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Exploring EFL Teachers Perceptions of Students' Use of ChatGPT: Case of English Department at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria

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Abstract

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT has sparked a global debate about their potential integration into classrooms. Numerous studies have explored educators' and students' perceptions of their benefits, drawbacks, and potential impact on learning. However, research in Algeria on this topic remains scarce. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating Algerian EFL teachers' perceptions of students using ChatGPT to learn English. Eight EFL teachers from Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret's English Department participated in structured interviews to provide qualitative data. The findings revealed that the majority of teachers viewed students' use of ChatGPT primarily as a shortcut, raising concerns about its impact on genuine language development, creativity, and core skills like critical thinking and academic integrity like plagiarism being a particular worry. Regarding the integration of AI technology like ChatGPT into the EFL curriculum, opinions were diverged. While some teachers expressed cautious support, others remained skeptical or opposed. These findings highlight the need for careful consideration of potential issues before incorporating AI tools into educational settings.

Keywords: Large Language Models, ChatGPT, English as a Foreign Language, Algerian Teachers Perceptions.

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving era of innovation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an indispensable aspect of human existence. ChatGPT, short for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, for instance, exemplifies this trend, increasingly impacting various facets of our lives, particularly in education.

Today, many higher education students rely on ChatGPT for a myriad of purposes. Research conducted by Valova et al. (2024) shed lights on its manifold advantages for learners in presenting a faster and easier way of text creation, while Thunstrom (2022) underscores its utility in assisting students in generating questions, composing essays, and soliciting feedback on their works. Researchers like Rudolph and Tan (2023) emphasize its potential to diversify problem-solving scenarios, and Baidoo-Anu and Owusu Ansah (2023) and Kasneci et al. (2023) highlight the usefulness of ChatGPT in assisting students with research and writing assignments.

In the specific context of language education, Schmidt-Fajlik (2023) discerns ChatGPT's efficacy in providing detailed explanations for grammar mistakes among Japanese students. Likewise, Kostka and Toncelli (2023) and Kohnke et al. (2023) explore its usefulness for learning vocabulary, while Ho (2024) describes its usefulness for English learners, particularly in grammar checks and paraphrasing.

Additionally, Tack and Piech (2022), as well as George and George (2023), illuminate its role in fostering interactive conversations for language practice. Nguyen (2023), Kostka and Toncelli (2023), Yan (2023) and Kohnke (2023) highlight its benefits in fostering foreign language learners' writing skills.

Moreover, ChatGPT proves advantageous for teachers as well. Nguyen (2023), Baskara and Mukarto (2023), Sok and Heng (2024) and Yu (2024) indicate that ChatGPT helps in alleviating teachers' workload such as streaming line lesson planning, material preparation, and classroom activities. This thought is echoed by Kasneci et al. (2023), Yu (2024) and Ho (2024), who highlight its benefits in freeing up time and energy for teachers by delivering learning material, scoring tasks and enabling them to focus more on other essential teaching duties. Furthermore, ChatGPT emerges as an invaluable ally for scientific writing, offering feedback on writing, generating outlines, and more.

However, despite its merits, the integration of ChatGPT in language instruction remains contentious among many educators. While students generally hold positive views, as revealed by different studies focusing on students' perceptions and attitudes (i.e , Firat, 2023; Kostka & Toncelli, 2023; Valova et al. 2024; Shoufan, 2023; Strzelecki, 2023, Xu et al., 2024; Ho, 2024, among others), educators express concern and reservations regarding its effectiveness in educational settings. These concerns primarily revolve around ethical issues like plagiarism and academic integrity (Hamdani, 2022; Stokel-Walker, 2022; Strzelecki, 2023; Sullivan et al. 2023; Neumann et al. 2023; Yu, 2024; Valova et al. 2024). Beyond the worry about its academic integrity, serious concerns encompass its potential risk of misinformation, especially, when unverified by students (Sallam, 2023; Valova et al. 2024). Some perceive it as fostering academic laziness (Yan, 2023), hindering critical thinking and writing kills (Moqbel & Al-Kadi, 2023; Islam & Islam, 2024), and disrupting fair learning assessment (Nguyen, 2023; Lund & Wang, 2023; Sok & Heng, 2024), which may, as Yu (2024) emphasizes, lead to negative impact of learners' learning outcomes and development.

In the light of this reality, academicians call for a measured approach that recognizes both the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating AI technology into pedagogical curricula. Schön et al. (2023) stress the importance of viewing AL tools like ChatGPT as innovative instruments rather than disruptive forces. Yu (2024) calls for a balanced and informed approach that acknowledges both the potential and limitations associated with the integration of AI technology into pedagogical curricula. Regarding the ethical consideration, Halaweh (2023) and Sok and Heng (2024) suggest AI plagiarism detectors to check students' writing while Villasenor (2023) suggests educating students on how to use AL tools effectively to ensure meaningful learning. For fair assessment, Rudolph and Tan (2023) recommend new forms of assessment that focus on critical thinking. Additionally, Darics and Poppel (2023) urge teachers to be aware of AL biases and the restricted framing of truth in AI-generated information. This highlights the importance of building teachers' professional competency of AL tool (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023; Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023 ; İpek et al., 2023), and offering educators effective training programs to harness the benefits of AL tools effectively (Mulian, 2023 ; Kasneci, 2023).

In Algeria; however, despite the ongoing debates surrounding AI technology, ChatGPT in particular, there is a notable absence of research on Algerian teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT. Given Algeria's involvement in global educational trends, understanding teachers' views is imperative.

This study aims to contribute to ongoing global debates by providing a comprehensive understanding of this issue in Algeria. The current study seeks to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards students' use of ChatGPT for English learning. Investigating their perceptions will help identifying perceived opportunities and drawbacks, concerns, and suggestions regarding AL technology's integration into the curriculum.

To achieve these objectives, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers towards students' use of ChatGPT ?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive the integration of ChatGPT within English language teaching and learning curriculum?

The significance of this study lies in its benefits in anticipating the challenges and opportunities presented AL tools by in Algerian EFL classrooms, and potentially elsewhere.

Research Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative method to explore the perceptions of Algerian EFL teachers at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret regarding their students' use of ChatGPT for English language learning.

Participants

Eight EFL teachers from a pool of fifteen at Ibn Khaldoun University were invited to participate, representing a range of teaching experience, subject areas, and ages. To ensure clarity and avoid ambiguity in the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with two additional teachers who were subsequently excluded from the main research.

Data Collection

Structured interviews served as the primary tool for gathering qualitative data. Each participant was invited to a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 15 minutes, which was conducted entirely in English. The interview was divided into three thematic sections. The first section explored the teachers' familiarity with ChatGPT and their perspectives on student motivations for using it. The second section delved into their perceived benefits, drawbacks, and any potential concerns associated with ChatGPT use for English learning. Finally, the third section investigated the teachers' views on the possibility of integrating ChatGPT into the English teaching and learning curriculum. An open-ended concluding question was asked as an opportunity for participants to share any additional comments or suggestions regarding ChatGPT's impact on students' achievement.

Results

Question one: Are you aware with EFL students' usage of ChatGPT or similar language model?
Regarding teachers' awareness of students' use of chatGPT for learning English, most teachers acknowledged its trending use among students, with one (participant 7) admitting the lack of thereof.

"yes, most students rely on it" (participant 1).

"chatGPT is trending among students" (participant 2).

"yes, yes sure, …." (the other participants).

"no , I'm not" (participant 7).

Question two: In your opinion, what are the reasons behind students use of ChatGPT ?

For their opinions regarding the reasons of its use by students, teachers attributed the reasons to laziness, language deficiency, ease of completing assignments, and quicker information gathering, rather than for improving English language proficiency or enhancing creativity, as reported by them:

"They use it for writing their assignments" (participants 1)

"the lack of vocabulary, inability to write essays and laziness" (participants 2, 3 and 4)

"I think laziness, because students don't want to make efforts to conduct research or prepare their home works " (participants 3).

" lack of information" (participant 8).
"*gathering information faster, answering questions"(participant 5)*

"…produce writing pieces free of mistakes" (participant 6).

Question three: Do you see any potential benefits of chatGPT for English language learning?

As teachers' answers below show, six teachers recognized some potential benefits of chatGPT for English learning such as quick information gathering and potential language understanding, but with some concerns expressed about its impact on students' English language development.

"I think it can help them in acquiring new vocabularies and expressions. However, if they use it for fulfilling writing assignments, there will be no benefit" (participant 1)

" it helps students saving time instead of searching many websites. ChatGPT can provide them the information very quickly; it can help them, but if they use it for learning, not for plagiarism. But it can't improve their language " (participant 2).

"there must be some benefits like building students vocabularies, grammar and writing"(participant 5).

"Making less efforts, generating ideas, providing feedback on mistakes" (participant 6).

"I may help them gathering and analyzing ideas" (participant 7).

"In some ways it can help students gathering information and sources quickly, but it hinders the learning process in many cases"(participant 8).

Unlike the above teachers who acknowledged chatGPT benefits for English learning, though with expressed concerns, two participants (3 and 4) admitted their lack of knowledge on how ChatGPT could assist learners.

" I've no idea of the capabilities of this AI in assisting students in learning" (participant 3).

"I don't see any benefit; it cripples learners from developing their skills" (participant 4).

Question four: In your opinion, what are the main potential drawbacks or concerns regarding students' use of ChatGPT?

The aim of this question was to know teachers' main concern regarding students' use of chatGPT. The main concerns, according to the participants, revolve around students' dependency on technology, ethical issues like plagiarism, and potential hindrances of English language, and critical thinking development. For examples, as cited by some of the respondents:

"yes, if it is badly used, it leads to cheating; it is unethical" (participant 1).

"yes, students will stop using their own words, it will not improve their writing, analyzing information, developing critical thinking" (participant 2).

"One of the drawbacks is that it is impossible to provide accurate evaluation regarding their writing assignments" (participant 3).

"heavy reliance on ChatGPT will lead students to get the habit of making no efforts" (participant 4).

"….it may affect the cognitive abilities of learners……ethical considerations" (participant 5).

"…decreasing cognitive skills and critical thinking abilities and unfair evaluation" (participant 6).

"… Students reliance of such tool will negatively impact their writing and speaking, which are crucial for language learning" (participant 8).

Participant 7, who reported earlier in question 1 his lack of awareness about ChatGPT use among students, reported that he had no concern regarding the potential drawbacks of ChatGPT, *"not really".*

Question five: As ChatGPT has become an inevitable tool for students' life, do you support its integration into pedagogical curricula?

As teachers' willingness to embrace technology innovation and change is imperative to achieve any desired outcome, this question aimed to know their perceptions on the integration of ChatGPT into pedagogical curricula. Gathered responses varied.

Some supported its integration with limitations and guidance like the following:

"Yes, I do support its integration, but only as a supplementary teaching material like other teaching material" (participant 5).

"Yes, but with limits and guidance" (participants 1 and 8).

" no, unless students are supervised while using it" (participant 2).

"yes, why not" (participant 6).

Other participants expressed lack of support or lack of sufficient knowledge, as follow:

"no, I don't support it" (participant 3).

"I don't know how it can be integrated; so I don't have a precise answer" (participant 4).

"No, I don't" (participant 7).

Question six: If, In the future, ChatGPT will be integrated into the pedagogical curricula, what recommendations would you have to ensure its effective use?

This question is linked to the previous one. It was asked in case of the participants expressed reservations about the integration of ChatGPT into the educational system. In response to this question, only 4 teachers provided recommendations while participants 3, 4, 6 and 7 did not provide any, because of their lack of knowledge of ChatGPT, according to them.

According to the respondents (participants 1, 2, 5, and 8), effective use of chatGPT, when integrated, should include implementing anti-plagiarism software, cautious use with guidance, providing training for teachers and learners, and raising students' awareness about both the positive and negative impacts of chatGPT.

1. *"I recommend anti-plagiarism software to prevent its abuse" (participant 1).*
2. *"It has to be used with caution, and students must be taught not to rely on it" (participant 2).*
3. *"Providing teachers and learners with training" (participant 5).*
4. *"I would recommend raising learners' awareness of its positive and negative impacts before using this AI tool. I would also recommend ChatGPT detectors for teachers, and strict regulations against plagiarism". (participant 8).*

Question seven: Is there anything else would you like to add regarding the matter?

The aim of the last question was to let the respondents speak their mind openly about the subject being examined.

Participant 1, 2, and 3 emphasized the need for careful use. Participant 5, called for the importance of re-evaluation of teaching methods and assessment in the era of AI technology *"…. teachers should start thinking of their teaching methods and assessment practices".* Other participants stressed the importance of considering both advantages and risks before ChatGPT's integration into the educational system. For example, as participant 8 said, *"If ChatGPT proves to facilitate language learning, then we should take this advantage while considering its misuse and acting upon them with suitable measures".*

Interpretation of the Main Findings

This study employed a qualitative method to understand Algerian EFL teachers' opinions regarding students usage of ChatGPT for English learning. The EFL teachers at Ibn Khaldoun University presented a spectrum of views on ChatGPT's role in learning English.

Concerning the first research question "What are the perceptions of EFL teachers' attitudes towards students use of ChatGPT in learning English?", the findings show a spectrum of views on ChatGPT's role in learning English. While the majority acknowledged some benefits of ChatGPT for English learning such as quick information gathering and potential language comprehension (Q3), they expressed concerns about its use such as laziness or language deficiencies (Q2). The teachers' perceptions extended beyond the

potential risk of chatGPT in enabling academic laziness to encompass negative impacts on language development, critical thinking, fair assessment, and cheating (Q4).

These concerns align with previous research by Valova et al. (2024), Ho (2024), and others, highlighting potential risks like cheating in assignments, as well as academic laziness (Yan, 2023), poor critical writing (Moqbel & Al-Kadi, 2023) and unfair learning assessment (Nguyen, 2023; Lund & Wang, 2023; Sok & Heng, 2024). This, according to Yu (2024) and Sullivan, Kelly and McLaughlan (2023) necessitates a balanced approach that enables teachers to leverage ChatGPT for students' language development.

Regarding its ethical use, it is crucial for schools system to address this issue. One approach to deal with this is to educate students and provide guidance on how to use large language models like ChatGPT for meaningful learning (Villasenor, 2023). Another approach, suggested by the teachers, participated in this study, is to employ AI plagiarism detection along with imposing policies against its misuse.

Regarding the second research question "How do EFL teachers perceive the integration of ChatGPT into the English language teaching and learning curriculum?", there were a divide among the teachers (Qs 5 and 6). Four participants (1, 2, 5, & 8) expressed cautious support, suggesting limitations, guidance, and training for both teachers and students, raising students' awareness about academic integrity, and anti-plagiarism with employing strict regulations against plagiarism. The remaining four (3, 4, 6, & 7) were either skeptical or opposed.

These differences in attitudes could be related to the varying levels of awareness among them. While some may have experience with AI tools, and therefore understand the opportunities and challenges associated with ChatGPT, the other participants are probably not aware of this. This means that teachers' awareness of the technological tools like ChatGPT that today's students use for learning, as well as its capabilities can support or oppose its integration into the curriculum.

In this regard, to ensure a smooth adaptation to future curricular changes and minimize potential teachers' resistance, there is a greater need for raising their awareness and offering training about the capabilities of AL tools like ChatGPT (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023; İpek et al., 2023; Kasneci, 2023).

Conclusion

This study shed light on the complex attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret regarding students' use of ChatGPT for English learning.

The findings obtained from the detailed analysis of the interview revealed mixed attitudes. While the majority of teachers recognized the potential benefits of ChatGPT in fostering language learning, they expressed concerns about its negative impacts on critical thinking skills, fair assessment, and impact on academic integrity, with more emphasis.

These findings suggest that future integration of ChatGPT into language instruction may pose both opportunities and challenges. While in one hand, it offers innovative ways to enhance teaching and learning processes, issues like ethical use, fair assessment, and critical thinking may pose significant barriers to its effective integrating, on the other hand. In this vein, addressing these challenges is crucial to harness the potential of ChatGPT for a more promising path forward.

The results obtained from this study demonstrate the following suggestions: Educators should receive adequate training programs and support to effectively incorporate ChatGPT into the existing teaching practices, while ensuring that it complements rather than replaces traditional teaching methods. Additionally, students should receive education about using ChatGPT responsibly and ethically while imposing policies against its misuse (plagiarism and cheating). By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions may transform ChatGPT to a meaningful tool for fostering students' learning and engagement in the AI-driven future.

Limitations of the Study This study acknowledges certain limitations. First, there is a lack of research in Algeria on the topic that could provide background to our study for comparison and contextualization. Future investigations are necessary to fill the research gap within the Algerian context. Second, the

study's generalizability is restricted by its focus on the perceptions of only eight EFL teachers from Ibn Khaldoun University in Tiaret. Their perceptions might not reflect those of EFL teachers elsewhere in Algeria, or even within the university investigated itself. Future studies exploring AI technology use in Algeria are important to scope by incorporate perspectives from a wider sample size from various Algerian universities. Finally, the data collection methodology could be enriched by including other data collection methods to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

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