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Research Article

Exploring Learners' Perceptions with ChatGPT as an English Language Learning Tool

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KEYWORDS

Unlocking Language Skills;
 Exploring;
 Learners' Perceptions;
 ChatGPT;
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A B S T R A C T

The objective of this study is to explore learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool in improving their English language skills. This research is qualitative by applying case study design. Selected participants fit the criteria that they have experience in utilizing chatGPT in doing assignments on campus and also maybe in non-academic activities. There are five college students of English Program Study at a higher education in Toraja who were selected to be participants in this study. To obtain the data, this study utilizes semi-structured interviews. The technique of data analysis applied is using thematic analysis. The study confirms that learners perceived the usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement. Learners highlighted the usefulness of ChatGPT in improving their English language skills, including speaking practice, listening comprehension, vocabulary and expressions, and error correction and feedback. The study suggests that ChatGPT is effective in enhancing language skills, reinforcing the idea that natural language processing models can be valuable tools for language learners. The positive perception of ChatGPT's usefulness may encourage educational institutions and language learning platforms to integrate similar AI-powered tools into their programs. This could enhance the overall learning experience for students. The finding can guide the integration of AI technologies in language education, assisting educators and developers in leveraging the strengths of conversational agents to enhance English language learning experiences. Further research can focus on comparing different language learning tools, investigating long-term impacts, and addressing specific user needs for diverse language learning contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The English language has become a global means of communication, playing a significant role in various domains such as education, business, and social interactions. As a result, individuals worldwide are

increasingly motivated to enhance their English language fluency and natural language production skills (Riemer, 2002). While traditional language learning methods offer valuable resources (Krishnan et al., 2020), they often lack the immersive (Johnson & Swain, 1994) and interactive experiences necessary for learners to develop conversational proficiency (Masood & Stefania, 2021).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) technologies to support language learning (Baclic et al., 2020; DeSouza et al., 2021; Hovy & Prabhumoye, 2021). One such technology that has garnered attention is ChatGPT, an advanced language model developed by OpenAI (Ge & Lai, 2023; Lund & Wang, 2023; Lund et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). ChatGPT utilizes deep learning algorithms to generate coherent and contextually relevant responses to user inputs (Hassani & Silva, 2023; Kung et al., 2023), making it a potentially valuable tool for providing conversational practice opportunities to English language learners.

ChatGPT, as a state-of-the-art language model, has the capability to generate human-like responses in a conversational context (Lu et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2023). It can understand and generate text based on prompts and provide interactive dialogue experiences (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023; Eysenbach, 2023). The research seeks to explore how learners can benefit from interacting with ChatGPT to improve their English language fluency, natural language production, and conversational skills.

Some studies have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of chatbots in providing language practice opportunities. They investigate the impact of using chatbots on learners' speaking, listening, and writing skills. These studies often involve comparing learners' performance and progress with and without the use of chatbots (Fryer et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Kohnke, 2023). Other research has focused on the design and development of chatbots specifically tailored for language learning purposes. These studies explore different approaches to creating conversational agents that provide relevant and engaging language practice activities. They may involve incorporating pedagogical strategies, adaptive feedback, and personalized learning experiences into the chatbot design (Chen et al., 2021; Daniel et al., 2018; Hew et al., 2023; Jeon, 2021). Additionally, studies have examined learners' perceptions and experiences with chatbots as language practice tools. They investigate factors such as learner motivation, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness of the chatbot interactions (Ebadi & Amini, 2022; Fryer et al., 2019; Jeon, 2021; Kohnke, 2023). While, the present study explores the role of ChatGPT in providing conversational practice opportunities for English language learners. By examining the role of ChatGPT in providing conversational practice opportunities, the study aims to contribute to the field of language learning technology and explore innovative ways to enhance language proficiency. The findings of this study could inform the development of AI-powered tools and educational

applications that facilitate language learning and provide learners with valuable practice opportunities to improve their English language skills.

As preliminary data, this present study shows the preliminary observation in EFL context at a higher education in Toraja. Observational data show that most students already use ChatGPT to help complete their project assignments. It is not difficult to charge tasks in a short time with a predetermined deadline. They are quite confident in what they do. On the other hand, lecturers have special strategies in testing students' understanding of assignments. Through presentation methods and in-depth interviews, lecturers ensure the depth of student knowledge. Thus, with ChatGPT, learners have access to a continuous source of conversational practice. They can engage in conversations whenever they want, without being restricted to specific class times or availability of human conversation partners. This availability ensures learners can practice consistently and at their own convenience. Additionally, ChatGPT serves as a valuable supplement to classroom instruction. Learners can practice and reinforce what they learn in class by engaging in conversations with the AI chatbot. It provides an additional platform for learners to apply and consolidate their language knowledge. Based on the background previously, the objective of this study is to explore learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool in improving their English language skills.

METHOD

This research is qualitative by applying case study design. A case study is a research method that involves an in-depth examination and analysis of a particular individual, group, event, or situation (Cockton, 2020). Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique used in research to deliberately select participants or cases based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research objective (Denieffe, 2020). Selected participants fit the criteria that they have experience in utilizing chatGPT in doing assignments on campus and also maybe in non-academic activities. There are five college students of English Program Study at a higher education in Toraja who were selected to be participants in this study. To obtain the data, this study utilizes semi-structured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The technique of data analysis applied is using thematic analysis. The process of conducting thematic analysis typically involves the following steps (Terry & Hayfield, 2021):

- a. Familiarization with the data: Researchers immerse themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the material to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content.
- b. Coding: Researchers identify and label meaningful units of data, known as codes, which represent specific ideas, concepts, or patterns within the text. These codes can be descriptive (reflecting the content) or interpretive (capturing underlying meanings).
- c. Generating initial themes: Researchers group similar codes together to form preliminary themes. Themes represent patterns or recurring ideas that emerge from the data and capture important aspects of the research question or objectives.
- d. Reviewing and refining themes: Researchers review, refine, and revise the identified themes, ensuring they accurately represent the data and reflect the research objectives. This process may involve combining, splitting, or discarding themes as necessary.
- e. Defining and naming themes: Researchers create clear and concise definitions for each theme, providing a conceptual description of what they represent. They also assign descriptive names to the themes to capture their essence.
- f. Analyzing and interpreting themes: Researchers analyze the relationships between themes and explore how they connect to form a coherent narrative or conceptual framework. They interpret the themes in relation to the research questions, theoretical perspectives, or existing literature.

Reporting findings: Researchers present the results of the thematic analysis, often through a written report or manuscript, highlighting the key themes, supporting evidence, and relevant quotes from the data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data from interviews using semi-structured interviews, data on learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool and learners' experiences of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool were described as follows:

Learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool

Data findings on learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a language learning tool show that learners perceived the usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement, here through table 1 illustrates how learners perceive chatGPT in improving their skills.

Table 1. Thematic matrix of Learners perceived the usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement

No	Aspect of skill improvement	Usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement
1	Speaking practice	Engaged in a conversation and more comfortable with self-expressing orally
2	Listening comprehension	Ample listening practice and understanding natural speech patterns and nuances
3	Vocabulary and expressions	Immediate access to a vast range of vocabulary and expressions and expanding vocabulary beyond the limitations of traditional learning materials
4	Error Correction and Feedback	Ensure immediate identification and correction of errors, real-time feedback allows to address mistakes promptly, and refine language usage and grammar skills more effectively

ChatGPT, as a language model developed by OpenAI, provide learners with an interactive and responsive environment to practice and improve their English language skills. Here are some ways in which learners perceived the usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement:

First from the aspect of speaking practice. ChatGPT can simulate conversations and engage in dialogue with learners. This interactive experience help learners practice their spoken English by providing them with opportunities to express themselves, receive feedback,

and gain confidence in their speaking abilities. Here are the results of an interview with participant 1 that confirmed specific examples of how ChatGPT helped to practice speaking English:

“When conversing with ChatGPT, I had the opportunity to talk about various topics that interested me. The model responded to my inputs and engaged in a conversation, which allowed me to practice forming coherent sentences and expressing my thoughts in English. This practice was valuable because it helped me become more comfortable with expressing myself orally” (*Interview, participant 1*)

The next positive thing about using chatGPT is the improvement of the listening comprehension aspect. Engaging in conversations with ChatGPT allows learners to practice their listening skills. By interacting with the model, learners expose themselves to different accents, vocabulary usage, and sentence structures, which enhance their understanding of spoken English. The following is the result of an interview with participant 2 about the conversations with ChatGPT helped to develop participant's listening comprehension skills:

“Yes, definitely. ChatGPT's responses were clear and well-articulated, which provided me with ample listening practice. I had to pay attention to the model's words, follow the flow of the conversation, and understand the context to respond appropriately. This practice helped me improve my ability to comprehend spoken English, especially when it comes to understanding natural speech patterns and nuances” (*Interview, participant 2*)

Related to the improvement of vocabulary acquisition, participants perceive positively how ChatGPT serves as a language resource, offering learners a wide range of vocabulary and expressions. Through interactive conversations, learners can encounter new words and phrases, learn their meaning in context, and expand their vocabulary repertoire.

“Compared to traditional vocabulary learning methods, ChatGPT's language resource capabilities offer a more interactive and personalized experience. The model can tailor its responses and explanations to my specific needs and interests. Additionally, ChatGPT provides immediate access to a vast range of vocabulary and expressions, which allows me to learn in a more exploratory and dynamic manner. It's a valuable tool for expanding vocabulary beyond the limitations of traditional learning materials” (*Interview, participant 3*)

In addition to the previously mentioned aspects, error correction and feedback is one of the improvement skills when learners use ChatGPT. ChatGPT provides learners with instant feedback and error correction. By identifying and pointing out language errors or suggesting improvements, the model can help learners refine their language usage and grammar skills. The following is an excerpt of an interview with participant 4 regarding the advantages of ChatGPT's instant feedback and error correction capabilities:

“Unlike self-study or writing exercises where errors might go unnoticed, ChatGPT's interactive conversations ensure immediate identification and correction of errors. This real-time feedback allows me to address my mistakes promptly and learn from them, which accelerates the learning process and helps me refine my language usage

and grammar skills more effectively” (*Interview, participant 4*)

Based on the analysis of the data mentioned above, this study showed that the learners found ChatGPT to be a valuable tool for language improvement due to its ability to provide speaking practice, improve listening comprehension, expand vocabulary and expressions, and offer error correction and feedback. These aspects combined to create a comprehensive language learning experience, allowing learners to strengthen their English skills through interactive conversations with the model.

The result of the present study relates to the results of the research that investigates the impact of using chatbots on learners' speaking, listening, and writing skills. These studies often involve comparing learners' performance and progress with and without the use of chatbots (Fryer et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Kohnke, 2023).

Claims in the present study also strengthen and support the results of research that examines the design and development of chatbots specifically tailored for language learning purposes. These studies explore different approaches to creating conversational agents that provide relevant and engaging language practice activities. They may involve incorporating pedagogical strategies, adaptive feedback, and personalized learning experiences into the chatbot design (Chen et al., 2021; Daniel et al., 2018; Hew et al., 2023; Jeon, 2021).

The results of the present study on a valuable tool for language improvement due to its ability to provide speaking practice, improve listening comprehension, expand vocabulary and expressions, and offer error correction and feedback also complement the results of research on learners' perceptions and experiences with chatbots as language practice tools. This study investigated factors such as learner motivation, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness of the chatbot interactions (Ebadi & Amini, 2022; Fryer et al., 2019; Jeon, 2021; Kohnke, 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of ChatGPT's impact on language learning, its contextualization within existing research, and its consideration of learner perceptions and experiences. This approach contributes a more nuanced understanding of the role of AI tools in language education, offering a valuable addition to the evolving field of technology-enhanced language learning.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that learners perceived the usefulness of ChatGPT in skill improvement. Learners highlighted

the usefulness of ChatGPT in improving their English language skills, including speaking practice, listening comprehension, vocabulary and expressions, and error correction and feedback.

The study suggests that ChatGPT is effective in enhancing language skills, reinforcing the idea that natural language processing models can be valuable tools for language learners. The positive perception of ChatGPT's usefulness may encourage educational institutions and language learning platforms to integrate similar AI-powered tools into their programs. This could enhance the overall learning experience for students. The finding can guide the integration of AI technologies in language education, assisting educators and developers in leveraging the strengths of conversational agents to enhance English language learning experiences. Further research can focus on comparing different language learning tools, investigating long-term impacts, and addressing specific user needs for diverse language learning contexts.

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