

# Potentials and Challenges of Using ChatGPT in Language Learning: EFL Learners' Perceptions\*

Lubna A. Alnaeem

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**—Using ChatGPT in language education is surrounded by arguments and many questions are raised regarding its advantages and disadvantages for language learners throughout their journey. Despite extensive body of research, EFL learners' viewpoints of ChatGPT have not been sufficiently studied in the Saudi context. This qualitative study investigated Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning. The data was collected from 22 Saudi university learners using semi-structured interviews. Results showed that ChatGPT is perceived as a helpful language learning tool, nevertheless, it should be used selectively and wisely to avoid undesirable consequences. Based on the obtained findings, some important pedagogical recommendations were suggested.

**Index Terms**—Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, language learning, EFL learners, perceptions

## I. INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language (FL), it is critical for learners to practice the target language in an authentic environment to grow proficiently (Chen & Hwang, 2022), however, learners do not always find ideal interactive partners particularly in contexts where the target language is not spoken (Guo et al., 2022). Lack of opportunities is a serious obstacle for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during their journey (Young & Shishido, 2023). Owing to the absence of realistic practice, EFL learners have limited opportunities for communicating in English and getting feedback to make reflections (Chien et al., 2020). Hence, it is fundamental to find effective ways to increase opportunities of exposure to the target language (Jeon, 2023).

Using technology in education has been unquestionably trusted by its proponents over the last two decades (Selwyn, 2020). Indeed, technology provides users with realistic sociocultural contexts and authentic materials to practice the target language meaningfully (Loncar et al., 2023). Technology-oriented solutions are considered a substitute to real-life situations and used as practical supplements in the classroom (Hwang & Wang, 2016). Through its different manifestations, technology helps FL learners overcome burdens of spatial distance to fill the gap caused by lack of exposure (Chen & Hwang, 2022) and go far beyond the traditional paradigms of education (Bernacki et al., 2020). In addition to the positive effects of technology on linguistic skills, non-linguistic aspects such as motivation and attitudes can also be improved via technology (Chen, 2022; Wei, 2022).

As an alternative to human communication, unceasing development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly offered a realistic portrait of partnership (Pack & Maloney, 2023). By interacting with intelligent chatbots, users can find an instant access to multiple languages (Kohnke et al., 2023) that is not restricted to a particular place or time (Fryer et al., 2020). A chatbot provides human-like conversations (Guo et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2022) and offers synchronic tutoring and support (Kerly et al., 2007). Among the most advanced AI-powered chatbots is ChatGPT (chat generative, pre-trained transformer) which is designed to perform different tasks and engage in normal conversations with users (Kim et al., 2022) providing enormous pedagogical potentials (Kohnke et al., 2023).

ChatGPT functions have received significant attention from educational scholars and practitioners across numerous fields (e.g. Guo et al., 2022; Adeshola & Adepoju, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Liu & Ma, 2023; Pack & Maloney, 2023; Shaikh et al., 2023; Young & Shishido, 2023; Xiao & Zhi, 2023), nevertheless, its effectiveness from the learners' perceptions has not been sufficiently investigated in the literature (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). As an unobservable factor in shaping the significance and effects of language learning, examining learners' perceptions is highly advocated (Peng, 2011; Wesely, 2012; Chen & Yu, 2019). Studying the role of technology from the learners' perceptions contributes to a better understanding of how language can be effectively learned and yields significant pedagogical implications (Salaberry, 2001; Stepp-Greany, 2002). Hence, this study aims at investigating EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of ChatGPT in language learning and bridging the research gap. Precisely, the present study addresses the following questions:

- 1- What are the potentials of using ChatGPT in language learning from the perceptions of EFL learners?
- 2- What are the challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning from the perceptions of EFL learners?

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Technological Advancements in Language Learning*

With a rapid growth of technological possibilities, many anticipations have surrounded the future of civilization including education and knowledge as cornerstones of this development (Starcić, 2019). Technology-enhanced instruction has brought promising chances to improve a more efficient pedagogical process (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2019; Yan, 2023) and transform education to a more flexible student-focused system (Ginns & Ellis, 2009). For EFL learners who need frequent practice of the target language, technology provides genuine and pervasive language input (Wei, 2022) and enables the learners to communicate with native speakers in an FL context (Reinders & Benson, 2017). As a result of the development of communication technologies, EFL learners can sufficiently receive English oral performance training via digital materials (Chien et al., 2020).

One manifestation of the role of technology in language education is reflected through the use of chatbots. Precisely, a chatbot is a computer application that provides rich linguistic input and written or spoken natural conversations (Guo et al., 2022). Chatbots have become a popular option for interaction with rapidly spreading implementation and popularity (Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020). As opposed to traditional chatbots, or what is known as rule-based chatbots that are derived from pre-defined guidelines, AI-powered chatbots generate responses from an enormous human language dataset (Jiang et al., 2022; Kohnke et al., 2023). Chatbots communicate with users intelligently and learn from previous interactions in a way that contributes to the improvement of chatbot functions (Fryer et al., 2020).

The efficiency of chatbots in education has been demonstrated in previous studies. Huang et al. (2022) found that using chatbots in language learning provided various technological and pedagogical affordances that facilitated task completion and learning through interaction activities. They also suggested that using chatbots encouraged students' social presence by affective and coherent communication. However, challenges of using chatbots were also found including technological limitations, the novelty effect, and cognitive load. According to Smutny and Schreiberova (2020), "Chatbots have had a long history of use as pedagogical agents in educational settings" (p. 2). Jeon (2023) indicated that chatbot-assisted dynamic assessment contributed to EFL learning development in general and higher vocabulary gains in particular and offered diagnoses about vocabulary learning.

### B. *The Role of ChatGPT in Education*

Currently, one of the most impressive chatbots is ChatGPT that was designed by the Microsoft-backed company OpenAI and released in November 2022 (Kohnke et al., 2023). Its user-friendly characteristics have attracted over one million subscribers in just a week following its launch (Grassini, 2023). Based on the fact that it is free and easy to use for people with different technical expertise levels, ChatGPT is unique and highly functional (Adeshola & Adepoju, 2023). What distinguishes ChatGPT from automated speech recognitions that provide information upon request is the capability of ChatGPT to engage in back-and-forth conversations with users and mimic human conversation (Kohnke et al., 2023). In addition to generating texts, ChatGPT can also understand and interrupt the meaning of the text in numerous languages, making it useful for a variety of language processing tasks. By its attractive capacities, ChatGPT opens a new avenue and an innovative paradigm in language learning.

According to Grassini (2023), ChatGPT could automatize the grading process of students' works by highlighting both strengths and weaknesses in a broad range of assignments, such as academic essays. Also, reports generated by ChatGPT could be used for giving feedback to the students in formative or summative assessment leading to a more precise estimation of a student's learning challenges. Young and Shishido (2023) investigated the potentials and effectiveness of ChatGPT in generating reference dialogues for an EFL chatbot system and creating high-quality dialogue materials suitable for EFL learners. The results showed that learners easily comprehended ChatGPT's dialogues, understood the vocabulary and learned new words. The study proved that integrating AI powered chatbots in EFL education overcame limitations and provided valuable resources. ChatGPT also works as an assistant tool for language researchers even those with limited experience in using AI tools and helps throughout the different stages of research procedure such as collecting and summarizing data (Pack & Maloney, 2023). Despite its beneficial uses in many aspects of education, ChatGPT is not without its limitations as it might reduce analytical skills and encourage misconduct (Grassini, 2023). Indeed, human efforts should not be replaced by ChatGPT functions, rather that it can be used as a supplementary tool to develop language learning skills effectively (Shaikh et al., 2023).

### C. *Learners' Perceptions in Language Learning*

To arrive at a better understanding of how language is learned and taught, it is crucial to examine the covered aspects of the process in addition to the observable ones. Learners' attitudes, perceptions and beliefs are unobservable attributes that reflect learners' opinions and feelings, and investigating these thoughts can help to deeply recognize the nature of language education (Wesely, 2012). According to Richardson (1996), perceptions, attitudes and beliefs are a "subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions" (p. 103). Based on the fact that learners' perceptions greatly influence their achievements (Williams & Burden, 1997), it is necessary to provide language learners with ample opportunities to express their perceptions and foster their critical thinking and reflective skills which consequently affects learning outcomes (Chien et al., 2020). Learner' perceptions have been commonly investigated in the literature in terms of how they perceive themselves and the

learning situation (Wesely, 2012). Perceptions of themselves is defined as how learners understand themselves and their learning (Liskin-Gasparro, 1998) while learner' perceptions of the learning situation refer to how they understand and experience aspects of the classroom (Brown, 2009). Although many studies have focused on one type of learners' perceptions, the two types are highly interrelated (Wesely, 2012).

Investigating learners' perceptions of using technology in teaching and learning has received considerable attention. For example, Wang et al. (2021) examined EFL learner' perceptions of blended learning and found that learners had positive perceptions of the blended design which motivated them to learn at their own pace with easily accessible resources and enhanced their engagement with interactive activities. The blended design also expanded the limited classroom time and encouraged the learners to develop learning autonomy in a supportive and participatory environment. Chen (2022) conducted a study to understand learners' perceptions of integrating information technology tools such as Kahoot! and Padlet for assessment and collaboration in EFL classes. The study indicated that using technological tools in teaching could significantly increase the learners' positive perceptions of the lesson as a whole.

Using a questionnaire-based approach, Shaikh et al. (2023) explored EFL learners' perceptions of the usability of ChatGPT for formal learning of English. A group of students with different English proficiency levels, age, gender, field of education, and nationalities were asked to give their feedback after performing series of tasks using ChatGPT. The quantitative analysis of the participants' responses reflected their positive attitudes as indicated by the high satisfaction scores. As an easily accessible tool, ChatGPT was helpful for performing different tasks such as conversation, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. In informal digital learning of English, EFL learners' perceptions and actual use of ChatGPT were examined by Liu and Ma (2023). A total of 405 EFL learners answered the technology acceptance model questionnaire with scales including Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Attitude, Behavioral Intention, and Actual Use. Results showed that Perceived Ease of Use did not predict learners' Attitude, but it could influence Attitude through the full mediator Perceived Usefulness. Learners who had positive attitudes toward the usefulness of ChatGPT showed a higher level of Behavioral Intention, which predicted their Actual Use of ChatGPT in English learning outside the classroom.

The effect of metacognitive awareness (MA) levels on EFL learners' perceptions, practices, and satisfaction with ChatGPT in developing research competency was investigated by Abdelhalim (2024). Results proved that high MA group showed a statistically significant advantage over the low MA group regarding the perception of the effectiveness of ChatGPT as a research tool. Adeshola and Adepoju (2023) investigated the opportunities and challenges of ChatGPT in education. The sentiment analysis of data extracted from Twitter showed that people had positive attitudes towards ChatGPT, and that its use was not going to slow down in the coming years. Based on these findings, the researchers called for considering the positive ways in which ChatGPT can be integrated into the university curriculum without affecting the cognitive reasoning of the students. Using a qualitative study design, Xiao and Zhi (2023) investigated EFL learners' perceptions of the role of ChatGPT in language learning. Analysis of the learners' responses indicated that ChatGPT worked as a valuable partner in completing language tasks and providing the learners with personalized learning experiences and immediate feedback. However, evaluating the quality of outputs generated by ChatGPT and modifying prompts to increase learning benefits were critical for the participants. Despite the extensive body of investigation, EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning have not been sufficiently examined in the Saudi context. This study aims to fill this gap.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Data Collection and Research Procedure

In this study qualitative study, data was collected using semi-structured interviews to investigate the learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning. Interview guiding questions were adopted from Xiao and Zhi (2023). Following the theoretical review developed by Kohnke et al. (2023), the interviews revolve around three main issues: (1) knowledge and understanding of ChatGPT; (2) utilization of ChatGPT in language learning; (3) awareness of the drawbacks and challenges of using ChatGPT (Xiao & Zhi, 2023, p. 5). They were face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher for an average of 45-60 minutes. The interviews were very smooth and full of information through which the participants expressed their thoughts freely and enthusiastically in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. Follow up questions were created during the interviews based on the participants' responses to achieve better understanding of their perceptions. The interviewees were told that they can speak English or Arabic, their mother tongue, so that they can talk with no language restrictions. The interview guiding questions were understandable and clear to the participants, so no further explanations were made by the interviewer. After transcribing the data, the researcher needed clarifications of some points, hence, the participants were asked for follow up online interviews via Telegram. To ensure validity of the interview guiding questions, a group of four students were first interviewed and their responses showed the appropriateness of the questions to achieve the purpose of this study.

#### B. Participants

A group of 32 students were asked about their experience in using ChatGPT in language learning. 12 students stated that they have never used ChatGPT, thus, they were not invited to participate in the study. The total number of participants was 22 EFL Saudi female students majoring in English at a public Saudi university in Riyadh. All participants had a three-

month-experience in learning English as college students and their ages ranged between 18-19. They all have good experience in using ChatGPT with an average of 2-3 times every week to perform different tasks as EFL learners. The participants' consent to be audio recorded during interviews and quoted in data analysis was taken and they were told that their participation was confidential and voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected in this study was analyzed qualitatively using the grounded theory. The interview data was carefully transcribed and coded by the researcher who has a good experience in transcribing interviews. A number of categories were created based on the codes and some relationships between these categories were established to obtain a theory. Dörnyei (2007) states that analyzing data using the grounded theory should adapt certain sequential coding system and produce some theory as an outcome of the analysis. To confirm that coding and categorization were appropriate, they were revised by an academic expert. Minor modifications were suggested and considered by the researcher. The analysis led to the following categories.

##### A. *Sufficient Knowledge About ChatGPT Basic Usages:*

Despite its recent development, ChatGPT was perceived by all participants as a user-friendly language learning tool that requires basic technological skills. They portrayed themselves as very good users with sufficient experience in using ChatGPT. They were highly satisfied with their knowledge about the features of ChatGPT that enabled them to perform fundamental needed tasks at this early stage of language learning. Nouf clearly stated "I know how to use it and I know what it is" and that what a normal user needs to know. Sara added that they don't need to dive into deep learning of ChatGPT because they use as an assistant device in language learning and not as the core of learning.

Basically, the participants used ChatGPT for summarizing and simplifying purposes. Instead of reading a whole text thoroughly, they used ChatGPT to summarize it and divide it into shorter parts when completing different tasks such as presentations. Four detailed pages can be reduced by the help of ChatGPT to four focused lines that emphasize the main points. Indeed, they believed that the most effective function of ChatGPT is making education easier which is manifested in its ability in changing an unreadable text to a comprehensible and enjoyable one. Sultanah usually asks ChatGPT to explain difficult texts "using very easy words like kids!!" to create a short and easy output especially if she is under time restrictions. Arwa added that, "If the essay is a higher level, it can...like... simplify it for you instead of having to research each word". ChatGPT sometimes explains meanings with new words which can definitely add to their vocabulary knowledge.

All participants agreed that they used ChatGPT for different purposes related to writing tasks. For example, Wahag uses ChatGPT as a guide to understand the general organizations of different types of paragraphs such as comparison and contrast. For Rand, ChatGPT is so helpful in changing the types of essays, from descriptive to argumentative for example, using the same ideas. Through understanding how to write different types of essays, the participants don't only learn new words such as connectors, they also practice different grammatical structures. ChatGPT also helps to find innovative writing ideas and supporting details which opens new domains of thinking as the human brain, due to overloading responsibilities, might sometimes lose the creativity in brainstorming. Yet, lack of writing ideas is not always the main cause of using ChatGPT. Sometimes, the participants have many ideas but face a difficulty in organizing them. Hence, ChatGPT functions as an idea organizer.

Another justification for using ChatGPT as the participants argued was class time limitations. Dana indicated that time is not enough for practicing writing in class, hence, she could use ChatGPT outside the class to deeply understand basic writing stages such as narrowing topics down and forming topic sentences. To avoid repetitions of words and enrich the content of writing, the participants use ChatGPT to find synonyms and derivations of the same word. As stated by Najd, instead of spending long hours to find a particular piece of information such as the meaning of new words, ChatGPT can do it in seconds by just one click that is much easier than dictionaries. Catching missed information is another major use of ChatGPT. In the recent past, according to the participants, it was disastrous if they missed a class or some important parts. It was challenging to understand the missed parts by themselves or find someone who could explain the material appropriately. But now, ChatGPT reduces the burden and offers a "plan B" that is kindly available upon request as stated by Ragad who consults her "lovely" ChatGPT at night before bedtime to bridge the gaps in understanding.

##### B. *Copying vs Understanding:*

It is worth noting that there is a huge difference between copying and understanding when using ChatGPT. The participants strongly argued that using ChatGPT to find information or summarize texts is not the whole story because if they don't understand the output, it is definitely ineffective. As indicated by Shahad, in making presentations, they have to understand the ChatGPT summary to be able to present the information appropriately and answer questions from teachers and colleagues confidently, otherwise, their performance will clearly indicate that it is not a personal effort.

Similarly, in generating writing ideas with the help of ChatGPT, they never copy and paste texts, instead, they read the text carefully, double check the correctness of information and redesign it in their unique writing style. Juri stated "When I make assignments and projects, I search and take the main ideas and the key words only from ChatGPT and complete it by myself". Menwah added that the main usage of ChatGPT in writing is for finding extra examples that only support but

never substitute her writing. As mature college students, Retag claimed that they are capable of distinguishing what facilitates learning from what hinders it as evident in her response below:

If we copy a text, why do we come to college then? If I let the ChatGPT write the essay for me then what is the point of taking a writing subject. I am not against ChatGPT and other AI tools... I am against using it in the wrong way. I use ChatGPT to exam myself. If I don't understand the material, I will not learn. I will not pass exam. (Retag)

Interestingly, the participants agreed that another major reason behind modifications of ChatGPT outputs was avoiding identical or highly similar answers. Copying ChatGPT materials will provide the same texts which is never tolerated by all teachers. Undoubtedly, it is easy to distinguish a machine-generated text from a text that is polished by elegant human touches as Hanadi claimed. She added that teachers enjoy their students' excellent styles after a number of written assignments, but complete copying from ChatGPT would obstacle this nice relation. However, if the teacher finds a high plagiarism percentage, the nice relation will be the opposite and the situation becomes worse if the teacher presents plagiarism results in front of colleagues. "Why do we put ourselves in this bad situation?", Ragad confirmed.

#### C. Teachers' Attitudes Towards Using ChatGPT:

As the participants claimed, all teachers have negative attitudes towards using ChatGPT in studying and completing tasks and assignments. Throughout their experience as EFL learners, no teacher has encouraged the use of ChatGPT in learning. The connotation between ChatGPT and plagiarism might be the main reason behind the teachers' attitudes, nevertheless, this is not usually the case as the participants argued. The participants didn't deny that they frequently consult ChatGPT, however, they never rely on it as the main source of information. The main problem is that teachers usually associate excellent performances with cheating to the degree that the first thing most teachers do is checking originality. As an excellent student, Futon was exposed to a very embarrassing situation. One of her teachers gave her zero for an assignment because the teacher didn't believe that it was a human effort. After taking a written exam in class, the teacher recognized her excellent level and modified the assignment grade. Futon added "Why teachers don't trust us now? Is it because of new apps? So, how can we convince them that we did it ourselves?"

The participants were against the idea of refusing the integration of helpful learning tools because some students might cheat. This opinion created a very sensitive relation between learners and teachers where learners always try to prove their credibility. The participants expressed their desire to take a course in a past era when all language learning tasks were "human made" and when teachers truly appreciated and trusted excellent performances. Nevertheless, all participants honestly emphasized that cheating is not uncommon among learners throughout the decades in diverse learning environments. Indeed, according to the participants, many colleagues do cheat under some conditions, though, they will recognize its bad consequences when they find it impossible to complete learning due to lack of knowledge. Those users believe that dependence on AI tools is legal and can never be considered a case of cheating which poses threats to academic integrity that suffers to a considerable extent all over the world because of such innovative methods of cheating and plagiarism as the participants declared.

#### D. Autonomous Learning Skills:

Most participants believed that ChatGPT helped them learn autonomously and avoid complete reliance on the efforts of others. For example, in group work activities, it is easier to complete the required tasks with the assistance of ChatGPT as opposed to the past when they had to seek help from group members. During examination periods when everyone is busy and stressed, the participants depend entirely on their efforts for understanding and revising using ChatGPT. Another picture of developing independent learning was reflected by Rawan who sometimes loses concentration in class and goes back to ChatGPT for deeper explanations of broadly explained ideas that she needs to focus on.

A noticeable improvement has also been observed in the participants' independent researching skills that was manifested in their enthusiasm to find more details about certain issues. ChatGPT helps them manipulate different research inquires and develop the ability to ask questions. Sultanah loves to ask ChatGPT "Why" questions to find convincing justifications for a variety of questions as she clarified:

I always ask ChatGPT about grammar mistakes because I want to know how to correct them... I can help myself... I don't wait to the next class. ChatGPT is an AI tool, so you find can information that you don't find in Google. It is more interesting and open. (Sultanah)

Searching for different sentence structures is another manifestation of the usefulness of ChatGPT that saves the time spent in watching "YouTube" tutorials. The participants chose the appropriate structures and avoid unrelated ones in a way that develops selectivity and autonomy in learning. Ragad loves to write poems and needs regular consultations and modifications so she frequently takes feedback from ChatGPT and selects what suits her poems. Repeated comments helped her develop autonomously and learn by herself.

On the contrary, two of the participants had the opposite view. They believed that frequent use of ChatGPT obstacles autonomous learning skills. According to Sahar, who represented this view "AI tools take the role of learners in searching and finding information. To be independent, I search by myself from books, resources, dictionaries and not from AI." Indeed, according to Sahar, AI can limit personal outputs and brain functions.

#### E. Disadvantages and Lazy Brain:

Generally speaking, despite the fact that it has proved to be advantageous in many cases, ChatGPT is not without its disadvantages. For example, Heba argued that ChatGPT does not always understand the intended purpose of the question, hence, it provides answers that are inaccurate, unrelated, or more than needed. Dana added:

I know it doesn't understand every question. Sometimes it makes mistakes so you have to check it if you want to use it. I search for the same thing that ChatGPT gave me in another place such as Google and if it is the same thing then it might be correct. (Dana)

The participants confirmed that they need to change question words until they get the answer from ChatGPT, nevertheless, clarifications of inquiries are not always successful because the answers are sometimes not available. The unavailability of answers in addition to the uncertainty of the reliability and appropriateness of ChatGPT materials put extra burden on the learner's shoulders. ChatGPT is expected to be a reliable helper every time to support and facilitate the human effort, yet, it is not always the case. Furthermore, not all functions are open to all users making it challenging in some cases to perform all needed tasks and that is "so disappointing" as Dana confirmed.

Although some participants discussed different disadvantages of using ChatGPT, all other participants agreed on one main issue that is "the lazy brain". An interesting example to reflect the lazy brain claim was discussed by Retag as follows:

Because we have a calculator in our smartphones, now, it is difficult for me and for many people, ... for most people, to calculate  $15+15...$  and it is impossible to calculate  $15+25!!$ . Sometime it is easy and we know the answers but it is easier for us to use the calculator in the mobile. Because we take it everywhere!! (Retag)

Her claim was supported by other participants as they were strongly convinced that they might under more strict conditions lose self-confidence and double check even if they know the answer. Another undesirable consequence is losing the brain ability to negotiate and filter information. Greater reliance on AI tools might result in complete acceptance of received materials without trying to refine and validate and some people might consequently lose the ability to form appropriate answers.

The participants believed that continuous dependence on ChatGPT will definitely lead to decreasing levels of eagerness and willingness to learn. Learners, even enthusiastic ones, might find it easier to escape from basic requirements of learning simply because an obedient device can take their role. Unquestionably, reducing jobs of the brain will make it lazy as all participants confirmed. Johara stated that online shopping made their bodies lazy and ChatGPT made their brains lazy. All participants insisted that ChatGPT, as a machine, has no emotions and lacks the human natural capability of debate and consideration of different affecting factors. Hence, it mostly provides repeated opinions and relying on such identical views might destroy personal opinions and argumentation skills. Sahar was so worried about the future of cognitive and intellectual abilities particularly in new generations.

## V. DISCUSSION

This qualitative study investigated EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning. Based on the analysis of data, ChatGPT is seen as a user-friendly tool that helps users in performing different language learning tasks with basic technical skills. In this regard, it has been stated that ChatGPT has proved to be easy to use which attracts many people to subscribe despite their expertise level (Adeshola & Adepoju, 2023; Grassini, 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Pack & Maloney, 2023). The participants of this study believe that they have very good levels of expertise that enable them to use ChatGPT appropriately as an assistant tool in learning English. Using ChatGPT as a powerful tool for EFL learning has been demonstrated by a number of previous studies (e.g. Adeshola & Adepoju, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Shaikh et al., 2023; Tlili et al., 2023; Young & Shishido, 2023).

The participants mainly use ChatGPT to summarize long texts and simplify difficult ones for many purposes such as making presentations and completing projects and assignments. ChatGPT does not only save time and effort, it can also help the participants increase vocabulary and practice grammar through exposure to new words and structures. It has been previously indicated that ChatGPT materials are significantly beneficial in expanding vocabulary gains (Young & Shishido, 2023) and grammatical knowledge (Shaikh et al., 2023). Additionally, findings provided by Jeon (2023) suggest that chatbots do not only facilitate vocabulary acquisition but can also offer diagnoses concerning vocabulary learning.

There is a general agreement among all participants in the usefulness of ChatGPT in developing writing skills and performing related tasks such as organizing paragraphs, finding innovative writing ideas and examples. It has been proved by previous research that ChatGPT is effective in facilitating writing (e.g. Liu & Ma, 2023; Shaikh et al., 2023) by helping the students in generating ideas, drafting, editing and evaluating (Yan, 2023), selecting the topic, setting the context as well as receiving tailored feedback (Barrot, 2023). Furthermore, if class time does not allow for enough practice, ChatGPT provides ample opportunity for extra practice after class that is achievable 24 hours. Based on the fact that students receive immediate responses when communicating with ChatGPT, they can easily and continuously learn the language at any time (Huang et al., 2022).

All participants strongly confirm that ChatGPT materials should not be copied, rather, it should be carefully understood to achieve successful learning outcomes. It is definitely important to select suitable materials and modify it using their own styles. They claim that complete copying from ChatGPT yields identical responses which can be easily identified by teachers, yet, never accepted. However, this finding contradicts those suggested by other studies (e.g. Huang et al., 2022; Xiao & Zhi, 2023) who claim that ChatGPT offers personalized learning by providing different inputs to different students

even when given the same topic for discussion. In a similar line, Abdelhalim (2024) finds that EFL learners with high metacognitive awareness perceive ChatGPT as a facilitative tool that enhances personalized learning through which they develop research competency.

It is worth noting that the participants have never been asked by teachers to use ChatGPT, and that excellent performances are often understood as a sign of plagiarism. Despite the fact that the participants frequently use ChatGPT, they state that they never depend on it entirely as other learners might do. Indeed, all participants show their disagreement with the teachers' negative attitudes towards using ChatGPT as they believe that beneficial learning tools should not be rejected because some students misuse them. Cheating is not a new phenomenon, and learners' perceptions about legality of copying information from online resources might be affected by the advent of new applications which in turn warns academic integrity. It has been previously indicated that using ChatGPT might pose threats to academic honesty (e.g. Yan, 2023), and that learners must be aware when using this learning tool (Hockly, 2023; Yeo, 2023). In consistence with these findings, Adeshola and Adepoju (2023) claim that academic cheating has a long history among generations and that using materials generated by AI tools for cheating in assignments is a new challenging method.

Most participants argue that using ChatGPT in language learning contribute to the development of autonomous skills that is mainly demonstrated in the participants' researching skills as well as their tendency to rely on personal efforts. In this respect, Pack and Maloney (2023) state that ChatGPT is a helpful device in different research phases for language education researchers with varying levels of experience in using AI tools. For example, a novice researcher can be guided by ChatGPT that performs the role of a supervisor throughout the process of a research experiment. The participants add that the talent of writing poems can also be improved via seeking feedback from ChatGPT and making necessary modifications autonomously. Grassini (2023) proves that ChatGPT is useful in providing feedback to the students by identifying points of strength and weakness to overcome learning challenges. Abdelhalim (2024) finds that EFL learners with low levels of metacognitive awareness consider ChatGPT a learning assistant that decreases dependence on teachers in a variety of tasks such as editing, answering questions and completing assignments. Nevertheless, such a view is not advocated by two of the participants in the current study who claim that using ChatGPT frequently hinders autonomous skills and creates a barrier that prevents learners from performing their roles properly.

There is a general agreement among all participants that ChatGPT has some disadvantages despite its noticeable advantages. Some functions are not accessible for all users and information taken from ChatGPT might be unreliable, inaccurate or unavailable. As a result, users need be alert when using ChatGPT by adjusting research words and checking the appropriateness of derived materials which is overwhelming in some cases. In addition, all participants strongly claim that overusing ChatGPT will definitely lead to a "lazy brain" which loses its basic activities and abilities. Losing self-confidence and the ability to form or manipulate responses might result from complete dependence on ChatGPT. Levels of enthusiasm to learn could also decrease among learners who might rely on ChatGPT in doing their jobs, and personal opinions and negotiation skills might be restricted due to greater reliance on such tools. The disadvantageous effects of continuous use of ChatGPT in learning have also been identified by other researchers who claim that ChatGPT should be an assistant language learning tool which needs to be used with more caution (e.g. Grassini, 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Shaikh et al., 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be theorized that using ChatGPT is perceived by EFL learners as a facilitative tool that should be used selectively to avoid bad consequences.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning were investigated qualitatively in this study. The main findings show that ChatGPT is perceived as a user-friendly tool that assists in performing a variety of language learning tasks. The participants are satisfied with their experience level through which they can benefit from ChatGPT in learning English. They mainly use ChatGPT to summarize and simplify long and difficult texts which helps them save time and effort and expand their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. ChatGPT is noticeably helpful in improving writing skills and facilitating the completion of writing tasks. Additionally, ChatGPT proves to be effective in providing extra practice after class that is attainable every day and every time.

All participants are strongly against copying ChatGPT materials and insist that users understand the materials to accomplish successful learning goals. Users should carefully select and adjust ChatGPT texts and avoid identical responses that might result from complete copying. The participants state that excellent answers are usually associated with plagiarism by their teachers who never ask them to use ChatGPT nor accept using it in learning. However, the participants disagree with the teachers' negative attitudes towards using ChatGPT and strongly confirm that they never completely rely on ChatGPT although they frequently use it. Indeed, beneficial learning devices should be used wisely and appropriately because cheating is not new, and perceptions of learners about copying from online resources might be changed after the advent of new applications which warns academic honesty.

Autonomous skills, mainly reflected in researching and modifying tasks independently, can be increased by using ChatGPT. Nevertheless, two of the participants disagree and believe that frequent use of ChatGPT stops learners from performing their roles correctly. Although ChatGPT has some advantages, it has also some disadvantages. ChatGPT materials are sometimes unreliable, inaccurate or unavailable and some functions are not accessible which constitutes extra burden on users who need to be attentive when using ChatGPT. Additionally, all participants strongly believe that greater dependence on ChatGPT will create a "lazy brain" and less confident users with low levels of enthusiasm to learn.

User might also lose negotiation skills and personal views. The theory that is obtained from the investigation is that EFL learners perceive ChatGPT as a helpful tool that requires selective use to avoid undesirable results.

This study is limited to investigating EFL learners' perceptions of the potentials and challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning. The participants were Saudi female EFL learners at the university level and the data was collected using semi-structured interviews only. To generalize the findings of the study, similar studies with larger samples in other learning contexts should be conducted.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

On the basis of the research results, it is recommended that EFL learners be given extra guidance and practice on how to use ChatGPT appropriately to achieve higher academic benefits. As shown from the findings, using ChatGPT seems to be unavoidable, hence, it is advocated that teachers help their students avoid plagiarism by reinforcing critical thinking and selective skills. EFL teaching material developers are advised to create tasks that promote skills of using AI tools appropriately and manage levels of reliance on such tools. Workshops and training courses that explain how these tools can be utilized properly and raising awareness campaigns that address how EFL learners satisfy their needs can be helpful. It is suggested for future research to consider the effect of other aspects such as personality factors and English proficiency level. Future studies with larger samples can be conducted and data can be collected using other instruments such as classroom observation and questionnaires to enrich the outputs of this study and expand the research scope.

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**Lubna A. Alnaeem** is an assistant professor of applied linguistics in the College of Languages and Translation at IMSIU, Riyadh, KSA. She has been lecturing in different linguistics and language skills courses. She collaborates with researchers and educators as she is interested in language teaching and learning, individual differences, curriculum development, and teacher cognition. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1714-7768>