

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH CHATGPT AS AN ENGLISH LEARNING PARTNER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract. The use of artificial intelligence in English language learning in higher education continues to increase, but understanding of students' perceptions of ChatGPT as an academic learning partner remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT as an English learning partner and its role in supporting independent and academic learning. This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students who had experience using ChatGPT in English learning. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns and meanings within students' experiences. The results indicate that students perceive ChatGPT as an accessible, flexible, and personalized learning partner, supporting learning outside the classroom and creating a low-anxiety learning environment. ChatGPT was deemed effective in improving reading and writing skills through providing linguistic clarification and cognitive support. Furthermore, its use contributed to increased learning autonomy and academic self-confidence. However, students also expressed critical awareness of ChatGPT's limitations, particularly regarding response accuracy and its limited role in supporting speaking skills. Overall, ChatGPT is viewed as a complementary learning partner that supports, but does not replace, conventional English language instruction.

Keywords: ChatGPT, Learning Partner, English Learning, AI-Based Learning

Abstrak. Pemanfaatan kecerdasan buatan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di perguruan tinggi terus meningkat, namun pemahaman mengenai persepsi mahasiswa terhadap ChatGPT sebagai mitra pembelajaran akademik masih terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan ChatGPT sebagai mitra pembelajaran bahasa Inggris serta perannya dalam mendukung proses belajar mandiri dan akademik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap mahasiswa sarjana yang memiliki pengalaman menggunakan ChatGPT dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan makna dari pengalaman mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang ChatGPT sebagai mitra pembelajaran yang mudah diakses, fleksibel, dan sesuai kebutuhan, sehingga mendukung pembelajaran di luar kelas serta menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang minim kecemasan. ChatGPT dinilai efektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan membaca dan menulis melalui pemberian klarifikasi linguistik dan dukungan kognitif. Selain itu, penggunaannya berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan otonomi belajar dan kepercayaan diri akademik mahasiswa. Meskipun demikian, mahasiswa juga menunjukkan kesadaran kritis terhadap keterbatasan ChatGPT, terutama terkait akurasi respons dan perannya yang masih terbatas dalam mendukung keterampilan berbicara. Secara keseluruhan, ChatGPT dipandang sebagai mitra pembelajaran komplementer yang mendukung, namun tidak menggantikan, pengajaran bahasa Inggris konvensional.

Kata Kunci: ChatGPT, Mitra Pembelajaran, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Pembelajaran Berbasis AI

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INTRODUCTION

Development Artificial Intelligence (AI) in several years has brought significant change in system global education. AI does not Again only function as tool administrative, but also starting to play a role directly in the learning and interaction process academically. One of the most prominent forms of AI is a language model generative like ChatGPT which is capable of communicating naturally with users. Technology allows students to get explanations, bait back, and support Study in a way instant. This shows that AI has the potential to become an integral part of ecosystem modern learning (Luckin & Holmes, 2016; Zawacki-richter et al., 2019).

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is a large language model designed for understanding and producing text-based context conversation. In context education, ChatGPT is used to help students understand draft academic, compiling ideas, and solve problem learning. The adaptive and responsive nature of ChatGPT makes it different from system learning based technology previously. This is to push the emergence of the ChatGPT concept as a learning partner, not just tool help passive. Concept in line with approach learning constructivist who emphasizes interaction and reflection actively (Holmes et al., 2019).

In the context of English language education, the concept of an English learning partner refers to a learning entity that actively supports learners through interaction, guidance, and feedback during the learning process. Unlike traditional learning tools that primarily function as information providers, a learning partner facilitates learners' engagement, reflection, and skill development. This concept is closely related to constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active knowledge construction through interaction and dialogue (Holmes et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown that digital and AI-based systems can function as learning partners when they provide adaptive support and promote learner autonomy (Luckin & Holmes, 2016; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In the context of language learning, AI tools have been found to effectively support text-based skills such as reading and writing by offering linguistic clarification and scaffolding (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Bannert et al., 2024). Within this framework, ChatGPT may be positioned as an English learning partner due to its interactive and responsive nature, particularly in supporting students' reading and writing development. Improvement use of ChatGPT by students no can be released from demands increasing learning complex and based technology. Students utilize ChatGPT to various academics, starting from search information until supporting scientific writing. Studies show that students consider ChatGPT as a source of easy learning, accessible and efficient in saving time learning. However, convenience also gives rise to concerns related to dependence, excess and decreased ability to think critically. Therefore, understanding the perception of students

becomes important in evaluating the role of ChatGPT in learning (Bannert et al., 2024).

Perception students to technology learning own influence big to level acceptance and effectiveness its use. Perception positive can push us to use technology optimally, while perception negative potential hinders integration technology in learning. In the context of ChatGPT, students can look at him as a virtual tutor, assistant academic, or even partner's discussion intellectual. How students interpret ChatGPT's role will be determined by how technology is used in the learning process. Therefore, study perception becomes an element crucial in study technology education AI- based (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2019) .

Several studies previously focused on impact use of ChatGPT against results learning and academic productivity. Research results show that ChatGPT can increase understanding concepts and support learning for independent students. However, research that explores subjective and perceptual students in a deep way is still relatively limited. In fact, this aspect is important for understanding dynamic interaction with AI in context learning. This open opportunity For exploration more carry on about the role of ChatGPT as a learning partner (Tlili et al., 2023).

Besides the benefits of academics, the use of ChatGPT also raises issues of ethics and integrity. Concerns related to plagiarism, AI abuse, and degradation of originality work scientifically become the attention of main educators. Students own diverse views to issue this, depending on the level of understanding and experience they have in using ChatGPT. Therefore, it is important to examine how students balance benefits and risks using AI in learning. Approach based perception can help formulate policy greater use of AI proper and ethical (Foltynek et al., 2023).

ChatGPT's role as a learning partner is also closely related with 21st century development skills, such as thinking critically, solving problems and learning independently. If used in a way right, ChatGPT can become supportive reflection and discussion development ability cognitive level high. However, without adequate understanding, the use of ChatGPT can potentially reduce the thought process of deep students.

Therefore, prospective students to role ChatGPT educational need reviewed in a comprehensive way. This study is important for ensuring that AI works as supporters, not substitute for the learning process man (Redecker & Punie, 2017). Based on the description said, this aim is to explore the perception of students towards ChatGPT as a learning partner in the learning process. Focus study directed at how students look at functions, benefits, and challenges use of ChatGPT in academic context. Research This can give a theoretical contribution to study technology education AI- based. In addition, the results are expected to

become a base for educators and institutions in designing ChatGPT integration strategy effectively and ethically. Thus, the use of ChatGPT can support quality sustainable learning in the digital era (Bannert et al., 2024; Zawacki-richter et al., 2019).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' perceptions and experiences of using ChatGPT as a learning partner in academic learning, particularly in English language learning. A qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate for studies aiming to provide a clear and comprehensive description of participants' experiences and perspectives without heavy theoretical abstraction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach enables researchers to capture participants' subjective meanings and interpretations in naturalistic settings. The participants consisted of 40 undergraduate students from various academic majors who had prior experience using ChatGPT for academic purposes. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Recent qualitative research emphasizes purposive sampling as an effective strategy for selecting information-rich participants who can provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016; Guest et al., 2023). Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted online. The use of open-ended questions allows participants to express their perspectives freely, while semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to explore emerging ideas in greater depth. Recent methodological studies highlight that combining multiple qualitative data sources enhances the richness and credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020). The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following contemporary guidelines that emphasize flexibility, reflexivity, and transparency in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, refinement, and reporting. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing responses from questionnaires and interviews, as recommended in recent qualitative research standards (Nowell et al., 2017; Guest et al., 2023).

RESULTS

ChatGPT as an On-Demand and Low-Anxiety Learning Partner

The findings indicate that students perceive ChatGPT as an on-demand learning partner that supports learning beyond classroom boundaries. Interview data show that students frequently use ChatGPT when encountering difficulties during self-study or assignment completion, particularly when access to lecturers or peers is limited. Participants highlighted that ChatGPT enables continuous learning without temporal or spatial constraints, making it a readily accessible source of academic support. Students emphasized the emotional comfort associated with interacting with ChatGPT. Many participants reported feeling less anxious and more confident asking questions through ChatGPT because the interaction is free from judgment and fear of making mistakes. This low-anxiety learning environment encourages repeated questioning and experimentation, which are essential in second language learning. Such findings are consistent with (Klimova et al, 2024), who found that ChatGPT provides a psychologically safe space that reduces language anxiety. From a constructivist perspective, dialogic interaction of this nature supports active knowledge construction through reflection and exploration (Holmes et al., 2019).

Cognitive Scaffolding for Writing and Reading Development

The data show that ChatGPT is predominantly used to support writing and reading activities. Students reported frequent use of ChatGPT when working on essays, paragraphs, and written assignments, particularly to improve grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, vocabulary choice, and idea organization. Several participants described how ChatGPT helps transform fragmented ideas into more coherent and academically appropriate texts. In reading-related tasks, ChatGPT assists students in understanding complex academic texts by paraphrasing difficult passages, explaining unfamiliar terminology, and simplifying dense information. These forms of support enable students to engage more confidently with English academic materials. This pattern aligns with (Bannert et al, 2024) and (Crompton & Burke, 2023), who argue that large language models are especially effective in scaffolding text-based language skills through immediate linguistic clarification. Nevertheless, students consistently noted that ChatGPT provides limited support for speaking and listening skills, indicating that its pedagogical contribution is primarily text-oriented.

Fostering Learner Autonomy and Academic Confidence

Another key theme concerns the role of ChatGPT in fostering learner autonomy. Interview responses indicate that students increasingly rely on ChatGPT to clarify concepts and revise assignments independently, rather than depending solely on lecturers. This shift reflects greater initiative and responsibility in managing learning processes, particularly in English language tasks. Alongside increased autonomy, students reported heightened academic confidence. The ability to verify language use, grammar, and ideas before submission reduced uncertainty and anxiety, especially when completing writing assignments. These findings resonate with (Sujannah et al, 2025), who identified a positive relationship between ChatGPT use and learner autonomy, as well as (Crompton & Burke, 2023), who emphasize the role of AI tools in supporting self-regulated learning. In this context, ChatGPT appears to facilitate learning independence while reinforcing students' confidence in their academic abilities.

Critical Awareness of ChatGPT's Pedagogical Limitations

Despite positive perceptions, students demonstrated critical awareness of ChatGPT's limitations. Interview data reveal that participants recognized the possibility of overly general or inaccurate responses and therefore reported verifying information through other academic sources. This evaluative behavior suggests that students engage with ChatGPT reflectively rather than accepting its outputs uncritically. Students also highlighted ChatGPT's limited effectiveness in tasks requiring direct interaction, such as speaking practice, pronunciation training, and immediate corrective feedback. These findings echo concerns raised by (Dwivedi et al, 2023) and (Foltynek et al., 2023), who caution that generative AI should be used with pedagogical guidance to avoid overreliance and to support the development of critical thinking and communicative competence.

ChatGPT as a Complementary English Learning Partner

The findings position ChatGPT as a complementary English learning partner rather than a substitute for traditional instruction. Participants consistently emphasized that ChatGPT is most effective when integrated with lecturer guidance, classroom interaction, and peer discussion. While ChatGPT is valued for its flexibility, speed, and clarity, human interaction remains essential for deeper explanation, social learning, and oral language development. This balanced perception aligns with previous studies advocating for pedagogically informed integration of AI in education (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Tlili et al., 2023). ChatGPT enhances learning

efficiency and autonomy when used alongside human-centered teaching practices, reinforcing its role as a supportive, rather than substitutive, learning partner.

DISCUSSION

University Students' Experiences with ChatGPT as an English Learning Partner: A Qualitative Study

The findings of this study reveal that students perceive ChatGPT as a meaningful learning partner in academic learning, particularly in English language learning. Rather than viewing ChatGPT merely as a technological tool, participants described it as an interactive support system that facilitates independent learning, reflection, and academic problem-solving. This perception aligns with recent studies suggesting that generative AI tools are increasingly experienced by learners as dialogic learning companions rather than passive information sources (Tlili et al., 2023; Bannert et al., 2024).

One prominent finding is students' perception of ChatGPT as a convenient and accessible learning partner that enables learning beyond formal classroom boundaries. The flexibility to access instant explanations anytime and anywhere supports students' self-directed learning practices. This reflects the growing role of AI in extending learning opportunities outside institutional settings, as highlighted by Crompton & Burke (2023), who argue that AI tools enhance learning continuity and learner agency. The low-anxiety learning environment reported by participants further suggests that ChatGPT functions as a psychologically safe space for inquiry, which is particularly important in second language learning contexts where fear of making mistakes often hinders participation (Klimova et al., 2024).

The findings also indicate that ChatGPT is perceived as particularly effective in supporting text-based language skills, namely writing and reading. Participants frequently relied on ChatGPT to improve grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, idea organization, and comprehension of academic texts. This supports previous research demonstrating that large language models are well-suited to scaffolding writing and reading processes through immediate feedback and linguistic clarification (Bannert et al., 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2023). From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests that ChatGPT serves as a form of cognitive scaffolding that assists learners in navigating complex linguistic tasks, consistent with constructivist views of learning as an active and supported process (Holmes et al., 2019).

Beyond cognitive support, the study highlights ChatGPT's role in fostering learning autonomy and confidence. Participants reported increased initiative, reduced dependence on lecturers, and greater confidence when completing English-related tasks. These findings

resonate with recent studies emphasizing the role of AI-assisted learning environments in promoting autonomous learning behaviors and self-regulated learning strategies (Sujannah et al., 2025; Crompton & Burke, 2023). In this sense, ChatGPT appears to function as an autonomy-supportive learning partner that empowers learners to take greater ownership of their learning processes. Despite these benefits, participants demonstrated critical awareness of ChatGPT's limitations. Concerns regarding the generality and potential inaccuracy of responses indicate that students do not uncritically accept AI-generated information. This reflective stance suggests a level of digital literacy and evaluative judgment that is essential for responsible AI use in education. Similar concerns have been reported in previous studies, which caution that generative AI should be used with pedagogical guidance to avoid overreliance and misinformation (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Foltynek et al., 2023). Furthermore, the perceived ineffectiveness of ChatGPT for speaking and pronunciation practice reinforces the importance of human interaction and feedback in developing oral language skills.

The findings position ChatGPT as a complementary rather than substitutive learning partner. Participants emphasized that the integration of ChatGPT with traditional classroom instruction and peer interaction resulted in more effective learning experiences. This supports existing literature that advocates for a balanced and ethical integration of AI technologies into education, where AI tools enhance but do not replace the pedagogical role of educators (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Tlili et al., 2023). Thus, ChatGPT's effectiveness as a learning partner depends largely on how it is pedagogically framed and supported within the learning environment. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of qualitative research on AI in education by providing nuanced insights into students' lived experiences with ChatGPT as an English learning partner. The findings underscore the importance of viewing AI tools not merely as technological innovations but as socio-pedagogical agents that interact with learners' cognitive, affective, and autonomous learning dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that university students perceive ChatGPT as a supportive and complementary English learning partner rather than a replacement for traditional instruction. Across five interrelated themes, the findings show that ChatGPT is experienced as an on-demand and low-anxiety learning companion, particularly effective in providing cognitive scaffolding for writing and reading, fostering learner autonomy and academic confidence, and supporting self-directed learning beyond classroom boundaries. At the same time, students demonstrate critical awareness of its pedagogical limitations, especially regarding response

accuracy and its limited capacity to support speaking skills. These findings highlight that students engage with ChatGPT reflectively, positioning it as a tool that enhances learning when used judiciously alongside human interaction and instructional guidance.

The study implies that higher education institutions and educators should integrate ChatGPT pedagogically and ethically as a learning support tool that promotes autonomy, confidence, and text-based language development, while maintaining the central role of teachers in facilitating interaction, feedback, and oral language practice. For future research, studies employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs are recommended to examine the impact of sustained ChatGPT use on measurable language outcomes across all skills. Further research could also explore lecturers' perspectives, instructional strategies, and institutional policies to develop comprehensive frameworks for the responsible integration of generative AI in English language education.

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