with insights from TAM (Davis, 1985), underlines the importance of interactivity in AI applications for educational purposes, a dimension that has not been extensively explored in previous studies.

The improvement in writing skills reported by participants is consistent with findings from studies like those by Lingard (2023) and Song and Song (2023), which noted similar

advancements in language skills due to AI tool usage. What sets this study apart is the detailed exploration of how ChatGPT aids in this improvement. The study delves deeper into the constructivist aspects of learning, where AI is seen not just as a tool for correction but as a means of enabling experiential learning. This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of how AI tools contribute to skill development, moving beyond the general observations of previous research.

The finding on learner autonomy contributes a new dimension to the existing literature. While the role of technology in promoting independent learning has been discussed (Delgado et al., 2020), this study provides specific insights into how ChatGPT, as an AI tool, empowers students to take charge of their learning. This aligns with the Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) but goes further by showing how AI can facilitate this process in a language learning context. The connection between the ease of use, as highlighted in TAM (Davis, 1985), and autonomy, offers a fresh perspective on how technology adoption impacts learner independence.

Finally, the exposure to diverse language uses is a unique contribution of this study. While previous research has touched upon the cultural and linguistic exposure provided by AI tools (Baskara, 2023; Farrelly & Baker, 2023), this study specifically identifies how ChatGPT offers a range of linguistic styles and cultural nuances, enriching the learning experience. This finding bridges a gap in the literature by demonstrating how an AI tool can function as a medium for cultural and linguistic immersion, an aspect that has been less explored in earlier studies.

Challenges

The challenges identified in this study related to the use of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises among Vietnamese students provide important insights when compared to existing literature, highlighting several unique aspects and contributions. The concern over an over-reliance on technology echoes findings in other studies, such as Lee et al. (2024), which also noted the potential dependency on AI tools in educational settings. However, this study offers a deeper understanding of how such dependence might impact the constructivist learning process by leading to a more passive approach. This insight, particularly in the context of an AI conversational tool like ChatGPT, underscores the need for a balanced approach to technology integration, a concern less emphasized in previous research. The findings from the TAM perspective, developed by Davis (1985), further contribute to the discourse by highlighting how perceived ease of use could inadvertently lead to dependency, offering a new angle to the ongoing debate on technology's role in education.

While concerns about the accuracy and appropriateness of AI-generated content have been raised in past studies (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023; Chiu et al., 2023), this study uniquely frames these concerns within the constructivist learning paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978). It emphasizes the impact of unreliable content on the construction of language knowledge, adding depth to the understanding of how AI accuracy affects the learning process. Additionally, from a TAM perspective (Davis, 1985), the study highlights how such concerns

can diminish the perceived usefulness of AI tools, contributing to the broader understanding of technology acceptance in educational contexts.

The challenge of limited creative expression due to reliance on AI aligns with concerns raised in previous literature (Barrett & Pack, 2023). However, this study extends this discussion by exploring how this limitation impacts students' active engagement in the constructivist learning process. It offers a novel perspective on the potential of AI tools to overshadow student creativity, a concern that has not been extensively explored in the context of EFL learning with AI tools. The study also contributes to TAM literature by examining how the tool's impact on creative expression influences its overall perceived usefulness and acceptance.

Ethical and privacy concerns in the context of AI in education have been a growing area of focus (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). This study contributes to this field by specifically examining these concerns in the use of ChatGPT for language learning. The findings highlight how ethical and privacy issues can affect the constructivist learning environment and students' trust in the technology, as viewed through TAM. This focus on data privacy and ethical use in the specific context of AI-assisted language learning presents a nuanced addition to the existing body of research on the ethical dimensions of educational technology.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the potential pedagogical benefits and challenges associated with incorporating ChatGPT into EFL writing exercises, focusing on the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL students. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 students from two higher education institutions in Vietnam. The interviews comprised a total of 10 questions, thoughtfully constructed to cover several key aspects including the usage and implementation of ChatGPT, perceived benefits, challenges and limitations, personal experiences and feedback, and ethical and privacy considerations. These interviews were designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences and were analyzed using thematic analysis, grounded in the Constructivist Learning Theory and the TAM.

The findings revealed several key benefits of using ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises. Students reported enhanced engagement in writing tasks, improved writing skills, fostering of learner autonomy, and exposure to diverse language uses. These benefits align with the principles of constructivist learning, emphasizing active, contextual, and interactive learning processes. From the TAM perspective, these benefits were linked to the perceived ease of use and usefulness of ChatGPT, contributing to its acceptance and effective integration in the educational process. However, the study also uncovered challenges, including over-reliance on technology, concerns about the accuracy and appropriateness of content, limitations in creative expression, and ethical and privacy issues. These challenges highlight the need for a balanced approach in integrating AI tools in education, ensuring that they enhance rather than impede the learning process.

The implications of this study on the use of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises are profound and multifaceted, impacting various stakeholders in the field of language education, including educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. For educators, the study highlights the potential of AI tools like ChatGPT to significantly enhance student engagement, improve writing skills, foster learner autonomy, and expose students to diverse language uses. However, it also underscores the need for educators to integrate these tools judiciously. It is essential for educators to ensure that ChatGPT and similar AI tools are used to complement, not replace, traditional teaching methods. This balanced approach helps in maintaining the richness of conventional language teaching while leveraging the advantages of AI technology.

Curriculum designers can draw valuable insights from the findings regarding the incorporation of AI into language learning curriculums. The study suggests that while AI tools can be beneficial, there is a need for strategies that prevent over-reliance on technology. Curriculum designs should encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills, ensuring that the use of AI is framed within activities that promote independent thought and creativity. This approach helps in preparing students to use AI as a support tool rather than a crutch, thereby enhancing their overall language competence and learning experience.

Policymakers in the education sector can use the findings of this study to inform policy decisions regarding the integration of AI technologies in language education. The study points to the necessity of continuous monitoring and improvement of AI tools to ensure their effectiveness, reliability, and relevance to the educational context. Policymakers should advocate for and support the development of AI applications that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of language learning, prioritizing accuracy and cultural appropriateness.

Furthermore, the study brings to light significant ethical and privacy concerns associated with the use of AI in education. Policymakers must ensure that these concerns are addressed through stringent data protection policies and ethical guidelines governing the use of AI in educational settings. Building trust in the technology is crucial, and this can only be achieved by assuring students and educators that their privacy is protected and that the AI tools are being used responsibly and ethically.

In conclusion, the study contributes to the understanding of the role of AI in language learning, offering insights into both its potential and limitations. As AI continues to evolve, its integration in education should be approached with a balanced perspective, harnessing its benefits while addressing its challenges to create an effective and enriching learning environment.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study, while providing valuable insights into the use of ChatGPT in EFL writing exercises, has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of 20 Vietnamese EFL students, though diverse in terms of gender and institutional backgrounds, is relatively small and limited to two educational institutions. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader EFL student populations or different educational contexts. Additionally, the study relies solely on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews,

which, while rich in detail, may not capture the entire spectrum of student experiences and attitudes. The subjective nature of qualitative data also means that the findings are open to interpretation, and different researchers might draw different conclusions from the same data set. Furthermore, as the study focuses exclusively on ChatGPT, the findings may not be applicable to other AI tools or technologies used in language learning. These limitations suggest the need for caution in extrapolating the study's findings to other contexts or AI applications.

The limitations of this study pave the way for several recommendations for future research in the field of AI-assisted language education. One of the primary limitations was the relatively small and homogenous sample size, consisting of 20 Vietnamese EFL students from only two educational institutions. This constraint potentially affects the generalizability of the findings to a wider population. Future research could address this limitation by involving a larger and more diverse group of participants. Including students from a variety of educational backgrounds and different cultural contexts would enrich the data and enhance the applicability of the findings across different educational settings.

Another limitation was the sole reliance on qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews. While this approach provided in-depth insights into the students' experiences and perceptions, the incorporation of quantitative methods such as surveys or experimental designs could offer additional dimensions of understanding. These methods would allow for the collection of data that can be statistically analyzed, providing a more comprehensive view of the impact of AI tools on language learning. Comparative studies that evaluate the effects of various AI tools in EFL learning would also be beneficial, shedding light on specific features and capabilities that optimize language education. Moreover, investigating the long-term effects of AI tool usage on students' language proficiency and learning habits would contribute valuable insights into the sustainability and long-term impacts of these technologies in educational contexts. Finally, expanding the research to include the perspectives of other stakeholders, like teachers and educational administrators, would offer a more rounded view of the integration of AI in language education. Such holistic research efforts could significantly deepen the understanding of AI's role in language learning and lead to more effective, tailored educational strategies and practices.

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