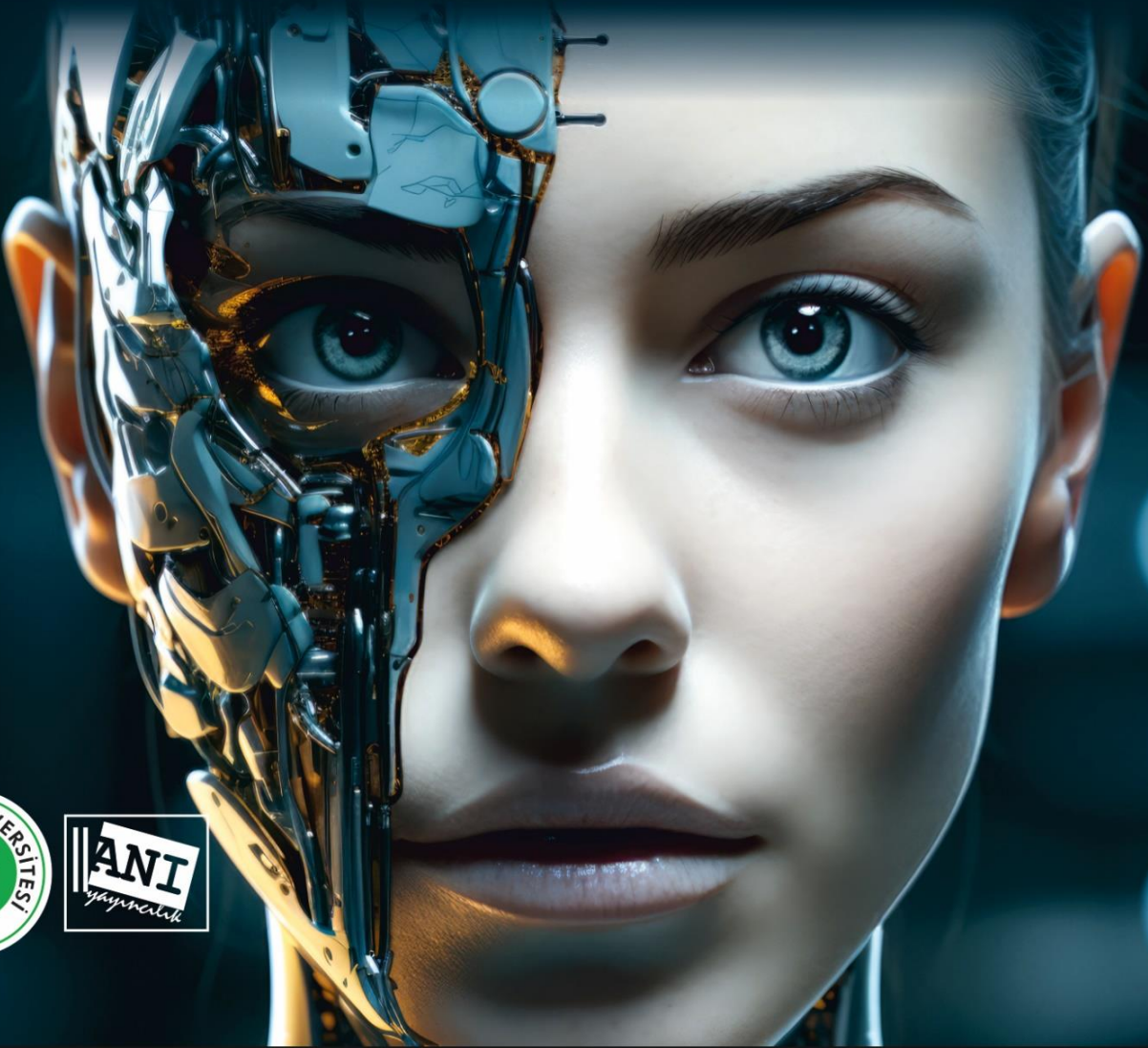


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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONGRESS

EJERCONGRESS 2024
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May 21-24, 2024/ Kocaeli University - Türkiye

Editor

Distinguished Professor Şenel POYRAZLI,
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Main Theme

“Designing the Future: Changing Paradigms and Transhumanism with Artificial Intelligence in Education”

Sub-Themes

- Academic freedom, autonomy, and social responsibility in education
- Artificial intelligence and educational applications
- Augmented reality applications
- Barriers to learning
- Blended learning
- Computer-assisted measurement and evaluation
- Core skill sets for students and teachers
- Design of school buildings in the future
- Designing and delivering a digital strategy
- Digital competence
- Digital parenting
- Distance Education
- Earthquake Education
- Post Earthquake Trauma Training
- Earthquake and Effective Psychosocial Intervention Methods
- Earthquake and Trauma
- The Impact of Earthquakes on School Staff
- Education and society
- Education for healthy living and healthy communities
- Education for a sustainable life
- Education in the digital age: Primary, secondary, high school, higher education, and application examples
- Educational leadership in the digital age
- Effects of regional differences on education
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Related to Marginalized Groups
- Emergency Management at Schools
- Evidence-Based School Counseling Services for Refugees and Marginalized Groups
- Globalisation and Education
- Higher education
- Innovative learning designs for student success
- Instructional technologies in the digital age
- Integration of immigrants into education
- K-12 education (preschool, primary, and secondary education)
- Learning management systems
- Lifelong learning
- Machine learning
- Management information system
- Managing schools
- Measurement and evaluation of students’ learning outcomes
- Metaverse
- Migration and education
- Multicultural Classroom Concerns of Educators and Parents
- New educational system after COVID-19
- New skills to live and work in new times
- New technologies in teaching and learning

- New trends in educational research
- New trends in learning and teaching methods
- New trends in research methods
- Pedagogy, educational programs, and teaching
- Politics, good governance, and leadership in the educational sector
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Abstract

In line with the rapid advancement in educational technology, and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, the teaching and learning of the English language has undergone a significant transformation. This paper aims to explore students' perceptions of integrating AI into the English as a foreign language (EFL) learning process. To this aim, data were collected from 26 senior students in the Department of English Language Teaching at a state University in Türkiye through a background questionnaire and interviews. Findings revealed that utilization of AI language tools was advantageous in providing equality in learning opportunities, access to authentic materials, reduced reliance on traditional learning settings and instructors, access to accurate information, and supporting various learning activities such as receiving timely feedback, error correction, idea generation, planning, outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing, note-taking, and proofreading. It also offers advantages in improving pronunciation and fostering autonomous and adaptive learning, while also reducing anxiety. However, challenges associated with utilizing AI-powered tools include the presentation of inaccurate, artificial, and inauthentic information, incorrect statements, a lack of instructional guidance, a mechanical learning experience, hindrance to creative writing and speaking, and concerns over data privacy and security. Thus, reevaluating teachers' roles, enhancing digital literacy, intensifying the infrastructure for easier and more affordable access to AI tools, increasing expert guidance, and addressing privacy concerns are recommended in utilizing AI-powered tools in EFL settings.

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Keywords: English as a foreign language learning; artificial intelligence; learners; perceptions

Introduction

While learning English as a foreign language provides unique opportunities, the process is fraught with challenges when the process of learning is considered. Learners suffer from a shortage of contextual and authentic materials, ineffective learning activities, limited practice opportunities, and an overreliance on the learners' first language (Savran Çelik & Aydın, 2018). Moreover, learners often face the challenge of a lack of exposure to comprehensible input and ineffective vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Krashen, 1982). These issues result in certain problems such as foreign language anxiety, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, amotivation, demotivation, and finally, failure to learn English as a foreign language. Moreover, not enough time is allocated to English classes, and the classrooms tend to be overcrowded (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2021).

Emerging technologies, particularly AI applications, may present solutions for the existing issues stated so far. First, AI can transcribe texts from speech, recognize and correct mistakes and errors (Kanero et al., 2018), present translation services, foster cross-cultural learning (Shadiev et al., 2018), and constitute a competitive learning environment by situating learners within a learning community. Second, artificial intelligence applications are helpful for providing an environment within the scope of autonomous and collaborative learning. In other words, learners can self-regulate their learning processes and interact with native speakers (Kannan & Munday, 2018). Third, learners can access contextual and authentic materials and develop

essential language skills such as grammar and vocabulary. However, the efficiency of using artificial intelligence in the process of foreign language learning heavily depends on their perceptions as it can significantly influence their achievement and progress in the target language. Dramatically enough, research on learners' perceptions of using AI remains too limited to conclude, as the research synthesis below indicates. However, before synthesizing the current research, a theoretical framework is drawn regarding perceptions and the utilization of AI in foreign language learning.

Theoretical framework

Autonomous learning, which is one of the learning theories rooted in Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory can be defined as an agentive activity of initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence in one's self-regulated and/or self-directed learning (Ponton & Rhea, 2006). As a multi-faceted construct, autonomous learning is described as "critical thinking, planning and evaluating learning, and reflection, a conscious effort on the part of the learner to continuously monitor the learning process from beginning to end" (Horváth, 2007, p. 103). Differently from Behaviorism and Cognitivism, the Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes that human behavior is intentional and is vastly affected by cognitive processes and the environment. The agency is based on the learner's attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs which produce behavioral intentions and other behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

AI is a platform that performs multitasks including learning, adapting, and understanding knowledge. Within this scope, it

reactivates the current knowledge and uses creative language that can be produced by human intelligence (Sarker, 2022). The use of AI in language learning might be clarified regarding Activity Theory. That is, Activity Theory deals with the mental capabilities of the individual within the scope of cultural and technical aspects of human actions (Bertelsen & Bødker, 2003) in a socio-technical system through the elements of the objective of the activity system, actors engaged in the activities, social context, concepts, tool mediation, division of labor, and rules (Bryant et al., 2005). From this perspective, it can be stated that AI as a tool and environment presents a dynamic experience that combines cultural context and technical aspects (Woolf et al., 2013) in the foreign language learning process.

Previous studies

The results of the fairly limited number of studies on learners' perceptions of integrating AI into foreign language learning also seem conflicting. For instance, Phan (2023) examined 100 learners' perceptions regarding AI-powered writing tools through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The results demonstrated positive perceptions among learners concerning the simplicity, adaptability, and accessibility of AI tools. Nevertheless, lack of tool variety and learners' technology anxiety were assumed as challenging parameters. In another study, Lozano and Fontao (2023) focused on learners' perceptions of AI technology from a dual perspective, as learners and future teachers. Showing a positive perception of artificial intelligence usage in English classrooms, participants did not perceive AI as a threat to the educational system. On the other hand, they pointed out that more knowledge in terms of accurate use of AI tools was required to ensure the quality of education.

Overview of the current study

As previously stated, foreign language learning includes significant benefits such as creating opportunities for communicating, developing cultural awareness, enhancing memory and problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. However, learners suffer from the lack of contextual and authentic materials, ineffective activities, and the lack of practice opportunities. Within this scope, AI applications may present solutions for the potential problems listed above since they help to provide environments enabling autonomous and collaborative learning. On the other hand, while learners' achievement and progress in the target language may be affected by their perceptions of using artificial intelligence environments, research on learners' perceptions of using artificial intelligence remains too limited to conclude. According to the research findings, the integration of AI results in an improvement in reading comprehension, speaking performance, writing quality, and an increase in motivation, whereas research also shows that AI tools fail to make complicated reasoning, increase plagiarism, and debilitate critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, the results of only two studies that focus on learners' perceptions do not show a consensus. With

these concerns in mind, the current study aims to explore learners' perceptions of integrating AI into the foreign language learning process.

Method

Research context

The present study was designed to adopt a qualitative research design that was based on a synthetic approach and a heuristic objective. In other words, since the current literature has not presented evidence regarding the underlying factors that were related to learners' perceptions of integrating AI into foreign language learning, a synthetic approach was preferred for defining the phenomenon and understanding the factors. Moreover, the study is designed to be in a heuristic objective, since it did not include a research question or hypothesis (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

Participants

The sample group of the study consisted of 26 senior students in the Department of English Language Teaching at a state university in Türkiye. The group included 19 female (73.1) and seven male students (26.9). The mean score for their age was 22.04 within the range between 21 and 24. They all have an advanced level of proficiency in English (C1) in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standards. The rationale behind the participant selection procedure depended on two reasons. First, the participants had high levels of interest in learning English as a foreign language, were experienced language learners, and studied in the Department of English Language to become English teachers in their future professional lives. Second, they all had familiarity and experience with using AI during their language learning process.

Tools

The study used a background questionnaire and interviews for data collection. First, background information such as their age and gender was acquired through the background questionnaire. Second, the participants were interviewed on their experiences and perceptions about integrating and using AI tools and environments during their EFL learning practices. Several reasons can be listed regarding the rationale behind using interviews. First, using interviews seemed beneficial for a deeper and better understanding of the participants' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions without causing any ambiguity. Second, it was necessary to understand the complex phenomena in terms of using the AI tools and environments in the mentioned process in a holistic view. Last, interviews were found to be flexible and adaptable to the specific aspects of the issues within the scope of the current topic (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

Procedure

After informing the participants about the purpose and significance, outputs, and ethical rules of the study, it was assured that their participation was voluntary, that their privacy was protected, and that the data obtained from the study were confined to scientific purposes. They were also informed that the study did not include any social and psychological risks. Then, the researcher interviewed each of the participants to seek answers to questions regarding their background information about EFL learning, their perceptions, attitudes, awareness, and familiarity, the tools preferred and their effectiveness, the contributions of AI tools to EFL learning, their future expectations, and concerns and challenges.

Data analysis

After designing the interview schedule in accordance with the purpose of the study, the participants were selected and recruited within a purposeful sampling under the criteria of having experience in EFL learning and AI utilization. After an interview guide was created, a five-participant group was used for piloting to identify the possible problems with the questions and the flow. Then, the interviews were scheduled and conducted in five days. After the recorded interviews were transcribed via software, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify the themes. In this process, two blind analyzers coded the data and categorized the codes into patterns. Finally, a comparison of the patterns seemed similar, trustworthy, and valid. The rationale behind this procedure was that it was necessary to gather data about participants' perspectives in terms of the phenomenon in a realistic setting (Denzin, 2017). The process of coding by separate researchers was preferred to obtain the validity and trustworthiness of the data (Patton, 1990).

Results

The findings obtained from the study show that the participants were experienced and familiar with the use of AI tools and environments in the language learning process. In the process, they used a wide variety of tools such as Babbel, Birdbrain, Busuu, Call Annie, Chat-GPT, DeepL, Duolingo, Gamma App, Google Bard, Google Translate, Grammarly, HelloTalk, Kahoot, Kukarella, and Lingodeer. The other tools and environments were Memrise, Mondly, Narakeet, ProWritingAid, Quillbot, Quizlet, Rosetta Stone, Snapchat AI, Speaky, Tandem, Voscreen, and Wordwall. It should be stated that the platforms listed included language learning-specific tools and environments, as one participant stated.

I think I am pretty much aware of AI in the context of language learning. Also, in my opinion, it is a crucial piece of knowledge that teachers should obtain. I am glad that tools such as Grammarly, Memrise, Kahoot, TedED, Padlet, and Duolingo have been encountered in my language-learning journey because I started using AI to improve my French and to teach English. Thus, I like the idea of integrating artificial intelligence into foreign language learning.

EFL learners believe that the utilization of AI tools has certain advantages. For instance, they believed that AI-based environments contributed to providing equality in learning opportunities, reduced dependence on formal learning settings and teachers, and allowed learners to access authentic and diversifying visual and audio materials, as mentioned by one of the students. In addition, they believed that they reached accurate information in a short period, enhanced their study schedules, and lessened their workload.

I benefited from it more when I used it to create activities for my internship because it gave me marvelous ideas. I managed to apply 6 activities in one lesson thanks to the activities I created by taking ideas from AI.

EFL learners mainly prefer using AI-based tools for communication and interaction within the scope of EFL learning, and use them to develop basic language skills and knowledge areas, as stated by one participant below. For instance, they used the platforms to receive feedback, correct their errors, and understand concepts while learning grammar. To enhance their vocabulary knowledge, they focused on word combinations, idioms, and references. The participants stated that AI tools could be used as a source of comprehensible input. They also believed that AI tools were ideal for developing conversations, fluency, cultural understanding of the target language, and awareness of various accents in terms of speaking skills. Next, the participants used AI tools and environments for generating ideas, planning, outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing, note-taking, instant, real-time, and individualized feedback, error and mistake correction, and proofreading while learning writing. Regarding pronunciation skills, AI tools were used for producing and practicing sounds, receiving feedback, converting texts to speech, and correcting their mistakes and errors.

I find AI-enhanced methods more effective than the traditional ones, even though I was able to progress in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing without any AI tool. However, I did notice that I lacked speaking skills, which, I think, was because of overly traditional language learning. Thus, in my opinion, especially for developing communicative skills, AI tools are essential. On the other hand, even though reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary can be learned with traditional methods, AI makes the process a bit funnier.

Results indicate that the integration of AI tools contributes to their learning process in a variety of skills. For instance, they stated that their utilization was beneficial for autonomous, personalized, self-paced, and adaptive learning since AI tools could be prompted in accordance with individual needs and expectations, as reported by a participant below. Moreover, they thought that AI platforms could be used for blended, flipped, and gamified learning. EFL learners also stated that they could develop their creativity, problem-solving skills, and translation skills. Finally, the participants thought that using AI-based environments contributed to achievement since they preferred using them for diagnosing weak and strong areas in the target language and examination preparation.

The potential benefits of using AI in language learning could be the personalized practices it can provide and its

accessibility. Since every learner is different with different needs, strengths, and weaknesses, with the help of AI, the language learning process can become a lot easier.

Findings demonstrate that using AI tools relates to both positive and negative effects in terms of emotions and affective states. First, the participants stated that using AI tools increased their attention and learning motivation, enhanced foreign language enjoyment, and engagement, and reduced anxiety since they found AI environments stress-free, as stated by one of the participants below. However, they thought that they had suffered from the lack of emotional support from their peers and teachers, and interactions with humans. Moreover, they felt alone and addicted to technology.

Regarding engagement, AI significantly boosts it. The interactive nature, personalized pathways, and instant feedback of AI-driven tools make language learning more enjoyable and engaging.

ELF teachers have conflicting ideas about the integration of AI tools and environments into the EFL learning process. For instance, some participants stated that innovations based on AI-related activities could result in their integration into current approaches, methods, and techniques. They also claimed that teachers' roles need to be redefined after the appearance of AI-based learning environments, as stated by one participant below. On the other hand, some participants believed that AI could be seen as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for teachers. Last, some students suggested a blend of traditional teaching and AI-enhanced applications considering their flexibility and adaptability. As a final point, EFL learners strongly needed teacher supervision while using AI tools in their language learning process.

I recognize the advantages of technology, which is integrated into the traditional methods in a balanced way to optimize the foreign language learning process. I believe that blended teaching methodologies can provide the best solutions to foreign language learning problems.

EFL learners experience some problems, difficulties, and challenges while using AI tools for learning. First, they encountered inaccurate, artificial, and inauthentic information, incorrect statements, and a lack of cultural relevance and sensitivity. Second, they believed that they needed instructions from their teachers for the effective use of AI, since they had no instructions in formal learning settings. In other words, they suffered from the lack of guidance from knowledgeable individuals to ensure the effectiveness of the integration of AI tools into the EFL learning process. Under this perspective, they had reservations about the effectiveness of AI tools to replace teachers due to the lack of sincerity and warmth and felt a sense of disconnection from real-life learning environments after experiencing a mechanical learning process. Third, they believed that using AI tools for writing skills constituted a barrier to creative writing and prevented developing speaking skills in real-world situations. Dramatically enough, they stated that AI use could debilitate the learning process and prioritize having higher grades rather than learning. Fourth, they felt concerned about data privacy and security. As a final

point, they thought that providing equipment and registering would cost more than they expected, as stated by one of the participants below.

To give an example, I tried to improve my French with Duolingo, but its free version has extremely annoying ads. Thus, I do not think teachers' importance will decline with AI evolving in language learning environments.

Conclusions and Discussion

Seven main conclusions can be drawn based on the findings presented above. The first one refers to the experience users of AI language tools possess, especially in using a wide variety of AI tools. The second one is that AI-based environments can provide equality in learning opportunities, availability of authentic audio-visual materials, reduced dependence on formal learning settings and teachers, and access to accurate information in a short time. The third conclusion is that learners prefer AI tools as a source of comprehensible input, communication, and interaction when they make an attempt to get feedback, correct their errors, and enhance their vocabulary knowledge. In addition, they find AI language tools beneficial in generating ideas, planning, outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing, note-taking, proofreading, and enhancing pronunciation. The fourth conclusion pertains to the benefits of implementing AI in EFL learning settings in boosting autonomous, personalized, and adaptive learning based on individual needs, providing blended, flipped, and gamified learning, developing creativity, problem-solving, and translation skills, and diagnosing weak and strong areas in the target language and examination preparation. The fifth conclusion focuses on affective states; according to participants' views, AI tools increase their attention and learning motivation, enhance foreign language enjoyment and engagement, and reduce anxiety. The sixth conclusion is concerned with conflicting views about the integration of AI tools and EFL learning settings. Some participants believe that innovations in the realm of AI-related activities may integrate with current approaches, methods, and techniques. Moreover, while some interviewees call for a reevaluation of teachers' roles in this new technological era, others insist on viewing AI-based techniques as supplementary tools instead of a replacement for teachers. Consistently, some are reminded of their need for teacher supervision while utilizing AI tools. Likewise, using a blend of traditional teaching and AI-oriented techniques is some participants' suggestion. The last conclusion documents the difficulties or challenges most users face while utilizing AI-powered tools for learning. To mention some, inaccurate, artificial, and inauthentic information, incorrect statements, lack of instructions and guidance, lack of sincerity and warmth, and experiencing a mechanical learning process. What is more, some participants find AI tools as a hindrance to creative writing and speaking, besides, some raised concerns regarding data privacy and security and the cost of registration to such instruments.

Pedagogical implications

Consistent with our elicited findings, several studies emphasize the virtues of AI technology in language learning. For instance, various researchers observe that the utilization of chatbots and AI has been useful in education because they could potentially provide a communicative use and collaborative situation (e.g., Fitria, 2021; Lozano & Blanco Fontao, 2023; Tafazoli et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2021). Research indicates that AI-powered tools such as Grammarly, Naver Papago, and Google Translate are highly supportive of English learners in terms of writing skills, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Fitria, 2021). In addition, AI technologies can assist learners in research planning, topic, and paper draft development (Utami et al., 2023). However, the participants in the current study point out AI's advantages in proofreading. Furthermore, using AI tools to learn English is an exciting experience since each learner enjoys having the opportunity to have a native teacher to assist her/him when listening, speaking, writing, and correcting mistakes (Fitria, 2021; Yin et al., 2021). Similar to the findings in the current study, it seems unlikely for learners to rely solely on formal education provided at institutions throughout their lives. As raised in the study, AI boosts learners' motivation and inspiration (Bailey et al., 2021) and stimulates learners' participation in activities (Gayed et al., 2022). However, as far as comparison between traditional and AI-based teaching is concerned, although some of our participants prefer a blend of both, while the likelihood of autonomous and more successful learning through traditional textbook learning was found to be 35%, its probability was 53% through using artificial intelligence technology (Zhang, 2022). However, despite these encouraging findings, the detrimental consequences of the use of AI-powered technologies or challenges should not be underestimated. For example, as the interviewees partially mention, the increase in plagiarism within learners' writing assignments, the inaccurate translations, and the hindrances might arise from excessive use of AI-powered tools as well as the scarification of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities caused by overreliance on AI writing tools (Perkins, 2023) which are not raised by the participants in this study. Furthermore, some studies point out unreliability, being unnatural, inappropriate, and decontextualized (Hood & Wilson, 2001), privacy and security of information as well as the possibility of cheating in AI tools which are argued by the participants in the current research. However, although Phan (2023) states technology anxiety when utilizing AI-based tools, the results of the study show that using AI tools reduces anxiety. As Lozano and Fontao (2023) underlie, the current study highlights the reevaluation of teachers' roles and the role of digital literacy in this new technological era.

Practical recommendations

Several recommendations can be noted within the scope of the conclusions reached in the study. First of all, to be in line with this fast-evolving technological teaching-learning era, it seems necessary to enhance digital literacy for both teachers and learners, then, they can get more benefit from various AI-powered tools while redefining their new roles. Next, providing equality in learning opportunities for as many users

of AI tools is required in at least main universities or major EFL learning settings. Afterward, intensifying the infrastructure to easy and convenient access to AI tools, at affordable costs, in correcting written or spoken errors and receiving feedback under the umbrella term of communication can be of utmost importance in learning or using English in even academic contexts. Furthermore, paying systematic attention to the concept of autonomous and self-paced learning, especially, via implementing more blended, flipped, and gamified learning in line with the appropriate utilization of AI-powered technology can lead to a tremendous revolution in teaching-learning processes; particularly, since most learners feel more relaxed and stress-free when using AI-tools. Last but not least, perhaps using AI-based technology in its new face in education in general and in EFL settings, in particular, seems partially perplexing; to alleviate the arising problems, more guidance from experts is required while working on the betterment of privacy issues.

Limitations and recommendations for further research

This study has a number of limitations. First, the sample group of the study was confined to 26 senior students in the Department of English Language Teaching at a state university in Türkiye. Second, the data collected were confined to a background questionnaire and interviews. Finally, the data were analyzed thematically.

Although the implementation of AI-powered tools in English classes is the hot topic of educational research at present, there is scant evidence and knowledge of accurate pedagogical approaches and correct utilization of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning English. Hence, it is recommended to investigate the long-term impacts of AI-oriented education, through triangulation such as observation or case studies as well as quantitative research designs to scrutinize a large number of participants prior to making any decisions or making any substantial alterations to the learning-teaching process and even in the educational model which can be occurred toward adapting to unavoidable transformations which will be encountered in upcoming years.

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