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USING CHATGPT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: HOW MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS VIEW IT

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Abstract

The study explores Malaysian polytechnic students' perceptions on using the increasingly popular ChatGPT (a large language model chatbot created by OpenAI) in their English language learning. The objectives of the study include determining to what extent ChatGPT is used in students' English language learning, and how students perceive about using ChatGPT in helping them learn English language. The research design employed in this study is a survey study, and specifically a cross-sectional survey. For this purpose, a set of questionnaire adapted from relevant studies was distributed to diploma-level students in a Malaysian polytechnic. The results of this preliminary study will provide useful insight into how ChatGPT can benefit both formal and informal English language learning.

Keywords:

Chatgpt, English Language Learning, Chatbot

1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational contexts has been transformative, with advanced tools reshaping how students access and interact with knowledge (Ali, Fatemi, Boskabadi, Nikfar, Ugwuoke & Ali, 2024). One of the most notable advancements in this area is ChatGPT, a sophisticated AI chatbot developed by OpenAI (OpenAI, 2023). Designed to generate coherent and contextually appropriate responses, ChatGPT has gained rapid popularity worldwide, including in educational settings. Therefore, ChatGPT's ability to provide students with feedback on language use and companion in practising the language makes it a useful tool for language learning (Bin-Hady, Al-Kadi, Hazaea & Ali, 2023).

In the Malaysian polytechnic context where students are exposed to various digital learning tools, tools like ChatGPT hold significant potential. Koo and Ting (2024) found that the students' main challenges in learning English are 1) deficits in English proficiency, confidence and fluency. The increasing availability of AI-powered platforms provides an opportunity to supplement formal instruction with interactive, self-directed learning. However, little is known about how Malaysian polytechnic students perceive and utilise ChatGPT in their language learning process.

As such, this study addresses this gap by exploring the extent of ChatGPT usage and the perceived usefulness of the tool among diploma students at a Malaysian polytechnic. By analysing responses from the students, this study not only identifies usage trends but also connects the findings to well-established language learning theories, providing practical implications for integrating ChatGPT into English language instruction.

Though the use of ChatGPT has not been formally included in the polytechnic official English language syllabi, students' frequent usage of the tool has been prevalent in recent years. Therefore, the present preliminary study sets to investigate the following:

- i. To what extent is ChatGPT used in students' English language learning?
- ii. How do students perceive about using ChatGPT in helping them learn English language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relevant Second Language Acquisition Theories

Various Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories are relatable. Firstly, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) asserts that learners acquire language when exposed to "comprehensible input" slightly above their current level. ChatGPT provides such input through tailored, responsive dialogue, allowing learners to absorb language forms naturally.

Similarly, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) further supports the role of dialogue and interaction in learning. Though ChatGPT lacks true human interaction, it simulates meaningful exchanges that may foster language development.

2.2 ChatGPT and Language Learning

ChatGPT, powered by natural language processing (NLP) technologies, has emerged as a valuable tool in SLA. It provides learners with instant feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and writing structure, and can simulate realistic dialogues, encouraging autonomous language practice (Chen, Zou & Xie, 2023). The benefits of ChatGPT to language learning outlined in Asad et al. (2024) include 1) personalised learning, 2) interactive practice, 3) immediate feedback, and 4) accessibility and convenience. Prior research (e.g. Ahmed, Taha, Hussain & Hayat, 2023; Ali, Shamsan, Hezam & Mohammed, 2023; Liu, 2023; Shaikh, Yayilgan, Klimova & Pikhart, 2023) has also highlighted about the potential of using ChatGPT in both formal and informal language learning.

2.3 AI in Malaysian Education

While digital education tools have been introduced in Malaysian schools and tertiary institutions, the adoption of AI-powered platforms like ChatGPT is still to be explored. Previous studies have investigated the use of ChatGPT in language learning at various academic levels, from primary school (e.g. Lou, 2023), secondary school (e.g. Aineh & Ngui, 2024), to tertiary level (e.g. Younes et al., 2024). The studies generally claim that ChatGPT can be an effective tool for language learning but emphasise several challenges of its use.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach through a cross-sectional survey which collects information at just one point in time from a predetermined population (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The predetermined population of this study is the students of a Malaysian polytechnic. Considering this being a preliminary study, the researchers opted for convenience sampling. Table 3.1 demonstrates the demographic information of the 72 polytechnic students involved in this study (n=72).

Table 3.1: Demographic Information

	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37	51.4
	Female	35	48.6
Semester	Semester 1	18	25.0
	Semester 2	30	47.7
	Semester 3	11	15.3
	Semester 4	12	16.7
	Semester 5	0	0.0
	Semester 6 and above	1	1.4
Department	Commerce	41	56.9
	Engineering	31	43.1
Age	18 years old	3	4.2
	19 years old	37	51.4
	20 years old	24	33.3
	21 years old	4	5.6
	22 years old	3	4.2
	23 years old and above	1	1.4

The demographic data show a rather balanced gender distribution among the 72 respondents, with 51.4% male and 48.6% female. Most participants were in Semester 2 (47.7%), followed by Semester 1 (25.0%) and Semester 3 (15.3%). The age range was predominantly between 19 and 20 years old, reflecting the typical age group of diploma students in Malaysia.

The main objective was to assess how diploma students at a Malaysia polytechnic use and perceive ChatGPT in their English language learning. A structured questionnaire comprising 17 items was administered, divided into three sections: demographics (4 items), general questions (2 items), ChatGPT usage (5 items), and perceptions of ChatGPT usefulness (6 items using a 5-point Likert scale). The questionnaire was mainly adapted from a previous study by Liu (2023).

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyse the data using SPSS software.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 4.1: *General Questions*

Questions	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How often do you use ChatGPT for English language learning?	Very Often	10	13.9
	Often	24	33.3
	Sometimes	28	38.9
	Rarely	9	12.5
	Never	1	1.4
In terms of English language learning, what do you mainly use ChatGPT for?	Vocabulary Building	31	43.1
	Grammar Correction	42	58.3
	Writing Assistance	43	59.7
	Speaking Practice	27	37.5
	Reading Comprehension	23	31.9
	General Questions	53	73.6

Table 4.1 reveals that 38.9% of students used ChatGPT "sometimes" for English learning, while 33.3% reported using it "often" and 13.9% "very often." Only one student reported never using it. This suggests that ChatGPT has gained a reasonable level of adoption, although not yet fully integrated into daily learning routines or formal instructions. The most common uses were for writing assistance (59.7%), grammar correction (58.3%), and vocabulary building (43.1%). Notably, 37.5% used it for speaking practice, indicating lower engagement in oral communication through the platform. These results indicate that students perceive the chatbot as a reliable aid in written communication, reinforcing previous claims about its utility in improving accuracy and clarity in writing tasks.

Table 4.2: Response on the Use of ChatGPT

No.	Statement	Percentage (%)					Mean	Standard Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral / Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree		
		(Disagree)			(Agree)			
U1	I use ChatGPT outside of class to help with English language learning.	1.4	1.4	16.7	56.9	23.6	4.00	.769
		(2.8)			(80.5)			
U2	I use ChatGPT during English class activities.	0	5.6	31.9	51.4	11.1	3.68	.747
		(5.6)			(62.5)			
U3	I use ChatGPT to increase my interest and motivation in learning English.	1.4	2.8	20.8	61.1	13.9	3.83	.751
		(4.2)			(75.0)			
U4	I use ChatGPT to improve my English communication skills (listening/speaking).	1.4	2.8	18.1	55.6	22.2	3.94	.803
		(4.2)			(77.8)			
U5	I use ChatGPT to improve my English reading and writing skills.	1.4	1.4	15.3	61.1	20.8	3.99	.741
		(2.8)			(81.9)			

Table 4.2 provides further insight into specific usage patterns. A large majority (80.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that they used ChatGPT outside of class to aid their learning, and 75% reported that it helped increase their interest and motivation. Similarly, 81.9% said they used it to improve reading and writing skills, while 77.8% used it to enhance communication (listening and speaking). Interestingly, 62.5% of students reported using ChatGPT during class activities, suggesting a growing openness to integrating the tool into formal instruction.

Table 4.3: Response on the Perceptions on ChatGPT

No.	Statement	Percentage (%)					Mean	Standard Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral / Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree		
		(Disagree)			(Agree)			
P1	I think ChatGPT can help me improve the quality of my English language learning.	0	0	12.5	63.9	23.6	4.11	.595
		(0.0)			(87.5)			
P2	I think ChatGPT can provide me with more English language learning opportunities.	0	0	12.5	69.4	18.1	4.06	.554
		(0.0)			(87.5)			
P3	I think ChatGPT can help me enhance my English language learning abilities.	0	0	12.5	68.1	19.4	4.07	.565
		(0.0)			(87.5)			
P4	I think ChatGPT may have issues with plagiarisms or information leakage.	0	5.6	40.3	44.4	9.7	3.58	.746
		(5.6)			(54.1)			
P5	I think ChatGPT's responses may contain some inaccurate information.	0	4.2	23.6	61.1	11.1	3.79	.691
		(4.2)			(72.2)			
P6	I think ChatGPT is NOT helpful for my English language learning.	15.3	30.6	29.2	20.8	4.2	2.68	1.098
		(45.9)			(25.0)			

As shown in Table 4.3, students held highly positive perceptions of ChatGPT's usefulness. 87.5% agreed it improves learning quality, enhances language abilities, and provides more opportunities for learning. However, 72.2% acknowledged that ChatGPT might provide inaccurate information, and 54.1% expressed concerns about plagiarism or data leakage. Only 25% agreed that ChatGPT was "not helpful," indicating that while scepticism exists, the overall perception is overwhelmingly favourable.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study provides clear evidence that ChatGPT is being increasingly adopted by Malaysian polytechnic students as a supplementary tool in English language learning. The majority of respondents not only used ChatGPT regularly but also perceived it as a beneficial aid, particularly for improving grammar, writing, and vocabulary. These results support the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, especially Krashen's comprehensible input and Vygotsky's interactive learning.

Even though students generally hold positive attitudes on using ChatGPT in their English language learning, some areas remain underutilised, especially for speaking practice. This may be due to the fact that the students have not been exposed to ways how ChatGPT can help with their speaking skills. Other than that, the fact that students are concerned about ChatGPT's accuracy and plagiarism issues reflects a growing digital literacy among the students.

Based on the findings, it can be shown that ChatGPT has the potential to be employed in Malaysian language education, either formally or informally. Nonetheless, its integration ought to be guided with clear instructions on AI literacy and ethics training. With proper implementation, ChatGPT can be a powerful tool to help students learn English language in a more effective and interactive way.

The finding of the present study offer a few implications. For educators, since it is clear that a big majority of the students somehow utilise ChatCPT in learning English language, they should consider integrating the tool in their formal and informal instruction. Lecturers can design activities that use ChatGPT for assisting students' writing, reading, grammar correction or speaking. Furthermore, they may guide students on how to effectively and ethically use ChatGPT to provide them personalised language learning guidance.

As for curriculum designers, the findings emphasise a need for digital tool training in language courses. AI literacy should be included in the curriculum to prepare students with the skills necessary to use AI efficiently and ethically to help with their language learning. Guidelines on AI usage have to be precise and unambiguous so that education institutions may monitor the usage properly.

Though this study provides useful insights into students' perceptions on using ChatGPT in English language learning, a few limitations should be acknowledged. The main limitation is the sample size itself. The study involved only 72 students from a single Malaysian polytechnic

with convenience sampling, which would limit the generalisability of the findings. The results cannot represent the views of other students, be they in the same or other institutions. Another limitation is that the findings are based on self-reported perceptions collected through questionnaires. This method is subject to response bias, as students may provide socially desirable answers or overestimate their actual usage and proficiency.

As for future research, on top of gauging students' perception, further qualitative research is needed to explore how students use ChatGPT in practice. Case studies, classroom interventions, and longitudinal tracking could reveal how ChatGPT affects learning outcomes over time.

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