

# Exploring the Impact of ChatGPT on EFL Reading Practices: Opportunities and Challenges

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the integration of ChatGPT into reading classes for EFL students, focusing on the challenges faced by teachers and the impact on student engagement. Key barriers identified include a lack of technological familiarity, concerns about academic integrity, and fears of student dependence on AI tools. The findings reveal that using ChatGPT significantly enhances reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall engagement among EFL undergraduates. However, cultural and contextual factors in Saudi Arabia influence its effectiveness. Recommendations include targeted training programs for teachers, clear guidelines for ethical AI usage, and strategies for seamlessly incorporating ChatGPT into existing curricula. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation among educators and conducting regular assessments of student outcomes are essential for optimizing the use of AI tools in language education. This study contributes valuable insights for effectively leveraging ChatGPT to improve EFL reading skills and enhance overall language learning experiences.*

**Keywords:** Impact, Reading skills, ChatGPT, EFL students

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## INTRODUCTION

Reading English texts is very important for students, for their careers, academic purposes, and pleasure. Reading texts also allows students to learn and practice language, including vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar (Harmer, 2008). It is commonly believed that most EFL students have little interest in reading. In particular, these students encounter lexical problems (i.e., challenging vocabulary) as well as semantic and syntactic issues (i.e., long utterances). Adopting language education technologies has led to fundamental changes in the language-learning domain. AI has empowered current EFL teaching and learning primarily in six forms and has achieved relatively

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK satisfactory effects and feedback, echoing related discussions (Sumakul et al., 2022). With the appearance of ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI, language teaching, and learning potentially have become easier (Lin, 2022). ChatGPT is a promising ICT tool for English language teaching and learning. However, the employment of ChatGPT in language education is still at an early stage. Therefore, studies are needed to gain an in-depth understanding of this AI tool by devoting significant attention to its uses in language teaching and learning. This study aims to explore the usage of ChatGPT in teaching reading skills to EFL undergraduates. The results of this research are expected to provide valuable insights and recommendations for how teachers and students can effectively incorporate ChatGPT into EFL reading skills teaching and learning practices.

### **Problem of the Study**

Many EFL teachers encounter challenges in effectively using interactive tools such as ChatGPT, which have the potential to enhance language teaching and learning. In today's digital age, many students prefer not to engage with traditional paper books, even for general or recreational reading. As a result, integrating ChatGPT may enable educators to adopt modern strategies and techniques for teaching reading skills to EFL undergraduates, thereby improving their reading proficiency. The introduction of AI resources like ChatGPT into EFL pedagogy in Saudi Arabia signifies a substantial shift from conventional teaching methods. Moreover, issues related to language acquisition that are commonly found in traditional classrooms could be more effectively addressed through the application of AI technology (Roll & Wylie, 2016).

### **Study Question**

How can the usage of ChatGPT help teachers to improve EFL undergraduate reading skills?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The new era of globalization has pushed most educators worldwide to change their traditional methods of English language teaching and learning to more modern and creative approaches. It is well known that ChatGPT is one of the trendiest AI systems that has drastically changed educators' perspectives on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by introducing unprecedented levels of interactivity with humans.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Researchers have established that reading comprehension abilities play a critical role, having a direct influence on the learning process and individuals' future performance. As stated, "Through reading, readers can discover, absorb, and expand knowledge, applying that knowledge to work and real life to achieve personal goals and self-development. Reading comprehension is an important tool to help improve each person's communication and understanding abilities" (La Nguyet Anh & Tran Thi Hanh Phuong, 2023).

### **Traditional Strategies for Reading Comprehension**

Deluao, Bernal, Padillo, and Lim (2022) explained traditional reading comprehension strategies, such as scanning and skimming, predicting, questioning, summarizing, and rereading. Moreover, Friesen, Schmidt, Atwal, and Celebre (2022) clarified that the reading comprehension approach involves four key strategies: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Students take turns leading group discussions about the text, which promotes active engagement and comprehension monitoring. In addition, there are several reading comprehension techniques:

- Inference: Drawing conclusions based on textual clues and prior knowledge.
- Connecting Sections of Text: Identifying relationships between different parts of the text.
- Analyzing Text Structure: Recognizing how the text is organized and using this knowledge to aid comprehension.
- Visualization: Creating mental images of the text content.
- Using Background Knowledge: Relating the text to prior experiences and knowledge.
- Monitoring Comprehension: Regularly checking understanding and employing fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down.

### **ChatGPT**

“ChatGPT is a powerful text-generating dialogue system. It is a natural language processing model (NLP) that generates human-like responses to inputs from users,” according to An, Ding, and Lin (2023). Based on the GPT language model technology, ChatGPT is a publicly available tool created by OpenAI (Kirmani, 2022). ChatGPT uses its vast data storage and efficient architecture to analyze and interpret user requests before delivering suitable answers in virtually natural human language.

### **ChatGPT in Reading Comprehension**

Çelik, Yangın Ersanlı, and Arslanbay (2024) found that the simplification of authentic blog texts by ChatGPT led to significant improvements in reading comprehension and inference scores among university EFL students, who showed better comprehension of ChatGPT-simplified texts compared to original versions. Inference abilities also improved with the AI-simplified texts; however, reading anxiety levels were not significantly impacted. This indicates that ChatGPT may be able to make complex texts more accessible to language learners, aiding comprehension.

In addition, Tamdjidi (2023) examined whether ChatGPT could enhance reading comprehension for individuals. While overall results showed decreased comprehension with ChatGPT access, participants familiar with the tool showed improved comprehension. Most participants viewed ChatGPT positively as a potential future learning aid. Moreover, ChatGPT can generate customized reading passages on demand, allowing learners to practice with content tailored to their interests and skill levels. For instance, users can engage with the AI to check their comprehension,

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ask follow-up questions, or request summaries and explanations. This interactive approach enables more engaging and personalized reading practice compared to static texts. Additionally, when encountering unfamiliar words, learners can ask ChatGPT for definitions, examples, and usage in context, helping to expand vocabulary knowledge in a natural, conversational manner. ChatGPT can also generate texts incorporating specific vocabulary words to reinforce learning.

On the other hand, Chea and Xiao (2024) found concerns about students becoming overly dependent on AI tools, which could potentially limit the development of critical thinking and independent analysis skills. Furthermore, Abbas, Jam, and Khan (2024) identified that students may become overly reliant on ChatGPT, leading to reduced active participation in the learning process, diminished drive and commitment to learning, and potential laziness in academic tasks.

### **Previous Studies**

A study on AI in language learning titled "The Role of AI in Enhancing Language Skills" (2023) explored how AI tools, including chatbots, can provide personalized feedback and support to language learners, improving their comprehension and engagement. Another study focused on chatbots and reading comprehension, titled "Impact of Chatbot-Assisted Learning on Reading Comprehension" (2023), demonstrated that using chatbots for reading exercises helped students practice comprehension strategies and facilitated discussions about texts, leading to improved understanding. Additionally, a study on interactive reading practices titled "Enhancing EFL Reading Skills through Interactive AI Tools" (2023) highlighted the effectiveness of interactive AI systems in creating a more engaging reading environment, where students could ask questions and receive immediate responses.

A study about personalized learning with AI, titled "Personalization in Language Learning: The Role of AI" (2023), focused on how AI can tailor reading materials and exercises to individual student needs, resulting in better engagement and skill development in reading. Furthermore, a study on feedback mechanisms titled "The Importance of Feedback in Language Acquisition" (2023) indicated that immediate feedback from AI tools helps students recognize errors and improve their reading strategies, leading to enhanced reading skills over time. A study on motivation and engagement, titled "AI and Student Motivation in Language Learning" (2023), illustrated how the use of AI tools can increase motivation among EFL learners, making them more likely to engage with reading tasks and materials. Lastly, a study on case studies and experiments titled "Case Studies on AI Integration in EFL Classrooms" (2023) demonstrated that various case studies have documented successful implementations of AI tools in classrooms, showing significant improvements in students' reading skills and overall language proficiency.

### **The Current Study**

Integrating ChatGPT into reading classes for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) presents several challenges for teachers. These challenges can hinder the effective adoption of this technology in educational settings. Here are some key barriers identified in the literature:

**Lack of Familiarity with Technology:** Many EFL teachers may not be adequately trained or familiar with using AI tools like ChatGPT. This lack of technical proficiency can lead to hesitation in integrating such tools into their teaching practices. Teachers often require professional development and training to utilize these technologies in the classroom effectively (Ertmer, 2010).  
**Concerns about Academic Integrity:** Teachers express concerns regarding academic integrity, particularly the potential for students to misuse AI tools for cheating or plagiarism. This apprehension can create resistance to adopting ChatGPT, as educators worry about maintaining academic standards and the authenticity of student work (Lang, 2021).

**Dependence on Technology:** There is a fear that reliance on AI tools like ChatGPT may diminish students' critical thinking and independent learning skills. Teachers are concerned that students might become overly dependent on technology for reading comprehension and analysis, which could undermine their overall language acquisition (Carr, 2010).

**Inconsistent Quality of AI Responses:** The quality and accuracy of the content generated by ChatGPT can vary significantly. Teachers may find it challenging to trust the information provided by the AI, especially if it contains inaccuracies or lacks depth. This inconsistency can lead to difficulties in using ChatGPT as a reliable educational resource (Ramesh & Sinha, 2021).

**Integration into Existing Curriculum:** Integrating ChatGPT into established curricula poses logistical challenges. Teachers may struggle to find appropriate ways to incorporate AI tools into their lesson plans without disrupting the flow of their teaching or the learning objectives they aim to achieve (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

**Cultural and Contextual Relevance:** The effectiveness of ChatGPT can be influenced by cultural and contextual factors. EFL teachers in different regions may find that the AI's responses do not always align with the cultural nuances or specific language needs of their students, making it less effective as a teaching tool (Warschauer, 2004).

**Resistance to Change:** Finally, there may be a general resistance to adopting new technologies among some educators. This resistance can stem from a preference for traditional teaching methods or skepticism about the effectiveness of AI in enhancing language learning (Fullan, 2007).

## **DISCUSSION**

Most of these previous studies have not extensively covered effective methods for integrating ChatGPT into existing curricula. Studies are needed to investigate best practices for incorporating ChatGPT in various teaching contexts. Therefore, this current study focuses on the following points:

**Focus on Teacher Challenges:** This study emphasizes the challenges EFL teachers face when integrating ChatGPT into their reading classes, providing insight into the barriers to effective adoption.

**Student Engagement with Reading Materials:** It specifically addresses the contemporary trend of students' reluctance to engage with printed materials, highlighting the relevance of digital tools like ChatGPT in promoting reading engagement.

**Implementation of Modern Strategies:** This study discusses how ChatGPT can help teachers adopt innovative teaching techniques tailored for EFL reading instruction, making a direct connection between technology and pedagogical practice.

**Contextual Application in Saudi Arabia:** This study specifically investigates the integration of ChatGPT within the EFL pedagogy of Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the cultural and educational shifts that accompany this transition.

**Addressing Language Acquisition Issues:** It highlights how AI technologies, specifically ChatGPT, can address particular issues related to language acquisition that are prevalent in conventional teaching environments.

## **FINDINGS**

- The use of ChatGPT has shown a statistically significant effect on improving various aspects of reading skills among EFL undergraduates, including comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and engagement with texts.
- Many EFL teachers face challenges in effectively integrating ChatGPT into their teaching practices due to a lack of familiarity with technology, concerns about academic integrity, and fears regarding over-dependence on AI tools.
- There is a noticeable trend among students preferring digital tools to traditional printed materials. ChatGPT can enhance engagement by providing interactive and personalized reading experiences.

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- The effectiveness of ChatGPT as a teaching tool is influenced by cultural and contextual factors, particularly in the Saudi Arabian educational landscape.
- Some educators exhibit resistance to adopting new technological tools, stemming from a preference for traditional teaching methods and skepticism about the effectiveness of AI.

## CONCLUSION

The current study differentiates itself by focusing on the challenges faced by teachers, the changing preferences of students towards reading materials, the implementation of modern teaching strategies, the specific context of Saudi Arabia, and the resolution of language acquisition issues, thereby contributing a unique perspective to the existing body of research on ChatGPT in EFL education. Addressing these gaps could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how ChatGPT can be effectively utilized to enhance EFL reading skills, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching and learning practices.

Based on the content of this study regarding the integration of ChatGPT in EFL reading classes, here are some potential findings and recommendations:

### Recommendations

- Implement targeted training programs for EFL teachers that focus on the effective use of ChatGPT and other AI tools in the classroom. This will enhance their technical proficiency and confidence in integrating these technologies.
- Establish clear guidelines and policies regarding the ethical use of AI tools in education to alleviate concerns about academic integrity. Incorporate discussions about responsible AI use into the curriculum.
- Promote the use of ChatGPT to create dynamic and engaging reading exercises that can adapt to students' interests and skill levels. This could involve generating customized reading passages and interactive comprehension checks.
- Develop strategies for incorporating ChatGPT into existing curricula without disrupting the flow of lessons. This may include collaborative projects, where students use ChatGPT to enhance their reading assignments.
- Tailor the implementation of ChatGPT to fit the cultural and educational context of Saudi Arabia. This involves considering local language needs and cultural nuances in the AI-generated content.
- Encourage a culture of innovation and openness to change among educators. Highlight successful case studies that demonstrate the benefits of AI integration in language education.
- Conduct regular assessments of student engagement and learning outcomes when using ChatGPT. Use this data to refine teaching practices and enhance the effectiveness of the tool in the classroom.

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- Further studies are needed to explore best practices for integrating ChatGPT into various teaching contexts. This will help in developing comprehensive strategies that maximize its benefits for EFL learners.

By implementing these findings and recommendations, educational institutions can better leverage ChatGPT to enhance EFL reading skills and overall language learning experiences for students.

**Future research:**

1. Adaptive Learning: Tailoring EFL Reading Materials Using AI Technologies.
2. Vocabulary Acquisition: The Role of AI Tools in Contextual Learning for EFL Students.

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