

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Exploring Saudi ESL Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT as a Generative AI Tool for Language Instruction

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Abstract

ChatGPT has emerged as a powerful generative AI tool. It has revolutionized the world with its production according to the given prompts. Capitalizing on its growing popularity and perceived instructional value, this study examines the perspectives of Saudi English as Second Language (ESL) students regarding the integration of ChatGPT as a generative AI tool into their learning practices. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study targeted a broader population of Saudi ESL students, with a purposive sample of 120 students selected randomly from various educational institutions studying in grade 8 across Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted from an open-ended questionnaire. Responses were audio-recorded and subjected to thematic analysis using Looppanel.ai software. The findings revealed that Saudi ESL students perceived ChatGPT as a comprehensive, user-friendly, and accessible tool, capable of delivering accurate and contextually relevant outputs. Participants acknowledged the platform's pedagogical utility, recognizing it as a valuable aid in supporting English language instruction.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, ESL classrooms, Students, Saudi Arabia.

1. Introduction

The convergence of technology and human interaction has significantly reshaped modern communication. Through the delivery of tailored experiences in knowledge acquisition and entertainment, artificial intelligence (AI) has enabled systems to align more closely with individual user preferences. This transformative impact extends across multiple domains,

including education, science, healthcare, security, and systems automation. Among the most notable developments in this evolution is Generative AI, which has garnered substantial attention for its capacity to autonomously generate human-like content (Susnjak & McIntosh, 2024).

The introduction of ChatGPT marks a pivotal advancement in this context, fundamentally altering the ways in which individuals think, learn, and interact (Rawas, 2024). As noted by ChatGPT is equipped to process vast volumes of textual data and demonstrates remarkable proficiency in both language understanding and natural language generation. Its progression to GPT-4 has further enhanced real-time interaction capabilities (Suriano, 2025).

ChatGPT has emerged as an innovation but has also influenced the emergence of other significant large language models (LLMs), including offerings from companies like Google AI. It has showcased enormous features (Khowaja et al., 2024). Built using advanced AI methodologies and deep learning architectures, ChatGPT serves as a robust platform for knowledge retrieval and educational support, responding to prompt-based queries with efficiency and precision. Its streamlined interface and algorithmic architecture deliver rapid, relevant, and high-quality results, making it an essential tool for students, educators, researchers, professionals, and businesses alike (Rice et al., 2024).

1.1.Research problem

Conventional methods of language learning have often led to student disengagement and inefficiency, particularly in the context of ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction. These traditional approaches have not only diminished learner satisfaction but have also struggled to meet the evolving demands and diverse learning needs of students. Consequently, ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms have frequently yielded inconsistent results, leaving learners dissatisfied with their progress. However, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has opened up new avenues for transforming language education. AI-driven technologies, particularly generative AI tools, offer innovative solutions that address the challenges posed by traditional methods. These advanced tools provide timely, targeted support, facilitating more engaging, interactive, and effective learning

experiences. By leveraging AI, educators can create dynamic and adaptive learning environments that better meet the needs of contemporary learners.

1.2. Significance of the research

In traditional ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms, knowledge is typically transmitted through conventional methods, which do not incorporate technological tools. As a result, learners in these settings often face significant challenges in acquiring language skills. However, the integration of AI applications has made language learning more engaging and effective. In response to this, several adult education programs have begun to incorporate these technologies into their curricula. This study aims to explore the perspectives of students regarding the integration of ChatGPT, a large language model powered by AI, into their teaching practices. The findings from this research will validate the effectiveness of ChatGPT in supporting and enhancing students' instructional capabilities.

1.3. Research Question

1. What views ESL learners hold regarding the use of ChatGPT in their learning process?

2. Review of Literature

Generative AI has emerged as a groundbreaking force, revolutionizing a variety of industries with its innovative solutions. The integration of AI across multiple sectors brings both advantages and challenges. As noted by Leiter et al. (2024), the primary objective of AI is to enable machines to perform tasks effectively while gaining an understanding of their environment, thereby becoming intelligent. AI systems leverage computational power to carry out human-like tasks, such as data collection, modification, generation, autonomous operation, and applying knowledge to complex problems ((Azaria, Azoulay & Reches, 2024). In the context of generative AI, ChatGPT stands as a trailblazer in conversational models. This large language model is designed to deliver precise, diverse, and contextually relevant responses based on user input, revolutionizing how humans engage with computers (Faisal, 2024). Its remarkable adaptability and personalization capabilities greatly enhance the overall user

experience. Mohammed, et al. (2025) highlighted that ChatGPT has the ability to learn from user interactions and preferences, offering tailored outcomes that meet individual needs.

2.2. What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT has attracted considerable attention from both the AI community and beyond since its debut in January 2025, marking a significant addition to the field of Generative AI. As a conversational large learning model, ChatGPT delivers accurate responses to user inputs, setting itself apart in the market with several unique features. Notably, it is affordable and personalized, observing and analysing user behaviour, expertise level, and emotional tone. Additionally, it sources responses from authoritative references, including academic journals, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the information provided. ChatGPT further enhances user interaction by offering dynamic exploration through advanced filtering, predictive questioning, and visual support (Pietrzak, 2025)

In comparison to similar models, ChatGPT boasts several distinct features. For instance, the training cost for generating accurate outputs is significantly lower than that of its counterparts. Moreover, ChatGPT is designed with a focus on advancing towards Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), processing specialized domains and datasets more effectively. It excels at delivering precise information in specialized areas such as legal, healthcare, and industry-specific contexts. Furthermore, ChatGPT is an open-source model, allowing unrestricted access for all users, which contributes to its widespread adoption and appeal (Ali, Anwar, & Zahid, 2025).

2.3. Theoretical connection

George Siemens (2004) and Stephen Downes (2005) proposed that connectivism is activated when an individual turns to digital technology to solve a problem (Downes, 2022). This could involve activities such as searching for information online, texting a friend, or browsing social media for relevant content. According to the Connectivism Learning Theory, leveraging digital technology for problem-solving significantly enhances one's comprehension of a subject (Plueger, C. T. (2024).). The theory underscores the pivotal role of technology in the learning process, suggesting that meaningful learning can occur through digital platforms.

Connectivism builds upon traditional learning theories, emphasizing how technology is reshaping the "what," "how," and "where" of learning. In their studies, Siemens and Downes highlighted eight core principles that form the foundation of connectivism:

- ❖ Learning and knowledge emerge from diverse perspectives.
- ❖ Learning is a process of establishing connections.
- ❖ Knowledge can be stored in non-human tools or technologies.
- ❖ The ability to learn is more critical than merely acquiring knowledge.
- ❖ To continue learning, it is necessary to sustain and nurture connections.
- ❖ Recognizing and linking concepts across various domains is a key skill.
- ❖ The goal of connectivism learning is to maintain accurate, up-to-date knowledge.
- ❖ Decision-making is an ongoing learning process, and our understanding today may be updated or revised in the future as new information becomes available (Davoodi, A. (2024).).

2.3.1. Some advantages of connectivism

Connectivism promotes collaboration, as learning occurs when peers engage in exchanging opinions, perspectives, and ideas through cooperative efforts (Almalki, Alruhaili, & Tashtoush, 2025). This collaborative approach allows communities to validate their actions and facilitates the widespread dissemination of knowledge (Pandya et al., 2024). It empowers both learners and educators to create environments and establish communities that guide the learning process (Leow & Neo, 2023).

Another key advantage of connectivism is its embrace of diversity. It encourages individuals to share their viewpoints, fostering an environment where knowledge is collectively shared, and no single piece of knowledge is considered superior to another (Mariyam & Karthika, 2025). However, some researchers have identified certain drawbacks. One of the challenges is that instructors may struggle when transitioning from a dominant, authoritative role to that of a collaborative partner (Ali, Alaa & Shahnaz, 2024). Additionally, learners' success is often determined by their personal skills rather than their age or educational level. Some learners, particularly those new to a subject or with limited prior knowledge, may require more structured guidance and direct instruction (Rocca, 2025). Lastly, there are instances when

technology can act as an obstacle rather than a facilitator, posing challenges to both learners and educators (Ali et al., 2024).

2.4. Recent researches on ChatGPT

Since ChatGPT has released, there are some important investigations conducted on the topic. However, some scholars have explored its some important studies in local context.

Mugableh (2024) viewed the impact of ChatGPT on the development of vocabulary knowledge of Saudi ESL students by performing an experimental study. They choose Sixty male Saudi students as a sample studying at Jouf University. Two groups were made and it was found out that the group which learnt by ChatGPT performed better than the other group. This authenticated the use of ChatGPT. Aldowsari and Aljebreen (2024) saw the efficacy of ChatGPT on vocabulary development in ESL Saudi context. They took 57 female learners from high schools. The study was experimental in design and apart from conducting the experiment, they also conducted a survey using a questionnaire from the student to explore their attitudes. It was concluded that ChatGPT was found to be an effective learning tool and can bring novelty and betterment in learners' performance. Going further, Abduljawad (2024) performed a study viewing the effect of AI in ESL writing situations. Their data consisted of 130 participants which showed notable difference in their writing after learning from ChatGPT. They also conducted interview from 6 students which provided qualitative insight. The interview responses claimed that ChatGPT is perfect for personalized feedback development of language and acquisition of vocabulary. Given the rapid appreciation of ChatGPT, an unexplored research area was considered. The goal was to investigate the perspectives of students at grade 8 who have used ChatGPT in their English language classrooms. This study aims to be an effort to determine whether ChatGPT is widely accepted among students. Additionally, it will provide insights into local opinions on utilizing and exploring ChatGPT.

3. Research Methods

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology for analysing and interpreting data. The quantitative approach, on the other hand, proves highly effective in collecting information suitable for descriptive statistical evaluation.

3.1 Sampling process

The target population comprised Saudi ESL instructors. Out of this group, 30 students were randomly selected from 10 different local universities. Both the educators and institutions were chosen using a simple random sampling method based on the pick-and-choose technique.

3.1.1. Participant Information

Table 2:

Gender	Num of participants	Age Range	AI app usage experience	English Exposure in years	Province	Native Country
Male	60	12-13(30)	2	3	Eastern,	Saudi
		13-14(30)	2	3	Western	Arabia
Female	60	12-13 (30)	2	3	Eastern	Saudi
		13-14(30)	3	3	Western	Arabia
Total	120	100%				

3.2. Research Instruments

The research employed a two-part open-ended questionnaire as its primary data collection tool. This instrument was designed to obtain both demographic details of the participating students and their insights regarding the use of the ChatGPT AI application. Interviews were conducted with the participants following their informed consent, and permission was also secured in advance to record these interview sessions for analytical purposes.

3.3. Procedure of theme extraction from Loopanel.ai.

3.3.1. Familiarization with the Data

The initial phase of thematic analysis requires an in-depth engagement with the collected data.

This process entails thoroughly reading and re-reading sources such as interview transcripts or questionnaire responses to develop a comprehensive understanding of their content, context, and underlying meanings.

3.3.2. Generating Initial Codes

Following data familiarization, the next step involves assigning preliminary codes to relevant sections of the text. These codes represent key features or meaningful patterns within the data that serve as the foundation for identifying broader themes during subsequent analysis stages.

3.3.3. Searching and Reviewing Themes

Once the initial coding was completed, the related codes were grouped into potential themes. This step involved analysing the coded data in relation to the research questions, ensuring that the emerging themes accurately representing the underlying patterns. Additionally, the themes provided a dataset indicating the frequency of specific words and phrases within the text. The theme review process was conducted in two stages: first, the raw data was re-examined for coherence, and then it was compared against the identified themes to ensure consistency and relevance.

3.3.4. Naming and Defining Themes

Following the review process, each theme was assigned a clear and concise name along with a brief definition. This step aimed to enhance clarity, facilitate understanding, and establish meaningful connections within the data, ultimately supporting a more coherent and effective analysis.

3.4. Analysis

To gather qualitative data, a focused visit was conducted with the participants. The collected data was then analysed using Looppanel.ai for thematic analysis, enabling the extraction of key themes.

3.4.1. Findings from Qualitative Data

The qualitative data analysis revealed five major themes extracted from Looppanel.ai, providing clear insights into students' views regarding the integration of ChatGPT in ESL settings. These themes, derived from both qualitative and quantitative data, are as follows:

Table 4: *Looppanel.ai* for analysing the themes.

This table presents the themes extracted from Claude AI along with their corresponding explanations. The data were submitted to Claude AI for analysis. In the second stage, the number of tokens (words) that appeared in the text was used as a key metric for identifying the primary themes. Claude AI is a specialized AI application designed to extract themes from text. The second table provides examples from the students' interviews that illustrate each of these themes.

No	Themes	Text Examples
1.	Application of ChatGPT	<p>Student 1 stated: "ChatGPT is a recent AI innovation that can provide responses to various ESL-related queries. Its conversational feature makes it particularly relevant for ESL environments."</p> <p>Student 120 shared: "Generative AI tools like ChatGPT are highly relevant in ESL classrooms due to their diversity, accuracy of information, and the speed of responses. The instant output is a key feature."</p>
2.	Developing ESL learners' motivation	<p>Student 12 remarked, "In my view, ChatGPT is one of the most effective tools for boosting learner motivation. Its seamless learning experience and the engaging features it offers play a significant role in motivating students."</p> <p>Student 108 expressed, "I believe that ChatGPT excels in motivating learners by providing concise summaries, posing key questions, and simplifying complex</p>

		<p>concepts, making it an invaluable resource for enhancing student engagement."</p>
3.	Assisting in collective learning and collaboration	<p>Student 28 mentioned, "I noticed that ChatGPT promoted collaboration through its engaging outputs. While I created a collaborative environment, ChatGPT helped me generate a wide range of appealing activities."</p> <p>Student 75 stated, "I brought my students together for improved results, and unlike before, I no longer needed to design individual activities. ChatGPT effectively handled that by providing impactful and engaging collaborative tasks."</p>
4.	Students observation about ChatGPT	<p>Student 89 remarked, "Students were excited and eager to use it in the classroom."</p> <p>Student 33 noted, "I observed that my students were enthusiastic and full of energy. They were keen to use it and showed a strong interest in integrating it into their learning."</p>
5.	Specific problems in implementing ChatGPT	<p>Student 59 mentioned, "There are no particular challenges as ChatGPT is a user-friendly and straightforward app."</p> <p>Student 7 stated, "The only challenge lies in integrating ChatGPT with the syllabus to achieve optimal results."</p>

6.	ChatGPT vs orthodox methods	<p>Student 97 stated, "ChatGPT is undoubtedly superior as it contrasts with traditional teaching and learning methods. It is engaging, efficient, and innovative."</p> <p>Student 22 added, "ChatGPT offers a refreshing approach, making learning more interactive and dynamic compared to conventional methods."</p>
7.	ChatGPT vs Deepseek	<p>Student 89 mentioned, "To the best of my knowledge, ChatGPT delivers more accurate and precise results, particularly for technical academic queries."</p> <p>Student 101 commented, "Both tools are excellent. As conversational AI tools, I would recommend integrating both into teaching and learning practices."</p>
8.	ChatGPT's advantages in ESL settings	<p>Student 43 shared, "In my opinion, ChatGPT provides an easy and seamless learning experience. It also fosters collaboration, offering unrestricted access without limitations on data input."</p> <p>Student 28 remarked, "For me, the key benefits of ChatGPT are its continuous, rapid output and efficiency. It seems capable of answering any query from anywhere in the world."</p>
9.	Assisting to overcome learner's problems	<p>Student 71 stated, "Yes! By creating engaging activities, providing precise summaries, and offering relevant information, ChatGPT can effectively reduce learners' challenges."</p> <p>Student 101 shared, "Learning in ESL is also an individual experience, and with ChatGPT, learners can seek help on any area of difficulty and receive the desired output. Personalized learning is a key feature of this AI application."</p>

10.	Applying ChatGPT in ESL classrooms	<p>Student 40 expressed, "For effective implementation, I would recommend designing a syllabus that incorporates tasks requiring the use of ChatGPT."</p> <p>Student 113 stated, "It is up to policymakers, managers, and heads of institutions to develop a framework that facilitates the integration of ChatGPT. Lesson plans should be structured to include ChatGPT as a core component."</p>
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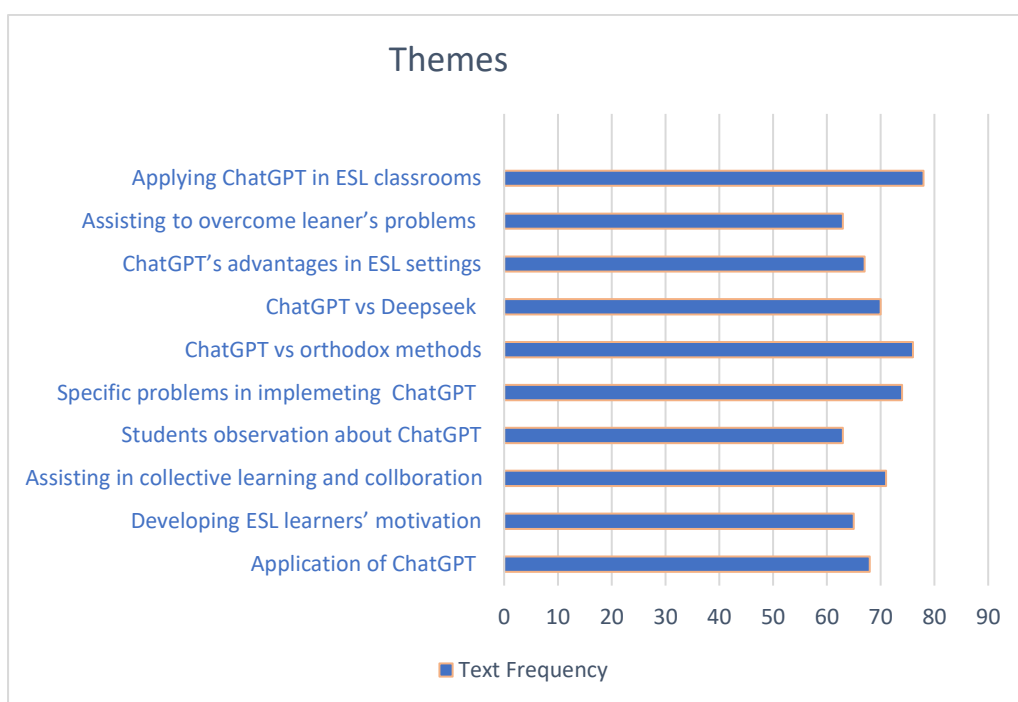


Figure 1: *Most frequently mentioned themes in the text.*

3.5. Discussion

The thematic analysis conducted using Looppanel.ai revealed key recurring themes that encapsulate students' perspectives on the integration of ChatGPT. Students generally viewed ChatGPT as a novel yet highly impactful AI tool designed to simplify and streamline

operations for its users. This aligns with earlier research that has highlighted the transformative nature of ChatGPT in enhancing educational practices.

The survey aimed at evaluating ChatGPT's user-friendliness, efficiency, and effectiveness, yielded predominantly positive responses. A significant number of respondents highlighted its overall effectiveness and expressed a clear preference for its use in educational settings. The qualitative data from open-ended interviews further reinforced this sentiment, with students consistently recognizing ChatGPT as a relevant and revolutionary tool in the realm of generative AI conversational applications. These findings resonate with Ali, Anwar, and Zahid (2024), who described ChatGPT as a leading tool in English language learning.

Students also reported that ChatGPT's engaging and compelling outputs effectively motivated learners, echoing the observations of Abduljawad (2024) who noted that AI-driven applications are particularly effective in enhancing motivation within second and foreign language contexts. Moreover, students found ChatGPT to be incredibly helpful both inside and outside the classroom, offering relevant information, examples, and practical assistance (Pietrzak, 2025), which corroborates findings from this study.

The students further emphasized that learners were more engaged and showed a heightened interest in using ChatGPT. This finding aligns with Suriano et al. (2025), who argued that diversifying activities with AI tools is key to improving educational outcomes. Traditional teaching methods have increasingly failed to meet the needs of modern English language learners, who now prefer contemporary, AI-driven approaches to education. These tools have proven instrumental in enhancing communication and facilitating technology-based learning, leading to better results (Khowaja et al., 2024).

In comparison with other generative AI tools, students found ChatGPT equally impactful, confirming its role as a valuable educational tool. Rawas (2024) also noted that both ChatGPT and similar models are designed to deliver seamless and accurate responses, with students appreciating ChatGPT's open-source, cost-effective, user-friendly interface. The general consensus among educators was that ChatGPT provides numerous advantages due to its low cost, ease of use, and simple design.

This research aligns closely with the principles of connectivism. The study observed that learners formed formal connections through ChatGPT, which acts as a digital tool for knowledge acquisition. As Downes (2022) stated, learning requires formal connectivity, and non-human tools play a critical role in this process. The students' views in this study further

affirmed that the ultimate goal of learning is to acquire accurate and up-to-date knowledge, a key tenet of connectivism (Peter & Ogunlade, 2024). Additionally, ChatGPT was recognized as a decision-making tool, offering a platform for learners to make informed choices. Ismail (2024) noted that connectivism encourages learning through digital platforms, a sentiment validated by this research.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on AI-driven applications, aligning with research by Mohammed et al. (2025) who found that AI tools like ChatGPT possess universal appeal and adapt well to the specific needs of their users.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of students' perspectives on ChatGPT yielded significant outcomes, with key findings supported by data extracted through Looppanel.ai. Students perceived ChatGPT as an efficient and cost-free conversational AI tool that allows unlimited queries, offering a stark contrast to other platforms, particularly ChatGPT. The app's ease of use, coupled with its ability to deliver accurate results, set it apart. From a connectivism perspective, ChatGPT acted as a catalyst for collaboration, fostering connections and information-sharing that contributed to positive educational outcomes. This study offers valuable insights for various stakeholders, positioning ChatGPT as a pioneering tool for further experimental research. The questionnaire data highlight the rapid emergence of AI tools and their undeniable efficacy in modern education. The findings hold relevance for future researchers, policymakers, and educational administrators, suggesting that ChatGPT can play a pivotal role in enhancing educational practices and outcomes.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. In your professional opinion, does ChatGPT serve as a meaningful tool within English as a Second Language (ESL) instructional settings? How?
2. Do you believe that the use of ChatGPT contributes to enhanced student engagement and improved academic outcomes in ESL learning environments? Share?
3. Have you observed an increase in learner motivation as a result of integrating ChatGPT into ESL teaching practices? If yes how?
4. To what extent do you think ChatGPT facilitates a collaborative and interactive learning atmosphere for ESL students?
5. How do ESL students typically react when engaged in classroom activities that involve the use of ChatGPT?
6. What specific challenges, if any, have you encountered while incorporating ChatGPT into ESL instruction?
7. Compared to conventional approaches, how would you evaluate ChatGPT's effectiveness in promoting language acquisition among ESL learners?
8. From your perspective, what are the most significant advantages of using ChatGPT in the context of ESL classrooms?
9. In what ways has ChatGPT supported learners in overcoming challenges commonly faced during second language acquisition?
10. Do you support the structured and widespread integration of ChatGPT into ESL pedagogical frameworks? Why or why not?

Appendix B

