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EFL Learners' Perception of ChatGPT Integration in English Learning: Motivation, Skills, and Pedagogical Development

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Abstract

This research explores the integration of ChatGPT, a generative AI language model, into English language learning in higher education, emphasizing students' perspectives on motivation, skill development, and pedagogical integration challenges. Drawing on interpretative qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with seven undergraduate students in Indonesia, the research identifies how ChatGPT enhances students' autonomy, confidence, and engagement, especially in writing, grammar, and vocabulary development. While students report strong intrinsic motivation and reduced anxiety due to ChatGPT's non-judgmental interface, they also acknowledge limitations in speaking and listening support. Thematic analysis reveals key themes including emotional responses, perceived usefulness, challenges in trust and overreliance, and expectations for institutional support in pedagogical integration. The findings highlight the importance of lecturer guidance and ethical AI literacy to ensure responsible use. This study contributes by providing empirical evidence on how AI integration can reshape language learning practices, offering clear directions for educators in designing effective instructional strategies and for policymakers in formulating guidelines that balance innovation with responsible use.

Keywords: ChatGPT; AI in education; Motivation; Language skills development; Pedagogical integration

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into education has dramatically transformed the ways in which students learn, access, and engage with knowledge. Among the many emerging AI tools, ChatGPT has quickly gained traction as one of the most widely adopted generative applications due to its ability to generate, edit, and extend text interactively. For English language learners in particular, such tools offer flexible and personalized support that complements student-centered approaches to language education (Godwin-Jones, 2021; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). Unlike traditional classroom interactions, ChatGPT provides learners with opportunities to engage with English at any time and from any location, thereby encouraging autonomous and informal learning. This mode of engagement reflects sociocultural perspectives on education, which emphasize the contextual and mediated nature of learning processes (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, research demonstrates that AI can serve as a cognitive scaffold by supplying iterative feedback and enabling repeated practice, which in turn supports learner development (Luckin et al., 2016; Warschauer & Liaw, 2011). Given these affordances, ChatGPT stands as a state-of-the-art tool with the potential to reshape the implementation of English language instruction in higher education.

One of ChatGPT's most appealing features is its adaptability to individual learner needs. The system enables students to adjust their learning pace, set personal goals, and engage in language practice that aligns with their preferences and learning styles (Akinwalere & Ivanov, 2022; Gupta et al., 2021). Such flexibility reflects constructivist perspectives that prioritize learner autonomy, agency, and active engagement in knowledge construction (Bruner, 1996). In practice, students can revisit language exercises, refine written drafts, and receive immediate responses without the time constraints of traditional instruction (Dong, 2024). Beyond cognitive benefits, ChatGPT also reduces affective barriers in language learning by offering a non-judgmental and private space for practice, which can lower anxiety and encourage risk-taking in language use (Krashen, 1982). Recent studies have confirmed that the use of AI tools can strengthen learner confidence and engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Kohnke et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the degree of impact depends on how effectively students engage with the platform and how they integrate its resources into meaningful practice. This variability underscores the importance of research that examines students' perceptions, strategies, and lived experiences when using ChatGPT as a language learning tool.

In terms of skills development, ChatGPT supports critical components of communicative competence such as vocabulary enrichment, grammar improvement, translation practice, and academic writing (Faiz et al., 2024). Its ability to generate text in response to inquiry-based prompts facilitates independent learning and encourages self-directed exploration of language (Polakova & Ivenz, 2024). These features enhance writing fluency and accuracy while also fostering inquiry-oriented engagement, which aligns with contemporary shifts toward active and student-led learning. However, the tool's limitations in supporting oral communication—particularly real-time interactive speaking practice—highlight an important area for further inquiry. Understanding how learners navigate these affordances and constraints across different language skills is therefore crucial to developing a comprehensive picture of ChatGPT's pedagogical value.

Despite its promise, the adoption of ChatGPT in language learning is not without challenges. Concerns have been raised about students' potential overreliance on AI, which may undermine the cultivation of critical thinking and deep cognitive processing (Barrot, 2023; Wu et al., 2025). Furthermore, disparities in digital literacy and unequal access to technological resources can exacerbate inequities in educational outcomes. Another persistent limitation is AI's lack of emotional intelligence, which restricts its ability to offer the socio-emotional support often required in language learning contexts. These issues reinforce the continuing importance of human educators and institutions in guiding ethical and effective use of AI. Rather than replacing teachers, ChatGPT should function as a complement that supports critical communication skills, reflection, and human interaction in the learning process.

Recent research has highlighted how generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, have transformed writing instruction. Studies report that such tools improve writing fluency, vocabulary usage, and idea generation (Faiz et al., 2024). Learners often employ ChatGPT to identify and correct mistakes, refine drafts, and enhance the overall quality of written work (Kohnke et al., 2023). The stress-free environment created by interacting with a non-judgmental tool further assists learners in generating extended texts such as essays (Akinwalere & Ivanov, 2022). Yet, much of the existing literature has emphasized ChatGPT's role as a writing assistant, leaving its broader pedagogical implications underexplored. In particular, limited attention has been given to how students experience the tool across multiple skills beyond writing, and how it mediates their learning processes holistically.

Language learning is also deeply shaped by motivation and affective engagement. Classical theories, such as Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985), have long underscored the significance of motivation in second language acquisition. More recent scholarship shows that AI tools can reinforce these motivational dimensions by promoting autonomy, confidence, and intrinsic interest in learning (Kohnke et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the literature also points to ambivalence: while some learners thrive with AI support, others report feelings of dependence and a diminished ability to engage in critical, reflective thinking (Barrot, 2023). Such tensions indicate the need for a nuanced understanding of how motivational and cognitive factors interact when learners use ChatGPT.

Empirical findings further confirm that ChatGPT positively influences writing, grammar, and vocabulary development, particularly within academic contexts (Ng et al., 2021; Polakova & Ivenz, 2024). However, limitations remain in oral communication, as the tool cannot replicate the immediacy of real-time spoken interaction essential for speaking proficiency (Tour et al., 2025). Moreover, studies suggest that learners predominantly use ChatGPT for text-based improvements rather than interactive language practice, which may constrain its potential as a comprehensive language learning aid (Kasneci et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of investigating how students use ChatGPT across skill areas and how they compensate for its limitations.

Effective integration of ChatGPT in education requires not only technological adoption but also pedagogical scaffolding. Teachers play an essential role in guiding students toward AI literacy, ethical awareness, and critical use of the technology (Akinwalere & Ivanov, 2022). While AI enhances learner engagement, it cannot substitute for mentorship, formative feedback, or socio-emotional interaction, which remain core responsibilities of educators (Fryer et al., 2020). Research indicates that institutional support, such as policies and frameworks for AI use, is necessary to prevent misuse and to ensure learning benefits are maximized (Kohnke et al., 2023). These findings emphasize that ChatGPT's success in education hinges not solely on its technological capacities but on the ways in which educators and institutions integrate it into structured, supportive learning environments.

Although the growing body of research demonstrates the promise of ChatGPT in language learning, several gaps persist. Much of the literature has concentrated narrowly on writing development or has been limited to controlled experimental designs (Faiz et al., 2024; Kohnke et al., 2023). Few studies adopt a holistic perspective that integrates cognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions of learners' experiences. Moreover, there remains a lack of qualitative research that centers on student voices and lived realities (Wu et al., 2025). Addressing these gaps is essential for understanding ChatGPT not just as a writing assistant but as a pedagogical resource with broader implications for language education.

To contribute to this emerging field, the present study explores learners' perceptions, motivations, and challenges in using ChatGPT for English learning. Specifically, the research is guided by three questions: (1) How do EFL learners perceive the integration of ChatGPT into their English learning practices? (2) In what ways does ChatGPT influence their motivation and language skill development? and (3) What challenges and supports are necessary for its effective pedagogical integration? By foregrounding student perspectives through semi-structured interviews, this study offers novel insights into the role of generative AI in higher education. It positions ChatGPT not merely as a technical innovation but as a pedagogical resource whose impact depends on students' experiences, institutional scaffolding, and ethical integration. In doing so, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical debates on the future of AI in language education, offering guidance for educators, researchers, and policymakers alike.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine university students' perspectives on using ChatGPT in English language learning. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) Semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were chosen to capture participants' lived experiences, motivations, and perceived challenges while allowing follow-up probing for depth.

Research Context and Participants

Seven undergraduate students from the English Language Education and Arabic Language Education programs at a university in Indonesia took part in this study. Participants were purposively selected from a larger pool of 108 students who completed an initial open-ended questionnaire. Selection was conducted through purposive sampling, based on the depth, clarity, and reflectiveness of the students' earlier written responses. The final group of interviewees represented a diversity of backgrounds, including different academic years (e.g., second-, third-, and fifth-year students), study programs such as Tadris Bahasa Inggris (English Language Education) and Pendidikan Bahasa Arab (Arabic Language Education) at State Institute for Islamic Studies Pontianak (IAIN Pontianak), age groups (ranging from 20 to over 26 years old), and gender (male and female). All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the interviews and provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age Range	Program	Class Level	Language Used in Interview	ChatGPT Use
AT (P.1)	Female	20-22	English Language Education (TBI)	3A	English	Yes
NZ (P.2)	Male	20-22	English Language Education (TBI)	5A	English	Yes
GEP (P.3)	Male	23-25	English Language Education (TBI)	3B	English	Yes
NY (P.4)	Female	20-22	English Language Education (TBI)	3B	English	Yes
ZPN (P.5)	Female	20-22	English Language Education (TBI)	5A	English	Yes
FN (P.6)	Female	23-25	Arabic language education (PBA)	2B	Bahasa Indonesia	Yes
AQAS (P.7)	Male	20-22	Arabic language education (PBA)	2B	Bahasa Indonesia	Yes

Interview Protocol and Data Collection

Data were collected in July 2025 through individual semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. Depending on participant preference, interviews were conducted either in person on campus or via a secure online platform, and all sessions were audio-recorded with permission. The interview guide was designed around the study's central research questions, focusing on students' perspectives regarding the use of ChatGPT in English language learning in higher education, the effectiveness of ChatGPT in supporting the development of skills such as writing, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary—particularly in relation to feature usage, skill improvement, and learning experiences—and the challenges students face as well as the types of support or expectations they hold when using ChatGPT for learning English, including obstacles, the role of lecturers, institutional support, and suggestions for improvement. Following each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim, and those conducted in Bahasa Indonesia were translated into English and subsequently back-checked by a bilingual researcher to

ensure semantic accuracy. To further enhance the credibility of the data, transcripts were returned to participants for member checking, allowing them to verify the accuracy and completeness of the content.

Data Analysis

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following six-phase model (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The coding process began with repeated readings of the transcripts to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and notable expressions. For example, "I use ChatGPT because it helps me learn independently and improve my English writing" was coded under Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning. A code-recode strategy was applied to ensure consistency, whereby the same coder re-analyzed the transcripts two weeks after the initial round of coding (Anney. V. N, 2014). This iterative process helped refine the codebook and confirm theme stability over time.

To improve credibility, member checking was conducted at two stages: participants reviewed both their transcript and the thematic summaries derived from their input. No corrections were requested, suggesting strong alignment with participants' intended meanings. Additionally, data triangulation was conducted by comparing interview themes with responses from an open-ended questionnaire (n = 108). This cross-source validation confirmed the robustness of the emerging themes. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained reflexive notes and an audit trail, ensuring transparency and mitigating potential researcher bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

the present study explores learners' perceptions, motivations, and challenges in using ChatGPT for English learning. Specifically, the research is guided by three questions: (1) How do EFL learners perceive the integration of ChatGPT into their English learning practices? (2) In what ways does ChatGPT influence their motivation and language skill development? and (3) What challenges and supports are necessary for its effective pedagogical integration? By foregrounding student perspectives through semi-structured interviews, this study offers novel insights into the role of generative AI in higher education. The data can be presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and Descriptions

Theme	Description
Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning	Students are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to use ChatGPT to enhance their language learning.
Emotional Responses and Confidence	students report feeling more confident, less anxious, and more autonomous when using ChatGPT.
Perceived Usefulness and Pedagogical Comparison	Students consider ChatGPT to be a more efficient, readily accessible, and tailored learning resource in comparison to traditional instructional methods.
Language Skill Development	ChatGPT contributes significantly to writing, grammar, and vocabulary development.
Speaking and Listening Limitations	Students find ChatGPT less helpful in developing oral communication skills.
Challenges in Use and Trust	Issues include over-reliance, doubts about accuracy, and a lack of speaking functionality.
Role of Lecturers and Institutional Support	Students emphasize the importance of lecturer guidance and institutional support in AI integration.
Expectations for Future AI Tools	Students express hopes for more interactive, voice-enabled, and culturally sensitive AI tools.

Table 3. Themes and Respondents' Responses (From 7 Selected Participants)

Theme	Representative Quote
Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning	"I use ChatGPT because it helps me learn independently and improve my English writing." (AT, P.1)
	"It is easier for me to study when I can ask questions anytime without waiting for class." (NZ, P.2)
	"ChatGPT makes me want to explore and learn English more by myself." (AQAS, P.7)
	"When I study alone at night, ChatGPT becomes a helpful partner in reviewing grammar and practicing English writing." (NY, P.4)
	"I feel more interested in English because ChatGPT supports me anytime." (ZPN, P.5)
Emotional Responses and Confidence	"I feel both excited and motivated... supported when I study alone." (AQAS, P.7)
	"Using ChatGPT makes me more confident because I can correct my mistakes without shame." (ZPN, P.5)
	"I do not feel nervous when using ChatGPT." (NY, P.4)
	"I feel both excited and motivated... supported when I study alone." (NZ, P.2)
Perceived Usefulness and Pedagogical Comparison	"I can ask ChatGPT about grammar, sentence structure, and examples anytime. It is more efficient than waiting for a lecturer." (GEP, P.3)
	"Both ChatGPT and lecturers are important, one gives quick answers, the other gives understanding." (NY, P.4)
	"I like using ChatGPT because it answers in seconds, unlike when I have to wait for class discussion." (AT, P.1)
	"I am not afraid to ask ChatGPT the same thing many times. With a lecturer, I would feel shy." (ZPN, P.5)
	"ChatGPT is helpful, but it cannot replace the emotional support and real-life examples given by a lecturer." (FN, P. 6)
	"Sometimes the answers feel mechanical or not culturally right." (AQAS, P.7)
Language Skill Development	"It helps me write better essays and check my grammar." (NY, P.4)
	"It corrects my grammar, gives vocabulary, and shows how to structure my writing." (FN, P. 6)
	"ChatGPT gives me vocabulary and examples I can use in class." (AT, P.1)
	"Now I can write without fear and even use synonyms I never knew before." (ZPN, P.5)
	"I use it to generate writing ideas and practice paragraph building." (GEP, P.3)
	"My English improved after using it to edit my assignments." (NZ, P.2)
	"It's helpful in translating and building stronger sentences." (AQAS, P.7)
Speaking and Listening Limitations	"It does not help me much with speaking. It is more text-based." (NZ, P.2)
	"I still need to talk with people, not just type." (NY, P.4)
	"Pronunciation practice is still missing in ChatGPT." (AQAS, P.7)
	"I can write well, but I still struggle in speaking because there's no voice feedback." (FN, P. 6)
	"ChatGPT can't replace real conversation." (ZPN, P.5)
	"It lacks tone, expression, and interactive voice features." (GEP, P.3)
	"For speaking, I combine it with YouTube or real people." (AT, P.1)
Challenges in Use and Trust	"Sometimes I doubt its answers and still need to check with my lecturer." (NY, P.4)
	"I become too dependent and worry about becoming lazy." (NZ, P.2)
	"I wonder if the answers are always correct. I have to double-check them." (AQAS, P.7)
	"If I ask unclear questions, it gives unclear answers." (AT, P.1)
	"Some explanations are too complex for me to understand directly." (FN, P. 6)

Theme	Representative Quote
	"I need to learn how to ask properly to get good responses." (ZPN, P.5)
	"Sometimes the grammar corrections are inconsistent." (GEP, P.3)
Role of Lecturers and Institutional Support	"Lecturers must guide us in using ChatGPT wisely, not just leave us with it." (AT, P.1)
	"Without lecturers, students might misuse AI or rely on it too much." (NZ, P.2)
	"Lecturers should integrate ChatGPT into lessons, not ignore it." (NY, P.4)
	"Lecturer helps us check which answers are right or wrong." (FN, P. 6)
	"Institutional support like training is important so we don't misuse it." (AQAS, P.7)
	"Internet access and facilities should be provided if AI tools are recommended." (ZPN, P.5)
	"Workshops could help both lecturers and students use ChatGPT better." (GEP, P.3)
Expectations for Future AI Tools	"I wish we could talk to ChatGPT using voice, not just typing." (AQAS, P.7)
	"It would be great to have real-time speaking and pronunciation features." (FN, P. 6)
	"AI should be more culturally aware and emotionally responsive." (GEP, P.3)
	"Interactive feedback through speech and visuals would help more." (NY, P.4)
	"I hope it can adjust to our level and give tasks accordingly." (AT, P.1)
	"Make it more accessible even without a strong internet." (NZ, P.2)
	"It would be helpful if AI could link to other resources like videos or articles." (ZPN, P.5)

Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning

Students demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation in using ChatGPT for English language learning, particularly in relation to their desire for independent study. AT (P.1) noted, *"I use ChatGPT because it helps me learn independently and improve my English writing."* This indicated a self-directed learning approach, reflecting self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), where students actively set goals, select strategies, and monitor outcomes.

AQAS (P.7) is similarly mentioned, *"ChatGPT makes me want to explore and learn English more by myself."* This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes autonomy and competence as drivers of intrinsic motivation.

Students also valued the flexibility of access. NY (P.4) stated, *"When I study alone at night, ChatGPT becomes a helpful partner in reviewing grammar and practicing English writing,"* showing how personalized learning conditions enhanced engagement (Dörnyei, 2001). ZPN (P.5) further highlighted the role of psychological safety: *"I feel more interested in English because ChatGPT supports me anytime."*

Finally, NZ (P.2) explained the immediacy of support, *"It is easier for me to study when I can ask questions anytime without waiting for class."* Taken together, these findings indicate that ChatGPT functions not just as a tool but as a motivational partner, reinforcing autonomy, self-regulation, and confidence in students' English learning journey.

Emotional Responses and Confidence

Emotional engagement appeared as a supportive but secondary factor linked to motivation. Students frequently described feeling less anxious and more confident when using ChatGPT. For instance, NY (P.4) said, *"I do not feel nervous when using ChatGPT,"* while ZPN (P.5) added, *"Using ChatGPT makes me more confident because I can correct my mistakes without shame."* Such responses confirm earlier findings that low-stress, judgment-

free environments foster willingness to experiment with language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Yu, 2022).

According to other students, ChatGPT inspired them to take more chances with their education. "*I feel both excited and motivated... supported when I study alone*," stated AQAS (P.7). A crucial element of Bandura's (1997) theory of motivation, this response suggests a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Students are more likely to participate in and stick with learning tasks when they believe their actions are effective.

However, emotions were not uniformly positive. NZ (P.2) admitted, *"Sometimes I feel doubtful, especially when I depend too much on it,"* pointing to the tension between trust and over-reliance. This highlights the need for balanced use, where AI reduces anxiety but does not replace self-initiative (Reeve, 2009).

Perceived Usefulness and Pedagogical Comparison

Students expressed clear perceptions of ChatGPT as a valuable tool that enhances their English language learning beyond what traditional classroom methods can offer. GEP (P.3) stated, *"I can ask ChatGPT about grammar, sentence structure, and examples anytime. It is more efficient than waiting for a lecturer."* This reflects how accessibility and immediacy were perceived as major advantages of AI. Similarly, AT (P.1) noted, *"I like using ChatGPT because it answers in seconds, unlike when I have to wait for class discussion."* Such efficiency highlights the platform's role in providing just-in-time learning support (Garrison et al., 1999).

Despite recognizing these advantages, students did not view ChatGPT as a full replacement for lecturers. FN (P. 6) explained, *"ChatGPT is helpful, but it cannot replace the emotional support and real-life examples given by a lecturer."* Likewise, NY (P.4) also highlighted this balance, stating, *"Both ChatGPT and lecturers are important, one gives quick answers, the other gives understanding."* These remarks suggest that students value a complementary model where AI offers efficiency, while lecturers provide cultural insights, scaffolding, and emotional support (Vygotsky, 1978).

Interestingly, some students found ChatGPT more approachable than human lecturers when asking basic or repetitive questions. ZPN (P.4) shared, *"I am not afraid to ask ChatGPT the same thing many times. With a lecturer, I would feel shy."* This indicates that AI reduces social pressures that may inhibit participation. At the same time, students acknowledged the limitations of ChatGPT. AQAS (P.7) stated, *"Sometimes the answers feel mechanical or not culturally right."* This reinforces the need for human mediation in addressing socio-pragmatic aspects of language learning (Kramsch, 1993).

Language Skill Development

Students reported significant benefits from using ChatGPT in enhancing their English language skills, especially in writing and vocabulary development. NY (P.4) shared, *"It helps me write better essays and check my grammar,"* while FN (P.6) explained, *"It corrects my grammar, gives vocabulary, and shows how to structure my writing."* These responses illustrate how students relied on ChatGPT for formative feedback and structural guidance in composing texts.

AT (P.1) highlighted its vocabulary function: *"ChatGPT gives me vocabulary and examples I can use in class."* This aligns with the notion of incidental vocabulary learning through contextual exposure (Nation, 2001). Moreover, some students demonstrated increased confidence in writing. ZPN (P.5) further remarked, *"Now I can write without fear and even use synonyms I never knew before."* Such affective benefits resonate with Affective Filter Hypothesis, where supportive environments lower anxiety and promote richer expression (Krashen, 1982).

Students also highlighted how ChatGPT assists in idea generation and organizing thoughts. GEP (P.3) noted, *"I use it to generate writing ideas and practice paragraph building."*

This aligns with the cognitive model of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Additionally, NZ (P.2) reflected, *"My English improved after using it to edit my assignments,"* pointing to iterative learning through revision. AQAS (P.7) concluded, *"It is helpful in translating and building stronger sentences."*

Speaking and Listening Limitations

While students found ChatGPT effective for developing reading and writing, many expressed concerns regarding its limitations in improving speaking and listening skills. NZ (P.2) observed, *"It does not help me much with speaking. It is more text-based."* This reflects a lack of multimodal input, which is essential for oral language development (Rost, 2011).

NY (P.4) similarly remarked, *"I still need to talk with people, not just type."* This underscores the social dimension of language learning, consistent with the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005), which emphasizes the role of spoken interaction in noticing language gaps.

Pronunciation also emerged as a notable concern. AQAS (P.7) stated, *"Pronunciation practice is still missing in ChatGPT."* FN (P.6) added, *"I can write well, but I still struggle in speaking because there's no voice feedback."* These remarks highlight the absence of auditory and expressive feedback, which is necessary for stress, intonation, and rhythm (Mayer, 2009).

ZPN (P.5) pointed out, *"ChatGPT cannot replace real conversation."* GEP (P.3) noted, *"It lacks tone, expression, and interactive voice features."* These observations reinforce the idea that human interaction remains central to oral proficiency development (Long, 1996).

Lastly, AT (P.1) shared, *"For speaking, I combine it with YouTube or real people."* This indicates students' adaptive strategies, resonating with blended learning approaches (Hockly, 2018).

Challenges in Use and Trust

Although students valued ChatGPT, they expressed concerns about trust, dependency, and usability. Accuracy was a recurring issue, NY (P.4) said, "*Sometimes I doubt its answers and still need to check with my lecturer*." Similarly, AQAS (P.7) noted: *"I wonder if the answers are always correct. I have to double-check them."* These concerns reflect a gap between perceived usefulness and actual trust, consistent with findings that reliability strongly affects technology acceptance (Kim & Hannafin, 2011).

Another challenge was over-reliance. NZ (P.2) said, "*I become too dependent and worry about becoming lazy*." This reflects the risk of cognitive offloading (Salomon & Perkins, 1989), where excessive reliance on AI may reduce effortful learning.

Students also reported difficulties in interacting with the system. AT (P.1) said, "*If I ask unclear questions, it gives unclear answers*," while ZPN (P.5) said, *"I need to learn how to ask properly to get good responses."* These remarks highlight the importance of prompt literacy and digital competence in maximizing AI's potential.

In some cases, the complexity of responses became a barrier, FN (P.6) said, "*Some explanations are too complex for me to understand directly*." This illustrates a mismatch between AI output and learners' proficiency, echoing Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.

Role of Lecturers and Institutional Support

Students emphasized that, with the proper guidance from educators and educational institutions, ChatGPT should be utilized for English language learning. "*Lecturers must guide us in using ChatGPT wisely, not just leave us with it*," stated AT (P.1). This shows that while students value AI tools, they rely on teachers to ensure safe, ethical, and critical use. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports this, highlighting the role of more knowledgeable oth ers (lecturers) in scaffolding learning.

Similarly, NZ (P.2) warned, *"Without lecturers, students might misuse AI or rely on it too much."* This underscores the potential risks of overdependence on technology without critical supervision. NY (P.4) further stated, *"Lecturers should integrate ChatGPT into lessons, not ignore it,"* emphasizing the need for deliberate pedagogical planning. FN (P.6) added, *"Lecturer helps us check which answers are right or wrong,"* showing how students depend on teachers to validate AI responses. This aligns with the TPACK framework. (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), where content, pedagogy, and technology must intersect for meaningful learning.

Expectations for Future AI Tools

Students discussed what they hope to see in AI tools going forward, emphasizing features that facilitate communication, allow for personalized learning, and increase emotional responsiveness. *"I wish we could talk to ChatGPT using voice, not just typing,"* stated AQAS (P.7). FN (P.6) said something similar: "*It would be great to have real-time speaking and pronunciation features*." These comments reflect the need for multimodal and interactive feedback (Mayer, 2009).

Some students emphasized cultural and emotional responsiveness. GEP (P.3) said, "*AI should be more culturally aware and emotionally responsive*." While NY (P.4) said, "*Interactive feedback through speech and visuals would help more*." This indicates demand for emotionally intelligent and multimodal learning experiences (Sykes et al., 2013).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that EFL learners view ChatGPT as a valuable addition to English language learning, particularly for enhancing motivation, autonomy, and confidence. These insights align with earlier research that emphasizes AI's potential to create flexible and personalized learning environments (Godwin-Jones, 2021; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). By offering on-demand assistance, ChatGPT provides learners with immediate access to explanations and examples, which reduces reliance on classroom schedules and fosters greater self-regulation. This corresponds with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which highlights autonomy and competence as central motivators in learning. The participants' accounts, where they described ChatGPT as a "partner" in learning that allowed them to practice independently and at any time, echo the idea that motivation in digital learning is strengthened when learners perceive a sense of control and immediate support.

Emotional responses also emerged as a prominent theme, with students reporting reduced anxiety and increased confidence when engaging with ChatGPT. These findings extend the literature on affective barriers in language acquisition, confirming that non-judgmental environments encourage experimentation and risk-taking (Krashen, 1982; Horwitz et al., 1986). Similar results were observed by Kohnke et al. (2023) and Kasneci et al. (2023), who noted that AI tools provide a low-pressure setting conducive to language practice. In this study, learners emphasized that ChatGPT helped them avoid embarrassment when repeating questions or correcting errors, which supports Daubney, Dewaele, and Gkonou's (2017) argument that reduced anxiety fosters deeper engagement. However, some students admitted to occasional feelings of overreliance, suggesting that while AI reduces affective barriers, it can also risk creating dependency. This duality mirrors Barrot's (2023) caution that unchecked reliance on AI may compromise critical thinking and reflective learning.

When comparing perceptions of ChatGPT with traditional pedagogy, students frequently described the tool as faster, more efficient, and always available. These advantages highlight its role as a just-in-time learning resource, consistent with Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (1999) notion of immediacy in computer-mediated learning environments. Yet, participants also recognized that ChatGPT could not replace human

lecturers, particularly in providing cultural context, emotional support, and nuanced feedback. This aligns with findings from Fryer et al. (2020) and Tour et al. (2025), who argue that while AI enhances learning efficiency, human instructors remain vital for socio-emotional scaffolding and the development of higher-order thinking. Students' recognition of ChatGPT as complementary rather than substitutive reinforces Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which underscores the role of more knowledgeable others in mediating complex learning processes.

A key contribution of this study lies in its evidence of skill-specific outcomes. Learners consistently highlighted ChatGPT's usefulness in writing, grammar, and vocabulary development, echoing earlier work by Faiz et al. (2024) and Polakova and Ivenz (2024), who found AI support particularly effective in improving writing fluency and accuracy. The ability of ChatGPT to provide synonyms, sentence structures, and feedback aligns with Nation's (2001) framework of vocabulary learning, which emphasizes exposure to varied input for deeper lexical acquisition. Students also valued its role in idea generation, confirming Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive process theory of writing, where tools that facilitate planning and revision enhance overall composition. These findings collectively suggest that ChatGPT functions as a formative feedback system, enabling learners to refine their interlanguage development through iterative practice.

Despite these gains, limitations in speaking and listening development were repeatedly emphasized. Students expressed frustration with the lack of oral interactivity, pronunciation guidance, and real-time conversational features. This gap resonates with prior observations by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) and Tour et al. (2025), who noted that most AI systems remain text-dominant and fail to support oral proficiency effectively. The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005) further underscores the importance of spoken interaction in noticing gaps and refining language competence, which ChatGPT in its current form cannot adequately provide. Students' adaptive strategies—such as combining ChatGPT with YouTube videos or peer conversations—illustrate a blended approach to compensating for these shortcomings, reinforcing Hockly's (2018) advocacy for hybrid learning models that integrate digital and human interaction.

Concerns about trust and dependency also surfaced, reflecting broader debates on AI literacy and digital competence. Learners admitted to occasionally doubting ChatGPT's accuracy and reported difficulties in formulating effective prompts, which aligns with Kim and Hannafin's (2011) findings that reliability and scaffolding strongly influence technology adoption. Overreliance was perceived as a risk, consistent with Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner's (2011) argument on cognitive offloading, where excessive dependence on external tools can reduce memory retention and critical engagement. These insights point to the necessity of developing prompt literacy and metacognitive awareness as part of AI integration in education, ensuring that learners remain active processors rather than passive recipients of information.

Equally significant were students' reflections on the role of lecturers and institutions in mediating AI use. Participants stressed the importance of guidance to avoid misuse, echoing Wang et al. (2023), who highlighted the need for teacher readiness in AI-enhanced education. Students framed lecturers not as competitors to AI but as essential mediators who contextualize, validate, and ethically guide its use. This perspective supports the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), which emphasizes the need for teachers to balance technological affordances with pedagogical strategies and content expertise. Institutional support was also emphasized, with learners calling for training workshops, equitable infrastructure, and policy frameworks. These demands align with Yunus et al. (2024) and Teräs (2022), who argue

that sustainable AI adoption in higher education requires systemic readiness and governance, not isolated experiments.

The expectations expressed for future AI tools further highlight learners' evolving vision of technology in education. Calls for multimodal features such as voice interaction, pronunciation support, and culturally sensitive responses mirror Mayer's (2009) principles of multimedia learning and Sykes et al.'s (2013) emphasis on emotionally responsive digital environments. Students' hope for personalization and accessibility also reflects Siemens' (2005) connectivist view of learning networks, where technology functions as a hub connecting learners to diverse resources. These expectations suggest that learners are not passive consumers but active stakeholders shaping the trajectory of AI innovation in pedagogy.

Taken together, the findings reinforce that while ChatGPT offers significant contributions to motivation, confidence, and skill development, it remains an incomplete solution requiring pedagogical mediation. Theoretically, this study extends discussions of AI in EFL by situating learner perceptions within established frameworks of motivation, sociocultural learning, and digital competence. Practically, it underscores that ChatGPT should be integrated as a complementary resource, supported by lecturer scaffolding and institutional policies that safeguard equity and ethical use. By foregrounding student voices, this research adds nuance to the discourse on AI in education, revealing both the promise and the pitfalls of ChatGPT as a pedagogical partner.

CONCLUSION

This study examined university students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges in integrating ChatGPT into English language learning in higher education. Findings indicate that ChatGPT enhances autonomy, reduces anxiety, and supports grammar, vocabulary, and writing, yet its limitations in speaking, emotional interaction, and risks of overreliance underscore the continued importance of human guidance. Theoretically, the study contributes by extending the discussion of AI in EFL to include learners' affective responses, critical engagement, and contextual challenges, while practically it emphasizes that AI tools should complement rather than replace teachers, whose scaffolding, socio-emotional support, and ethical guidance remain central. Overall, ChatGPT represents a valuable but partial solution for advancing EFL learning, with success depending on balanced integration supported by educators, institutions, and policy frameworks.

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