

EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHATGPT AT SEEU IN NORTH MACEDONIA: POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Era Baliu, PhD Candidate, Prof.Dr. Brikena Xhaferi

Department of English Language and Literature, South East European University, North Macedonia

eb28974@seeu.edu.mk

b.xhaferi@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract: *This study examines students' views and experiences regarding the use of ChatGPT at South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia, focusing on its benefits and challenges. A review of existing literature highlights the increasing interest in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT in educational settings, emphasizing their potential to support language learning, offer personalized feedback, and boost student engagement. However, concerns are also raised about the possible drawbacks of AI in education, including the risk of over-reliance, which might hinder critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Ethical issues, such as academic integrity and the reliability of AI-generated responses, are also frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to writing tasks and assessments. There is additional concern that dependence on AI may limit students' ability to learn independently. The study uses a questionnaire to explore the challenges and benefits of integrating ChatGPT into EFL education. The findings suggest that while students perceive ChatGPT as a useful resource for learning and support its use for specific academic purposes, acceptance varies depending on the task and individual attitudes toward AI in education. The data recommend that ChatGPT should serve as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for independent thought and creativity, and stress the importance of verifying the accuracy of AI-generated content.*

Keywords: *ChatGPT; Students' Perspectives; SEEU; Learning*

1. Introduction

In the era of technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed various sectors, including education around the globe where AI tools are increasingly being integrated to enhance teaching and learning experiences of diverse learners. Among these tools, ChatGPT—a sophisticated language model developed by OpenAI—has gained significant attention for its potential to support language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language at SEEU in North Macedonia. As universities seek to leverage innovative technologies to improve student engagement and learning outcomes, understanding the implications of AI tools like ChatGPT becomes essential for more effective teaching and learning.

The integration of AI in education, especially language learning, offers numerous benefits. First of all, the application of AI can provide personalized feedback and provides immediate support for writing and grammar, which are crucial for

language acquisition. Recent studies have highlighted that AI tools can enhance language learners' motivation and autonomy by offering flexible, self-directed learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting (Lai & Li, 2022). These tools are particularly valuable for EFL learners who often face challenges in practicing English due to limited access to native speakers or immersive language environments.

Despite these advantages, the adoption of AI in language education also presents significant challenges. Concerns have been raised about the potential over-reliance on AI, which could hinder students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Zou & Xie, 2023). Furthermore, issues related to academic integrity and the accuracy of AI-generated content pose ethical dilemmas for educators and students alike. The lack of clear guidelines on the appropriate use of AI tools in academic settings adds to these concerns, making it imperative to explore how students perceive and use these technologies.

However, significant research gaps remain regarding their long-term effectiveness, particularly in higher education contexts, where critical thinking and autonomy are core objectives (Jones et al., 2021; Kumar & Patel, 2020). Concerns are raised about the possible drawbacks of AI in education, including the risk of over-reliance, which might hinder critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Chen & Wang, 2023). Ethical issues, such as academic integrity and the reliability of AI-generated responses, are also frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to writing tasks and assessments (Brown, 2022). Furthermore, little research has explored the specific attitudes of EFL students toward AI tools like ChatGPT, particularly in the Balkans region.

Based on all these opportunities and challenges, this study aims to explore students' perspectives and experiences with using ChatGPT for learning English at South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia. This research is motivated by the need to understand the real-world implications of integrating AI tools into EFL learning, particularly in higher education contexts where digital literacy and academic integrity are critical. By examining students' attitudes, perceived benefits, and potential challenges associated with ChatGPT, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform educators and policymakers on the effective integration of AI in language education. Also, the results of the study will raise students' awareness about all benefits and challenges the use of AI might pose.

The findings of the study present and discuss the results collected from a students' questionnaire highlighting key themes from student responses and offer some recommendations for a more effective use of AI tools in EFL teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

With the rapid developments in technology, teachers around the globe had to integrate different technology tools in the classroom. Recently, with the discovery of the AI model, ChatGPT, there is a need for more research discussing its potential benefits and challenges for both teachers and students. "Artificial intelligence will only add value to the quality of training. There have been lots of arguments around the development of artificial intelligence as having more potential to change higher education than any other technological advancement"

(Akinwalere and Ivanov, 2024, p.3).

Generally, AI has revolutionized language learning by offering adaptive and personalized educational experiences. Tools like ChatGPT provide instant feedback, simulate real-life conversational practice, and assist with writing and grammar corrections, which are crucial for language acquisition (Lai & Li, 2022). Research shows that AI technologies can enhance learner engagement by offering interactive and flexible learning opportunities, making them particularly effective for self-directed learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). Additionally, AI-powered platforms can address the varying proficiency levels of students, offering tailored support that traditional classroom settings may not always provide (Hwang et al., 2020).

Several studies have emphasized the advantages of integrating ChatGPT and similar AI tools into EFL education. For example, ChatGPT can serve as a virtual language partner, enabling students to practice conversational English in a low-pressure environment, which can reduce anxiety and build confidence (Zou et al., 2023). Moreover, the tool's ability to provide immediate corrections and suggestions can significantly improve writing skills, particularly in grammar and vocabulary development (Jia & Yu, 2021). AI tools also encourage autonomous learning, allowing students to engage in language practice beyond the confines of the classroom, thereby fostering lifelong learning skills (Hajar, 2022).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Mai et al. revealed that "a SWOT analysis of the use of ChatGPT in teaching and learning has revealed a spectrum of strengths and promising opportunities, but it also comes with certain weaknesses and threats (2024, p.14).

Despite the promising benefits, the use of AI in language learning presents several challenges. One of the primary concerns is the accuracy of AI-generated content. While ChatGPT can produce coherent and contextually relevant responses, it is not infallible and may sometimes generate incorrect or misleading information (Bender et al., 2021). This raises concerns about students' reliance on AI tools for learning, potentially compromising their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Søgaard, 2022). Furthermore, issues related to academic integrity have been highlighted, particularly in cases where students might misuse AI tools to complete assignments without proper understanding or effort (Gao & He, 2023).

Ethical considerations are also a significant part of the discourse surrounding AI in education. Scholars argue that the widespread use of AI tools could lead to a decline in traditional literacy skills if not properly managed (Selwyn, 2020). Additionally, the lack of clear guidelines and policies regarding AI use in academic settings poses a challenge for educators aiming to maintain academic standards while embracing technological advancements (Jones, 2022).

Understanding students' attitudes towards AI tools like ChatGPT is crucial for their successful integration into educational contexts. Studies indicate that students generally view AI positively, recognizing its potential to enhance language learning through personalized support and interactive practice (Lim & Gruba, 2019). However, some students express concerns about the ethical implications and the potential for over-reliance on AI, which could lead to reduced motivation for independent learning (Zhang & Zhu, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to provide guidance on the effective use of AI to maximize its benefits while addressing students' concerns.

The use of AI tools in higher education, particularly in EFL programs, requires a strategic approach to ensure that technology complements, rather than replaces, traditional teaching methods. Educators are encouraged to integrate AI in a way that supports active learning and critical engagement, thereby preparing students for a digitally driven workforce (Redecker, 2017). Incorporating AI literacy into the curriculum can help students develop the skills needed to critically evaluate AI outputs, promoting ethical use and fostering digital literacy (Blayone et al., 2020). Furthermore, Basic et.al.(2023) conducted a study in academic settings. The results showed that ChatGPT has been shown to help students generate content quickly and improve the quality of their writing by offering suggestions for structure and style. Yet, concerns arise around issues like accuracy, plagiarism, and over-reliance on AI-generated text. Students who relied heavily on ChatGPT produced less authentic text and achieved lower scores compared to those who engaged more critically with the writing process. Also, in their study, Abass et.al.(2024) examined the causes and consequences of generative AI usage among university students. The data collected showed that when students faced higher academic workload and time pressure, they were more likely to use ChatGPT.

The reviewed literature suggests that while AI tools like ChatGPT offer significant potential to enhance EFL learning by providing personalized support and fostering engagement, there are notable challenges related to accuracy, ethics, and student dependence. As AI continues to shape the educational landscape, it is essential to develop clear guidelines and best practices for its use in language learning. Future research should focus on exploring long-term effects of AI integration on language proficiency and student outcomes, as well as developing strategies to balance the benefits of AI with the need for critical and autonomous learning especially in a context like that of North Macedonia.

3. Research Methodology

This research was conducted during the academic year 2023/2024 at SEEU, a multilingual university located in Tetovo, North Macedonia. The study participants are 52 students enrolled in the BA program in English Language and Literature. They cover various nationalities, including Albanians, Macedonians, Turkish, Roma, and others, and represent both genders, male and female.

The research instrument, was the student questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the student questionnaire were ensured through a systematic process grounded in the reviewed literature. The questionnaire, comprising 18 items, was carefully designed to capture key dimensions such as participants' awareness of ChatGPT, its perceived usefulness, associated challenges, and future recommendations for its use. The questionnaire was shared via Google Docs and was analyzed carefully.

The research questions which guide this research are:

How do students perceive the use of ChatGPT for learning purposes?

What are the potential benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in educational contexts?

How do students perceive the usefulness of ChatGPT in their learning process?

4. Results

The main data collection method was a student questionnaire. The aim of the

student questionnaire was to gather insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT for learning purposes and their usefulness.

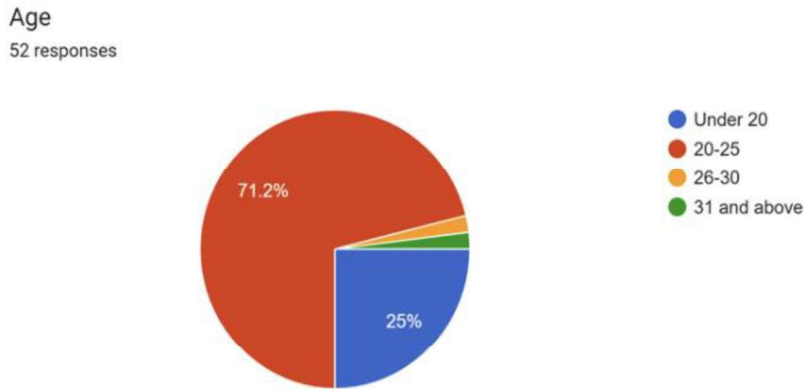


Figure 1: Participants' age

The results in Figure 1 show that 71.2% of the participants are between 20-25 years old, 25% are under 20 years old and the remaining participants are above 26 years old. These findings suggest that the study mainly accounts for a youthful demographic, which may influence the perspectives and experiences shared regarding the research topic.

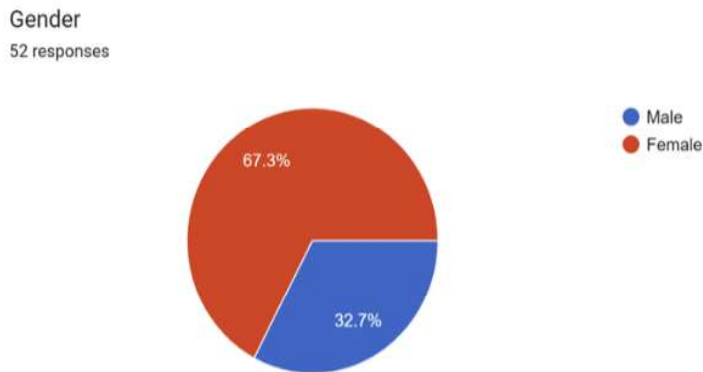


Figure 2: Participants' Gender

The results in Figure 2 show that out of the total number of the study participants 67.3% are female students and 32.7% are male students. The findings reveal a gender imbalance among the participants, with a higher proportion of female students, which is typical for language studies students' gender.

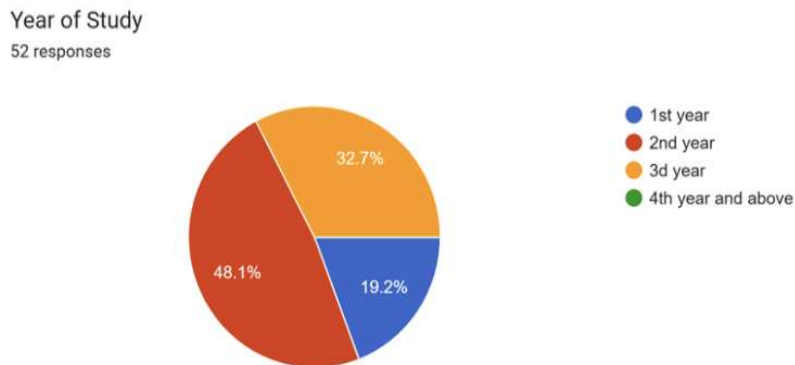


Figure 3: Year of study

Building on the findings from Figure 3, the results indicate that 48.1% are second year students, 32.7% are third year students and 19.2% are first year students. This distribution suggests that the study may primarily reflect the perspectives and experiences of students who are more advanced in their academic journey.

Part 2: Students' general awareness of ChatGPT

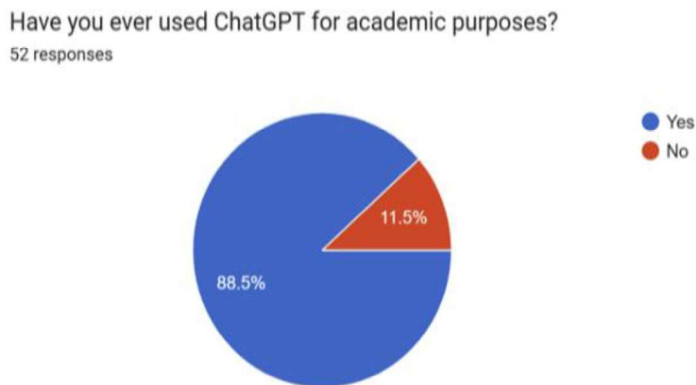


Figure 4: General use of ChatGPT

Analysing the results of Figure 4, it can be concluded that 88.5% of the participants have used ChatGPT for academic purposes while only 11.5% have not used it. These findings suggest a strong trend towards integrating AI into the academic routines of students, which could have significant implications for future teaching methodologies and learning strategies.

If yes, how often do you use ChatGPT for your studies?
52 responses

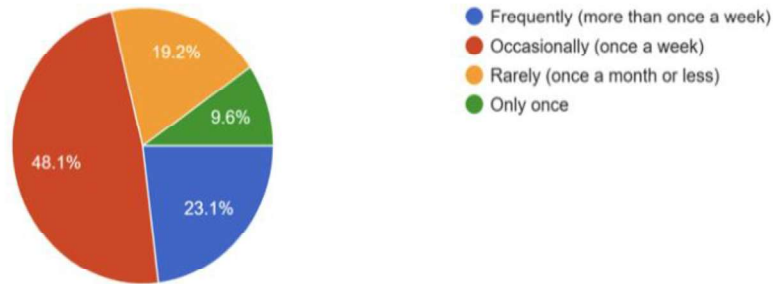


Figure 5: Frequency of ChatGPT use

Based on Figure 5 results, it can be concluded that 23.1% of the participants use ChatGPT frequently, 48.1 % of them use it occasionally, 19.2% of them rarely use it and 9.6% reported to have used it only once. These results highlight the diverse engagement levels with ChatGPT, which could be influenced by different factors.

How would you describe your understanding of how ChatGPT works?
52 responses

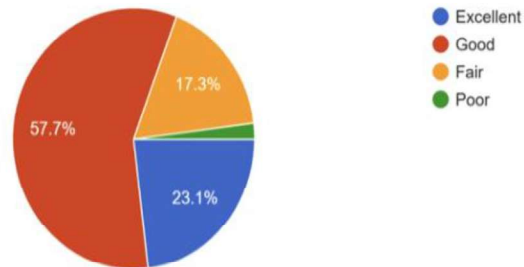


Figure 6. Understanding of how ChatGPT works

Building on the results in Figure 6, it is indicated that 23.1% of the participants have excellent knowledge of how ChatGPT really works, 57.7% have good knowledge, 17.3% fair and only 1.9% have poor knowledge. These findings suggest that the students now only use ChatGPT but they are familiar with its capabilities which could lead to more effective and responsible usage.

Part 3: Perceived usefulness of ChatGPT

a. ChatGPT helps me understand complex topics in my Studies.

52 responses

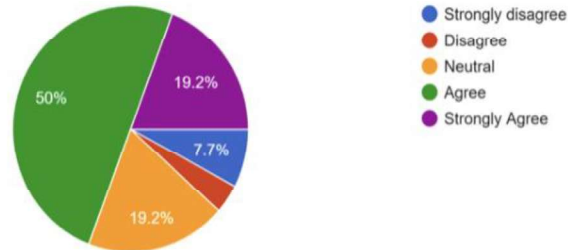


Figure 7: Perceived usefulness of ChatGPT

The findings in Figure 7 show that the majority of participants find ChatGPT helpful in understanding complex topics, with 69.3% agreeing to some extent. Half of the participants (50%) agree, and 19.3% strongly agree. However, there is still a small percentage (3.8%) who strongly disagrees, and 7.7% disagree, suggesting that, for some students, ChatGPT may not be as effective in helping them grasp difficult concepts. The neutrality of 19.2% of participants suggests that while ChatGPT might be beneficial for many, its impact may vary depending on individual needs or expectations.

b. ChatGPT improves my writing skills in English.

52 responses

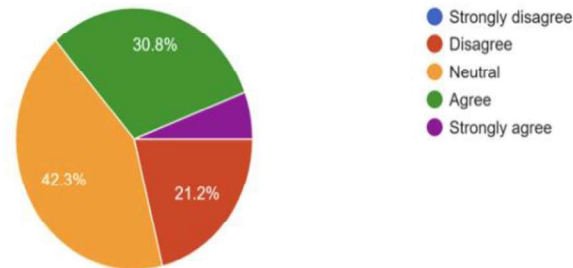


Figure 8: Improvement of writing skills

Figure 8 findings show that 21.2 % of the participants disagree that ChatGPT helps them to improve their writing skills, 42.3% are neutral, while 30.8% of the participants agree, and only a small 5.7% strongly agree. The data highlights the need for more targeted guidance on how to integrate generative AI tools effectively into educational practices to maximize their benefits for student learning.

c. ChatGPT is a reliable source of information.

52 responses

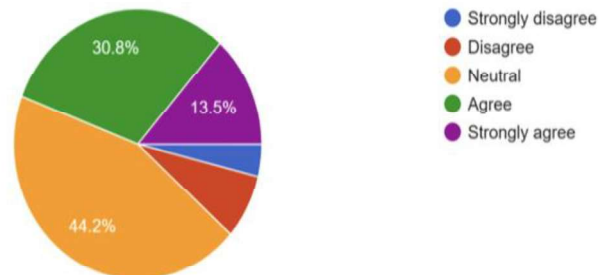


Figure 9: ChatGPT reliability

Building on the results in Figure 9, it can be seen that 13.5% of the participants indicated that they strongly agree that ChatGPT is a reliable source of information, 30.8% agree, which accounts for almost half of them, 44.2% are neutral. On the other hand, 7% of them disagree and only 4.5% strongly disagree. These findings suggest that while a significant number of users recognize the potential of ChatGPT as a reliable information source, there is still a considerable level of scepticism among the participants.

d. ChatGPT saves time when working on assignments.

52 responses

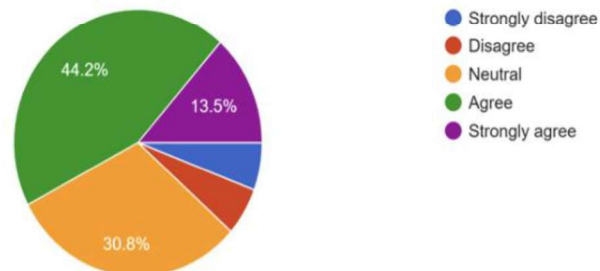


Figure 10: Time spent on assignments

Analysing the results in Figure 10, we note that the participants gave different responses. 13.5% of them strongly agree that ChatGPT saves time when working on assignments, 44.2% agree on this, 30.8% are neutral; 5% disagree and 9.6% of them strongly disagree on this statement. These results suggest a generally positive outlook on ChatGPT's ability to enhance productivity by saving time.

In which of the following areas do you find ChatGPT most useful? (Select all that apply)

52 responses

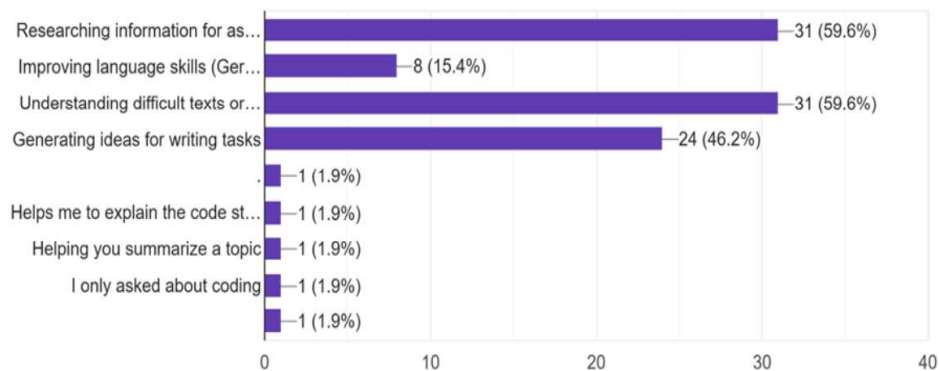


Figure 11:Usefulness of areas

Based on the results presented in Figure 11, 59.6% of the participants reported that they find ChatGPT to be most useful for researching information, similarly, another 59.6% reported to understand difficult texts while 46.2% of them find it most useful to generate ideas for writing tasks. Yet, only 15.4% indicated ChatGPT to be useful for improving language skills. Overall, the data indicate that the participants perceived its usefulness to support research and comprehension particularly in terms of accessing information and simplifying complex texts. However, it is less recognized in developing language skills.

Part 4: Challenges and concerns in using ChatGPT

a. ChatGPT's responses are not always accurate or relevant.

52 responses

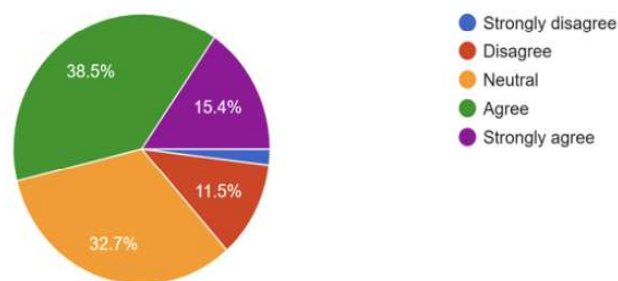


Figure 12: Relevance of ChatGPT responses

Based on Figure 12 results, it is evidenced that 15.4% of the participants strongly agree that ChatGPT responses are not always accurate or relevant, 38.5% agree, 32.7% are neutral, on the other hand, 11.5% perceive the responses of ChatGPT not to be always accurate or relevant. Overall, while ChatGPT is valued for its

convenience and versatility, these findings suggest that users should approach its outputs with caution, ensuring a critical review process to maximize its benefits while minimizing the risk of misinformation.

b. ChatGPT makes me over-reliant on technology for my studies.

52 responses

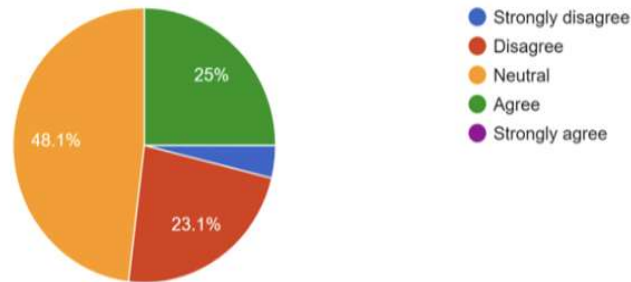


Figure 13: Technology over-reliance

Building on the results of Figure 13, it is evident that 25% participants agree that ChatGPT makes them over-reliant on technology for their study purposes, 48.1% are neutral while 23.1% disagree and a small percent of the participants 3.8% strongly disagree. The data imply that users need to strike a balance in integrating AI tools into their learning process, ensuring they enhance rather than replace independent academic skills.

c. Using ChatGPT hinders my critical thinking skills.

52 responses

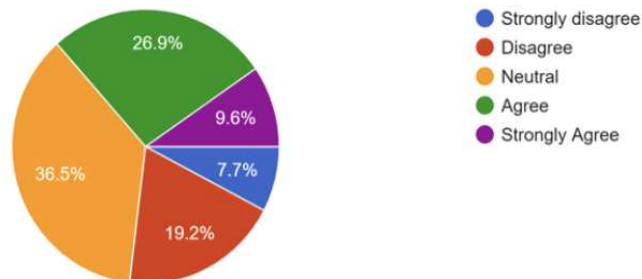


Figure 14: Opinions on critical thinking

Looking at the results presented in Figure 14, one can conclude that 9.6% of the participants strongly agree that ChatGPT hinders their critical thinking, 26.9% agree with it, 36.5% are neutral. However, data show that 19.2% disagree that it hinders critical thinking and 7.7% strongly disagree. The mixed responses likely point to the fact that ChatGPT's impact on critical thinking depends on how it is

used. When used accurately, it may enhance learning, but if over-relied upon, it could risk reducing the effort required for deeper analysis and independent thought.

d. I am concerned about potential ethical issues related to the use of AI tools like ChatGPT.

52 responses

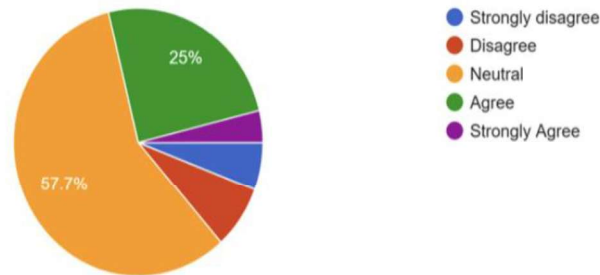


Figure 15: Potential ethical issues

Building on the results presented in Figure 15, it can be concluded that only 3% of the participants strongly agree that he/she is concerned with ethical issues related to the use of ChatGPT, 25% of them agree, surprisingly 57.7% are neutral for this issue. However, 8% of them disagree and 6.5% strongly disagree. The data could reflect a lack of awareness of the ethical implications, or it may indicate that students perceive the tool's benefits as outweighing the potential ethical risks.

Part 5: Challenges faced

What challenges do you face when using ChatGPT? (Select all that apply)

52 responses

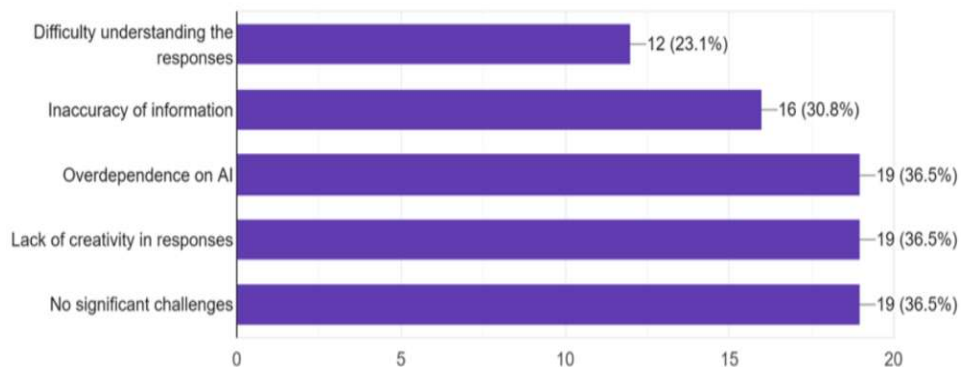


Figure 16: Challenges faced using ChatGPT

Figure 16 results show that 23.1% of participants expressed difficulty in understanding the responses provided by ChatGPT. Additionally, 30.8% of participants expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information provided.

Furthermore, 36.5% of participants indicated that ChatGPT could lead to overdependence on AI and a lack of creativity in responses, while another 36.5% reported seeing no significant challenges. These results highlight the importance of using ChatGPT wisely but as an additional tool rather than to replace independent thinking and creativity, and that all users remain vigilant about verifying the accuracy of AI-generated content.

Part 6: Future Use and Recommendations

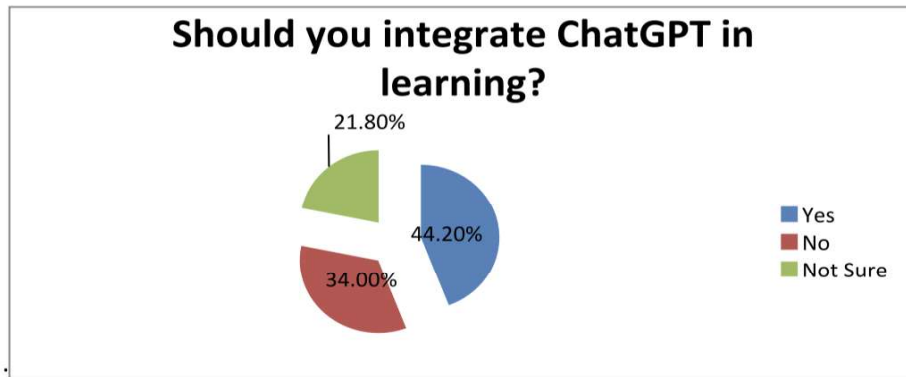


Figure 17: Opinions on future use of ChatGPT

The data presented in Figure 17, 44.2% of the participants indicate that see value in using ChatGPT for learning, suggesting a positive perception of its potential benefits. However, a significant 34.0 % does not recommend it, possibly due to concerns over its limitations or effectiveness in academic contexts. The remaining 21.8% are uncertain, highlighting a degree of ambivalence or lack of clarity regarding the tool's impact on learning. These results suggest that while ChatGPT is regarded positively by many, its widespread adoption in educational settings may depend on addressing concerns and ensuring that its use aligns with effective learning practices.

What role do you think ChatGPT should play in future academic work? (Select all that apply)

52 responses

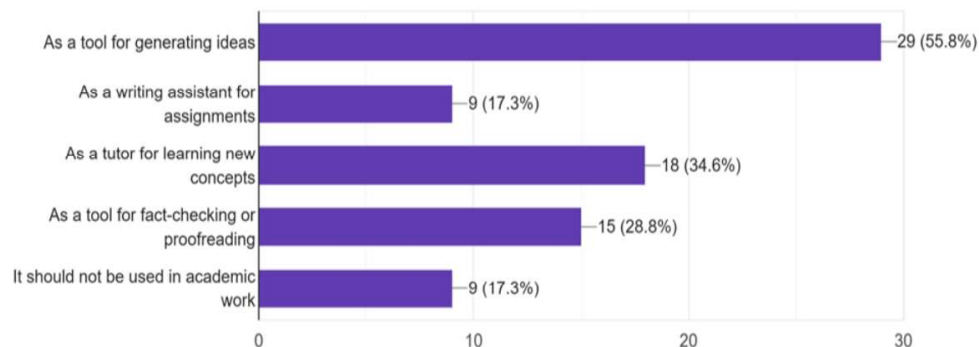


Figure 18: The role of ChatGPT in the future

Analyzing the results presented in Figure 18, 55.8% of participants believe that ChatGPT should be used in academic work as a tool for generating ideas, 34.6% view it as a tutor for learning new concepts, 28.8% find it useful for fact-checking and proofreading, and 17.3% consider it a writing assistant for assignments. However, 17.3% of participants indicated that ChatGPT should not be used in academic work at all. These findings highlight that while there is strong support for using ChatGPT in certain academic tasks, its acceptance may vary depending on the specific function and different users' attitudes toward AI in education.

Conclusion

This study examined students' awareness and experiences with ChatGPT in academic work, highlighting its benefits and challenges. While students frequently use ChatGPT, many lack a deep understanding of how it functions and question its effectiveness in aiding complex problem-solving, improving writing skills, or serving as a fully reliable information source. The tool is generally perceived as helpful for understanding challenging topics, though opinions on its effectiveness vary, reflecting individual learning preferences. Participants value ChatGPT for generating ideas, fact-checking, proofreading, and learning new concepts, yet concerns about over-reliance, misinformation, and reduced critical thinking persist. Ethical issues, such as the accuracy and reliability of AI-generated content, and the risk of stifling creativity, further underscore the need for cautious integration. While some students view ChatGPT as a productivity-enhancing resource, others are skeptical about its broader educational utility. The findings suggest that ChatGPT should complement, not replace, independent thinking and creativity. As its adoption in education grows, regular feedback from students and educators will be essential to refine its use and ensure it meets diverse learning needs. Future research should explore ways to optimize ChatGPT for areas like language skill development and expand its potential across educational contexts.

References:

1. **Abass, M., Jam, F. A., Khan, T. I.** (2024). Is it harmful or helpful? Examining the causes and consequences of generative AI usage among university students. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-024-00444-7>
2. **Akinwalere, N.S. and Ivanov, T.S.**(2022). Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education:Challenges and Opportunities. *Border Crossing*. 12(1).1-15.
3. **Basic, M., et al.** (2023). Exploration of ChatGPT in Basic Education: Advantages, Disadvantages, and Its Impact on School Tasks. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 16(3), Article ep511. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/14615>
4. **Bender, E. M., et al.** (2021). On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?. *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*.
5. **Blayone, T., et al.** (2020). Digital Competence for Educators: Competence Framework and Education Technology Certification. *Journal of Educational Technology*.

6. **Brown, P. (2022).** "Academic Integrity in the Age of AI: Navigating Ethical Challenges." *Ethics in Education Journal*, 15(2), 123-138.
7. **Chen, Y., & Wang, Z. (2023).** "AI Tools in Language Learning: Benefits, Limitations, and Pedagogical Implications." *Computers & Education*, 182, 104531.
8. **Gao, S., & He, W. (2023).** Academic Integrity in the Age of AI: Challenges and Solutions. *Journal of Academic Ethics*.
9. **Hajar, A. (2022).** Autonomous Learning in EFL Contexts: Leveraging AI for Personalized Language Learning. *Language Teaching Research*.
10. **Hwang, G. J., et al. (2020).** AI-Based Learning Analytics in Language Education: A Systematic Review. *Computers & Education*, 159.
11. **Jia, M., & Yu, L. (2021).** The Impact of AI Writing Assistants on ESL Writing Performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 54.
12. **Jones, K. (2022).** Navigating AI in Higher Education: Ethical Considerations and Policy Implications. *Educational Review*.
13. **Jones, M., Smith, T., & Roberts, L. (2021).** "AI in Higher Education: Risks and Rewards for Critical Thinking Development." *Higher Education Research and Development*, 40(4), 567-582.
14. **Kukulska-Hulme, A., & Viberg, O. (2018).** Mobile Collaborative Language Learning: State of the Art. *British Journal of Educational Technology*.
15. **Kumar, R., & Patel, S. (2020).** "Artificial Intelligence and Learner Autonomy: A Double-Edged Sword." *Educational Review*, 72(6), 718-732.
16. **Lai, C., & Li, G. (2022).** Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning: Enhancing Learner Autonomy and Engagement. *Language Learning & Technology*.
17. **Lim, C. P., & Gruba, P. (2019).** A Student-Centric Approach to AI-Enhanced Language Learning. *Educational Technology Research and Development*.
18. **Mai, Th. et al. (2024).** The use of ChatGPT in teaching and learning: a systematic review through SWOT analysis approach. *Frontiers in Education*. 9, 1-17.
19. **Redecker, C. (2017).** Digital Skills for the Future: European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu). European Commission.
20. **Selwyn, N. (2020).** Should Robots Replace Teachers? AI in Education and the Limits of Automation. *Learning, Media and Technology*.
21. **Søgaard, A. (2022).** Critical Perspectives on the Role of AI in Education: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. *AI & Society*.
22. **Zou, B., et al. (2023).** AI-Enhanced Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges for EFL Learners. *Language Learning Journal*.
23. **Zhang, Y., & Zhu, H. (2021).** Exploring Student Perceptions of AI Tools in Higher Education. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 118.