

EXPLORING TOURISM STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHATGPT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract : The rapid development of artificial intelligence has introduced new opportunities in language learning, including the use of ChatGPT as an interactive learning assistant. In tourism education, English proficiency is important for communication with international visitors. This study aims to investigate tourism students' perspectives of utilizing ChatGPT in learning English for tourism fields. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach involving tourism students enrolled in an English for Tourism course. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to examine students' experiences in using ChatGPT to support tourism-related language learning activities, such as making tour guiding scripts, practicing dialogues with tourists, and generating tourism-related vocabulary. The findings show that most students perceive ChatGPT as a useful tool that helps them generate ideas, increase vocabulary related to tourism, and practice English communication more confidently. Students also reported that ChatGPT gives quick explanations and practical examples that support independent learning, additionally some students noted limitations based on the need to verify the accuracy of the information and avoid overreliance on AI tools. Overall, the findings suggest that ChatGPT can serve as a supportive learning tool in English for Tourism when used critically and under teacher guidance. The study provides insights into the potential integration of AI tools in tourism-related English language learning.

Keywords: ChatGPT, English for tourism, students' perceptions, language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed educational practices, particularly in language learning. The integration of ChatGPT has built new opportunities for students to engage with language in more interactive, personalized, and flexible ways. Among various AI technologies, ChatGPT has emerged as a widely used platform that supports students in practicing English through interactive, real-time communication. Its ability to generate human-like responses allow students to engage in meaningful language use, including reading, writing, and conversational practice, beyond the constraints of traditional classroom (Kasneci et al., 2023; Zhai, 2023).

In the context of English language learning, ChatGPT gives several pedagogical affordances. It can function as a virtual tutor by giving instant feedback, suggesting vocabulary and

grammar corrections, and generating examples tailored to students' needs. This immediacy of feedback is particularly beneficial for language acquisition, as it allows students to notice and correct errors in real time (Huang et al., 2023). Moreover, ChatGPT supports student autonomy by allowing students to practice independently at their own pace, which in line with the principles of self-directed learning and learner-centred pedagogy (Little, 2007; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022).

Several previous studies have showed the potential of ChatGPT in improving students' language skills, enhancing autonomous learning, and increasing motivation. For example, research has shown that AI-based writing assistants can significantly enhance students' writing quality and grammatical accuracy (Ranalli, 2018; O'Neill & Russell, 2019). Similarly, previous studies on ChatGPT can facilitate idea generation, enhance engagement, and provide scaffolding for language learners (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). These findings suggest that ChatGPT has the potential to complement traditional teaching methods and support more effective language learning experiences.

However, despite these promising advantages, most existing research tends to focus primarily on the effectiveness of AI tools in improving specific language skills, such as writing or grammar accuracy. There is still limited investigation of how students themselves perceive the use of ChatGPT as a learning tool. Understanding students' perceptions is important because their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences can significantly impact how technology is used in learning contexts (Teo, 2011). Additionally, students' perceptions can show not only the perceived benefit of the tool but also the obstacles they face, such as lack of critical evaluation, over-reliance and obstacles in interpreting ChatGPT responses (Zhai, 2023).

Moreover, the utilization of ChatGPT in English language learning raises essential pedagogical questions regarding students' critical thinking and autonomy. While ChatGPT can promote independent learning, they may also lead to passive learning attitude if students rely too heavily on automated responses. That is why, it is crucial to examine how students navigate the balance between using ChatGPT as a supplementary tool and maintaining their own cognitive engagement in the learning process.

Given these gaps, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of ChatGPT in English language learning, emphasizing on its perspectives, benefits, and challenges. By exploring students' experiences in a specific educational context, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on ChatGPT in education, particularly by giving insights into how students interact with and make sense of emerging technologies in language learning.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method to investigate students' perceptions of ChatGPT in English language learning. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because this study aims to understand participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, and attitudes toward the use of ChatGPT, rather than to measure its effectiveness through numerical data. Qualitative research enables researchers to capture rich, detailed insights into how individuals make meaning of their experiences in specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Especially, a case study was adopted as it allows for an in-depth and holistic investigation of a bounded system, such as a group of students within a particular classroom setting. This approach is particularly suitable for examining contemporary phenomena, like the integration of ChatGPT in education, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). By emphasizing on a specific group of learners, the study seeks to provide a contextualized understanding of how ChatGPT is perceived and utilized in real classroom practices.

Furthermore, the case study design enables the researcher to explore multiple dimensions of students' perceptions, including cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects. It also allows for the utilization diverse sources, which contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through data triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the utilization interviews and supports the development of a well-rounded analysis of students' experiences with ChatGPT.

In addition, this design is particularly relevant in the context of emerging educational technologies, where users' perceptions and interactions play an important role in determining the success of technology integration. Exploring students' perceptions through a qualitative case study not only gives insights into the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT but also reveals how students negotiate their learning processes when supported by AI tools. Therefore, this approach is expected to generate meaningful and context-sensitive findings that can inform both pedagogical practices and future research in AI-assisted language learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at one of the universities in West Java, Indonesia, within the English language learning context. This setting was selected because the integration of digital technologies, including AI-based tools such as ChatGPT, has increasingly become part of students' learning practices, particularly in higher education. The university environment provides a relevant context for examining how students utilize emerging technologies to support their academic and language development.

The participants of this study consisted of six undergraduate students majoring in Tourism. These students were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is commonly

utilized in qualitative research to identify participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, all participants had prior experience using ChatGPT as part of their English learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom.

The relatively small number of participants is consistent with the nature of qualitative case study research, which prioritizes depth of understanding over generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By focusing on a limited number of participants, the researcher was able to explore their experiences, perceptions, and reflections in more detail. This allowed for a more nuanced analysis of how ChatGPT was perceived and utilized in their learning process.

Furthermore, students in the Tourism major were considered particularly relevant for this study because English proficiency plays a crucial role in their future professional careers. As future practitioners in the tourism industry, they are asked to build strong communication skills in English, both in spoken and written. That is why, their engagement with tools like ChatGPT give valuable insights into how AI can support language learning in professionally oriented educational contexts.

Overall, the selection of this research setting and participants was intended to ensure that the data collected would be rich, relevant, and closely aligned with the objectives of the study, particularly in exploring students' perceptions of ChatGPT in English language learning.

Data Collection Techniques

To get deeper insights into students' perceptions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all six participants. This method was chosen because it allows the researchers to investigate participants' experiences in a flexible yet focused manner. Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between predetermined questions and the chances to probe further based on participants' responses, allowing a more in-depth understanding of their perceptions (Kallio et al., 2016).

The interview protocol was developed based on the objectives of the study, covering key aspects such as students' experiences in using ChatGPT, perceived advantages and disadvantages, attitudes toward AI-assisted learning. Open-ended questions were used to motivate participants to elaborate on their responses and share personal experiences in detail. Additionally, follow-up questions were asked to clarify responses and explore emerging themes during the interview process.

Each interview was conducted individually to ensure that participants could express their opinions freely without external influence. The interviews were carried out in a comfortable and familiar setting, either face-to-face or via an online platform, depending on participants' availability. Each session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in a mix of Indonesian and English to ensure clarity and ease of expression.

To make sure accuracy, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. The utilization of transcription helped preserve the authenticity of participants' responses and allowed for a more precise analysis of their perceptions. The interview data were then coded systematically and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to students' perceptions of ChatGPT.

Overall, semi-structured interviews were considered an effective data collection method in this study, as they provided detailed, rich, and contextually grounded insights into how students perceive and experience the use of ChatGPT in English language learning.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it gives a systematic yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. The analysis began with the process of data familiarization, in which the researcher carefully read and re-read the interview transcript to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. During this stage, initial ideas and impressions were noted to guide the analysis.

The next step involved generating initial codes, where meaningful segments of the data were systematically identified and labeled. Coding was conducted by highlighting relevant phrases, sentences, or expressions that reflected students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward the use of ChatGPT in English language learning. These codes were then examined and compared to identify similarities and differences across participants' responses.

Following this, the researcher proceeded to search for themes by grouping related codes into broader categories that represented significant patterns in the data. These potential themes were then carefully evaluated in the reviewing phase, where the researcher ensured that the themes accurately reflected the data and were coherent, consistent, and distinct from one another. Any overlapping or unclear themes were refined or reorganized to improve clarity and analytical depth.

Finally, the themes were defined and named to capture the essence of each category in relation to the research objectives. This stage involved clearly describing what each theme represented and how it contributed to understanding students' perceptions of ChatGPT. The final themes were then used as the basis for interpreting the findings and discussing their implications in the context of English language learning and AI integration.

Students' Perceptions

Overall, students demonstrated predominantly positive perceptions toward the use of ChatGPT as a learning tool in English language learning. Most participants viewed ChatGPT

as an innovative, accessible, and engaging platform that meaningfully supports their learning process. They emphasized that ChatGPT offers a different learning experience compared to traditional classroom interaction, particularly in terms of flexibility and emotional comfort. For many students, interacting with ChatGPT felt less intimidating than communicating directly with teachers, which encouraged them to practice English more frequently and with greater confidence.

This perception is reflected in one student's statement:

"I feel more confident using ChatGPT because I'm not afraid of making mistakes. If I say something wrong, it just corrects me without judging." (Student 2)

Another participant similarly expressed:

"When I talk to ChatGPT, I can try again and again. With lecturers, sometimes I feel nervous because I don't want to be wrong." (Student 5)

These responses indicate that ChatGPT creates a low-anxiety learning environment, which is crucial in language learning, as anxiety is often a barrier to participation and performance. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that AI-based tools can reduce learners' anxiety and promote a more comfortable learning atmosphere (Zhai, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023).

In addition, students perceived ChatGPT as a supportive and always-available learning companion. Its accessibility allowed them to learn anytime and anywhere, without being limited by classroom schedules. This was particularly beneficial for students who needed additional time to understand materials or practice their English skills independently.

As one student explained:

"I can use ChatGPT anytime, even at night when I'm studying alone. It helps me when I don't understand something." (Student 1)

Similarly, another student noted:

"It's like having a tutor that is always ready to help me. I don't need to wait for the next class." (Student 4)

Furthermore, several students highlighted that ChatGPT contributed to a more relaxed and exploratory learning environment. They felt free to experiment with vocabulary, sentence structures, and ideas without fear of being criticized. This sense of freedom encouraged them to take more risks in using English, which is an essential component of language development.

For example, one participant stated:

“I can try different sentences and learn new words without worrying. It feels more like practicing than being tested.” (Student 3)

These findings suggest that students’ positive perceptions of ChatGPT are closely related to its ability to foster motivation, confidence, and active engagement in learning. The supportive and non-judgmental nature of AI interaction appears to encourage students to participate more actively in language practice. This is consistent with the concept of learner-centred fields, where technology facilitates personalized and self-directed learning experiences (Huang et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings indicate that ChatGPT is not only perceived as a functional learning tool but also as an emotionally supportive platform that enhances students’ willingness to engage in English language learning. Such positive perceptions play a crucial role in determining the successful integration of technology in educational contexts, as students’ attitudes significantly influence their learning behaviors and outcomes (Teo, 2011).

Students’ Challenges

Despite its benefits, students also identified several challenges in using ChatGPT in English language learning. One of the main concerns was over-reliance, where some students admitted that they tended to depend too much on ChatGPT to complete their tasks rather than developing their own ideas. This tendency indicates a potential risk of reduced critical thinking and creativity if the tool is used without proper awareness and control.

This issue is reflected in one student’s statement:

“Sometimes I just copy the answer from ChatGPT because it is easier. I don’t always think about my own ideas.” (Student 5)

Another participant similarly noted:

“I feel like I depend on it too much, especially when I have assignments. It makes me a bit lazy to think.” (Student 2)

These responses suggest that while ChatGPT can facilitate learning, it may also lead to passive learning behaviors if students rely on it excessively. This finding is consistent with concerns raised in previous studies that AI tools, if not used critically, may reduce learners’ active engagement and higher-order thinking skills (Kasneci et al., 2023; Zhai, 2023).

In addition to over-reliance, students pointed out that ChatGPT sometimes produced inaccurate, unclear, or overly complex responses, which could lead to confusion. This was particularly challenging for students with lower levels of English proficiency, as they struggled to fully understand the explanations provided. For instance, one student explained:

“Sometimes the answer is too complicated, and I don’t really understand it.” (Student 3)

Another student added:

“I think ChatGPT is helpful, but sometimes the information is not always correct, so I get confused.” (Student 1)

These findings highlight the issue of reliability and comprehensibility in AI-generated content. While ChatGPT can provide useful information, its responses are not always perfectly accurate or tailored to the learner’s level, which may hinder understanding if students do not critically evaluate the output. This aligns with previous research emphasizing that AI-generated responses require careful interpretation and verification by users (Huang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, several participants reported difficulty in understanding certain explanations, especially when the language used was too advanced or not aligned with their proficiency level. This suggests that although ChatGPT can generate detailed explanations, it does not always adapt effectively to individual learners’ needs.

As one participant stated:

“Sometimes I need simple explanations, but ChatGPT gives long and difficult answers.” (Student 6)

These challenges indicate that the effectiveness of ChatGPT depends not only on its capabilities but also on how it is used by learners. Without proper guidance, students may struggle to maximize its benefits or may even develop counterproductive learning habits. Therefore, these findings suggest that while ChatGPT is a powerful and supportive learning tool, it requires critical and guided use. Students need to develop the ability to evaluate, select, and interpret AI-generated content rather than accepting it passively. In this regard, the role of teachers remains essential in guiding students to use ChatGPT effectively, fostering critical thinking, and ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces meaningful learning processes. This supports the view that AI should function as a complementary tool within a pedagogically guided learning environment (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that tourism students generally perceive ChatGPT positively as a flexible, accessible, and supportive tool for English language learning, particularly in developing tourism-related communication skills, increasing vocabulary, building confidence, and encouraging autonomous practice through a low-anxiety learning environment. ChatGPT’s instant feedback and availability allow students to practice English beyond classroom boundaries, making it a valuable supplementary resource in English for Tourism education. However, the study also highlights challenges such as over-reliance, reduced critical thinking, and the possibility of inaccurate or overly complex responses, which may hinder meaningful learning if used uncritically. Therefore, while ChatGPT has significant potential to enhance students’ language learning experiences, its effective use depends on critical awareness and proper teacher guidance to ensure that AI functions as a

complementary educational tool rather than a substitute for active learning, creativity, and cognitive engagement.

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