

THE ROLE OF CHAT-GPT IN LEARNERS' AUTONOMY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

The emergence of advanced language learning tools, like Chat-GPT presents both opportunities and challenges for educators and students who are seeking to optimize this integration. The widespread use of technology within the ESL classroom necessitates a critical examination of its role in facilitating the integration of teaching and learning processes. This paper aimed to examine the role of Chat-GPT in learners' autonomy with focus on its prospects and challenges for ESL learners. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach in the study by employing questionnaire as a data collection tool comprising closed and opened-ended questions. For the study, 33 undergraduate students were selected from the Department of English, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan through convenience sampling technique. After the data collection, the data were analyzed through pie charts for percentage and frequency. Moreover, Word-cloud software was also utilized to analyze the responses of the students. The findings revealed some of the major benefits of Chat-GPT such as it helped the learners in personalized learning, promoted learners' autonomy, and provided instant accessibility. Furthermore, the tool enhanced learners' motivation, and improved their language skills. However, it also presented some challenges to the learners such as over-reliance on technology, bias and inaccuracy, no information for innovative ideas, risk of plagiarism, lack of human interaction and the lack of technical requirements. Thus, the study suggests that Chat-GPT is an important realization of the modern-day technology; however, the educators are required to update their teaching practices accordingly. Moreover, they should find out remedial measures to address the challenges presented by Chat-GPT for ESL learners.

Key Words: Chat-GPT, Learner's Autonomy, ESL Learners, Technology, Benefits, Challenges

Introduction

Technology and language teaching are inseparable from each other in the modern era, since most of the teaching materials are directly obtained from internet or facilitated by it. This integration of technology with language learning has seen drastic and rapid changes in the past two decades. Initially, it was Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) that was considered one of the essential developments in the integration of technology into the ESL classroom. Similarly, CALL led to the invention of Web-Assisted Language Learning and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in English language classroom, as noted by Khan, Ullah, Bakht, and Bibi, (2024). Currently, it is Artificial Intelligence (AI) that has enormous impact on language teaching and learning. In fact, AI is such an effective technology that has shaped the modern world in several ways. It can be used in any sphere of life in a productive manner to make things easier for the users. In addition, AI is available in many forms. One of the effective AI tools is Chat-GPT which has triggered a great debate in the world. In fact, it has revolutionized the world

with its multifaceted usages. Chat-GPT is a natural language model which was developed by Deep Learning and Open AI technology. It is based on the transformer architecture information which is basically a chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT). It takes the input, processes it and gives the appropriate output to the users. Essentially, it works on the given prompts and instructions and subsequently produces the output results. Moreover, the latest version of GPT-4 functions like human beings and with time improves its quality automatically with the given instruction (Murphy, Wotley, & Minn, 2023). Thus, this new development in technology has impacted every aspect of human life. Subsequently, it has influenced the teaching-learning process in general and English language learning in particular.

Initially, Chat-GPT was criticized and banned by many institutions in the world and it was termed as a source of plagiarism but now it is deemed as essential part of teaching and learning process. Teachers and students can equally be benefited from its immediate response. In fact, students use it for different learning purposes as it is an effective assistant in almost every subject. Similarly, English language learners also utilize it for improving their language skills. Therefore, this research aims to investigate as to how Chat-GPT is exploited for promoting learners' autonomy and how they utilize it for their benefits. Moreover, the study also addresses the challenges English language learners face while using Chat-GPT. Thus, this study is an attempt to know more about the utility of Chat-GPT in promoting learners' autonomy and the opportunities and challenges it presents to the learners.

Literature Review

Learner autonomy is basically the ability of learners to take charge and responsibility of their own learning process and become self-sufficient. It is a kind of independent learning process where the learners take decisions for setting themselves learning objectives and achieve those objectives with the help of various sources. According to Benson and Voller (2014), learners' autonomy means when learners assume responsibility of their own learning. Consequently, autonomous learners tend to have higher level of language proficiency than other learners (Cekaite & Schubert, 2019). ??In fact, emerging technologies often provide opportunities for independent and personalized learning. According to the study of Ullah, Ali, and Hussain (2021) after the Covid-19, it became necessary for learners to switch over to online learning and focus on the efficient use of technology. Thus, latest technology offers a host of new tools for English language learning and teaching (Barrot, 2024). Furthermore, Tolstykh and Oshchepkova (2024) state that Chat-GPT is one of the most widely used tools of Artificial Intelligence in ESL classroom which enhances the language skills of the students. According to Agustini (2023) Chat-GPT has many advantages for ESL learners in terms of learners' autonomy such as it provides personalized learning support to language users that suits their needs and styles of learning.?? Besides, it also affords an opportunity of self-assessment and self-reflection to the learners regarding their progress. A learner's autonomy means the ability of a learner to take charge of the responsibility of their learning process (Benson & Voller, 2014). Autonomous learning enables learners to take decisions about the learning and learning process on their own, with minimum or no assistance from teachers. In other words, this way of learning is the outcome of learners' centered approaches where learners take more responsibility than teachers (Hair Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2018). Students-centered approach to language teaching is encouraged by modern practitioners of language across the globe. The advocates of students-centered approach consider Chat-GPT a productive and efficient tool for language learning

inside and outside the classroom; as Chat-GPT helps learners to find out their relevant language materials and answers their queries (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023; Ali, 2023).

Theoretically, learner's autonomy is associated with constructivist approach where learners experience the surrounding world and construct their knowledge based on their experiences. It is associated with the philosophy of John Dewey which explains self-learning and its significance in the language classroom (Cekaite & Schubert, 2019). Modern educationists believe in the maximum participation of learners in the teaching and learning process. Learners are considered the cornerstone of any classroom. Thus, constructivists place much emphasis on the learners. According to Benson and Voller (2014) knowledge is constructed by the experiences of learners who take active participation in the learning process. They create new knowledge with their experiences. Likewise, experiential learning comes with the experiences of the learners about the contents they are being taught in the classroom. In fact, a learner's autonomy is the actual manifestation of constructivist approach in a language classroom (Cekaite & Schubert, 2019). Similarly, this theory is also more students-centered approach where students are active stakeholders in learning process. Thus, learners' autonomy is considered an offshoot of students-centered approach where learners are actively involved in classroom interaction. In addition, students are expected to set their goals, monitor their learning process and achieve the target goals in an efficient way. In such sort of learning environment, Phuong (2024) argues that Chat-GPT is one of the most essential learning tools where learners actively gain knowledge through it. Similarly, according to Songsiengchai et.al (2023) Chat-GPT has emerged as an effective learning tool for Thai students while learning English language. There are few relevant studies in ESL domain focusing on Pakistan context such as Ramzan et al. (2025) study the psychological influences and challenges as a medium of instruction along with stress causing factors and language related challenges (Javaid et al. 2024) . Javaid et al. (2024) reviewed systematically on cognitive and motivational impact on language learning through artificial intelligence. Similarly Ramzan et al. (2024) study the perception of teachers on gamification in ESL learning and perception of students about collaborative strategies by empowering ESL students through social media (Ramzan et al., 2024).

The integration of technology is an essential aspect of modern education system and Chat-GPT is widely used by learners to help them in their learning. It provides opportunities of experiential learning and problem-solving scenarios to the learners. According to Balci (2024) Chat-GPT works as personal language tutor for the students as it provides them instant and immediate feedback. The students continue further queries to ask the Chat-GPT until the learners' confusion is clarified. Nevertheless, some of the researchers believe Chat-GPT does not offer assistant like human beings and cannot facilitate the learners appropriately (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Further, the opponents also claim that human instruction and teaching is not replaceable (Meniado, 2023). Therefore, this research paper aims to focus on both the aspects of Chat-GPT, investigating the opportunities and challenges along with the learners' autonomy in ESL context.

Statement of the Problem

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought unprecedented changes in the modern world and affected every aspect of human life and Chat-GPT is one of the most widely used AI tools for learning purposes in current times. Meanwhile, students tend to utilize it for their benefits to get immediate answers for certain topics. Thus, Chat-GPT has become an integral part of their study to rely on. The article addresses as to how learners' autonomy is promoted through the use Chat-

GPT. Additionally, it also focuses on the prospects and challenges of English language learners while using Chat-GPT for learning purposes. Obviously, in our context, Chat-GPT is not the only efficient learning tool, but it is also a challenge for learners to exploit in an effective manner. Hence, the current study investigates the correlation of learners' autonomy and Chat-GPT, as well as the opportunities and challenges for English language learners.

Material Methods

This study is based on a mixed-methods research design; as it employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It is a survey study of the undergraduate students at the University of Malakand. For data collection, a questionnaire was used that consisted of Likert scale questions and several open-ended questions. Moreover, the questionnaire was adapted from the studies of Murphy et.al (2023) and Balci (2024) with certain modifications to fulfill the needs of the study. The participants of the study were BS students from the Department of English who had used Chat-GPT for learning and improving English skills. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 22. It means they were in their third and fourth year of study. The researchers employed convenience sample technique to collect the data from the respondents. The data were collected through online Google Form survey, where 33 students participated in the study. After the collection of data, the results were drawn through Word-Cloud Software and pie charts presentation of the respondents' results. Word-Cloud is software used for the visual representation of the text, depicting most occurring words more visible and bigger than the others. The size of the words indicates the number of the responses of the learners. Then results were interpreted and discussed in the discussion section. Ethical issues were taken care of through the study. Particularly, the inform consent form the participants was obtained before the study. Similarly, the privacy of the participants were also ensured during the study.

Results

I often use Chat-GPT for explanation of difficult concepts of English language to enhance my skills
33 responses

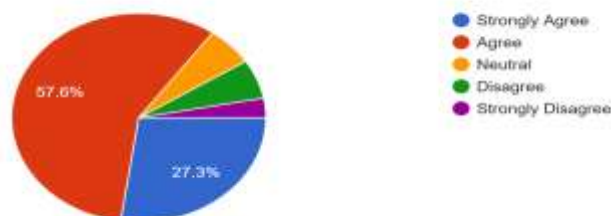


Chart No.1 shows that 58% of the learners agree and 27% strongly agree that they use Chat-GPT for their English language skills, particularly for difficult concepts. Contrary, a few students showed disagreement about the statement. It shows that the majority of the learners use Chat-GPT for English language learning.

I always feel motivated when I am using Chat-GPT for learning English language and improving my skills.
33 responses:

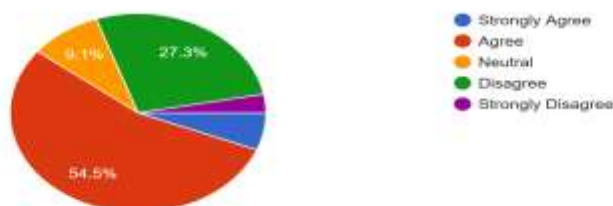


Chart No. 2 shows that 55% of the students feel motivated when they are using Chat-GPT and also improved their language skills. However, 27% show disagreement about it and 9% students remained neutral.

Chat-GPT always facilitates me in independent language learning and exploration.
33 responses

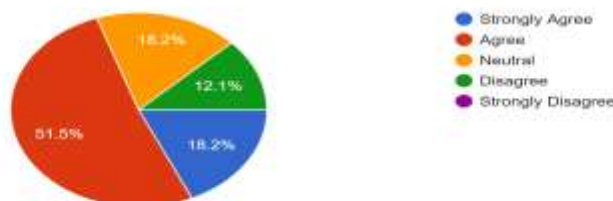
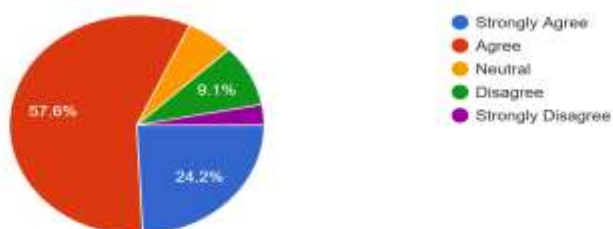


Chart No.3 illustrates that 52% students agree and 18% strongly agree that Chat-GPT facilitates them in independent language learning and exploration. Contrary, 18% strongly disagree and 12% showed disagreement. The results reveal that the majority of the learners believed that Chat-GPT enhances their independent learning.

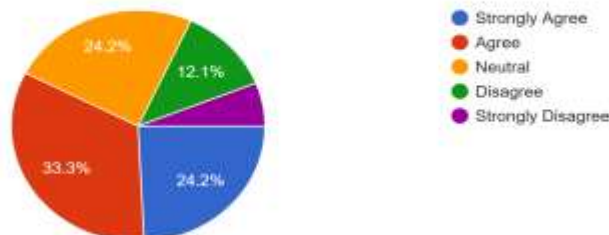
Chat-GPT always provides me with personalized feedback and guidance in English language skills.
33 responses



The Chart No.4 illustrates that 58% of the learners agree and 24% strongly agree that Chat-GPT provides them personalized feedback and guidance in English language skills. Conversely, only 9% show disagreement to the given statement. It shows that the majority of the learners consider Chat-GPT as an effective tool for personalized language learning.

Chat-GPT empowers me to take control of my language learning process.

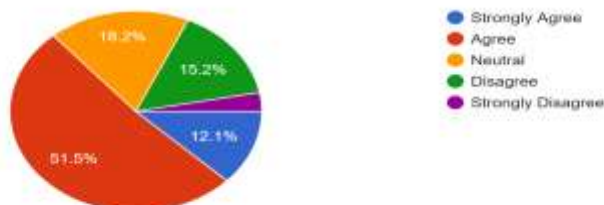
33 responses



The Chart No. 5 indicates that 33% of the learners agree and 24% strongly agree that Chat-GPT empowers them to take control of their English language learning process. Alternatively, 12% of the learners disagree and 24% remain neutral about the statement.

Chat-GPT helps me to identify my own learning needs and subsequently helps me in fulfilling the learning needs.

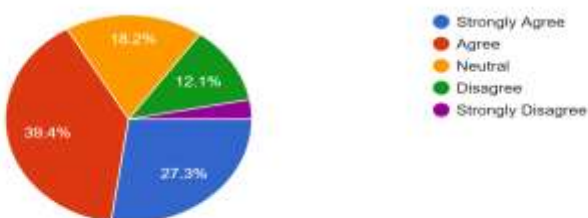
33 responses



The Chart No. 6 demonstrates that 52% of the learners agree and 12% strongly agree to the statement that Chat-GPT helps them to identify and fulfill their learning needs in English language learning. Notwithstanding, 15% of the students, express dissent and 18% of the learners remain neutral about the statement. It reveals that the majority of the learners agree to the statement.

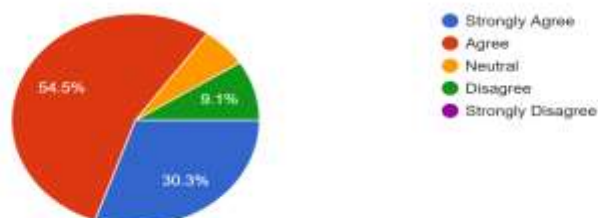
The frequent use of Chat-GPT and over-reliance on it hinders my critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

33 responses



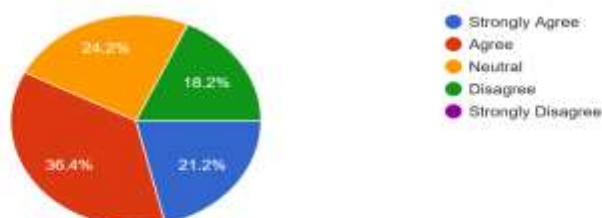
The Chart No.7 illustrates that 39% of the learners agree and 27% strongly agree that the frequent use of Chat-GPT hinders their critical and problem-solving skills. In contrast, 12% disagree and 18% are neutral about the statement. The result indicates that the majority believe that over-reliance on Chat-GPT stops critical thinking of the learners.

Sometimes, Chat-GPT provides me inaccurate and biased information as the ideas are mostly taken from open sources.
33 responses



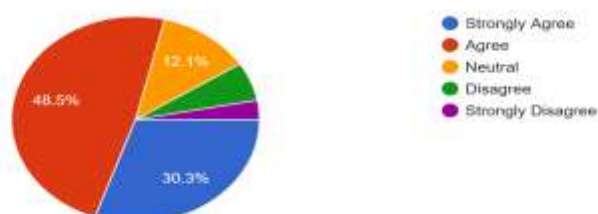
The Chart No. 8 reveals that 55% of the learners agree and 30% strongly agree that Chat-GPT sometimes provides inaccurate and biased information due to the open sources of ideas. By contrast, 9% disagree to the statement. The results indicate that the majority of the learners do not trust the provided information of the Chat-GPT.

Chat-GPT does not have access to advanced libraries and paid publications
33 responses



The Chart No.9 demonstrates that 36% of the learners agree and 21% strongly agree that Chat-GPT does not have access to the advanced libraries and research publications. On the other hand, 18% disagree and 24% are neutral about the statement. It shows that the majority believe that Chat-GPT only uses the open sources to answer the quires.

Chat-GPT lacks human interaction and guidance which sometimes does not clarify the confusion in culture-related vocabulary.
33 responses



The Chart No.10 illustrates that 49% of the learners agree and 30% strongly agree that Chat-GPT still lacks human like interaction and guidance which is sometimes unable to clarify the ambiguities, particularly culture-related vocabulary. Nevertheless, 12% show neutral responses about the statement and very few disagreed. This shows that majority of the learners believe that Chat-GPT needs to improve human kind of interaction for better clarification.

by the users to process and generate the required results. English language learners always need some assistance in terms of language learning and Chat-GPT provides that assistance in an effective way.

The first six questions in the questionnaire were related to the benefits of Chat-GPT for ESL learners and promoting learners' autonomy. The majority of the respondents favoured that the Chat-GPT helps them in an independent learning of English language. The results are supported by a study conducted by Meniado (2023), who argues that Chat-GPT has an enormous impact on the teaching of English language and making the students independent ones. In addition, the learners also responded that Chat-GPT provides personalized feedback and guidance in English teaching and learning process. Thus, 82% of the learners believe that Chat-GPT is effective in providing personalized learning opportunities which is concurrent with a study conducted by Xiao and Zhi (2023) as the study illustrated that Chat-GPT provides personalized learning experiences to ESL learners. It is noted that learners feel safe and free to ask any type of question to Chat-GPT according to their needs and requirements. Similarly, the majority of the learners believe that Chat-GPT fulfills their learning needs in English language teaching, as in the results 64% of the respondents favoured the statement. A study conducted by Ali (2023), found almost the same results while arguing that Chat-GPT has a potential advantage for English language learners in terms of providing the required and necessary assistance in learning the target language. Thus, Chat-GPT is considered an effective tool in learners' autonomy as it provides opportunities for independent learning and makes the learners self-sufficient in their language learning endeavors.

To further connect with learners' autonomy, the study finds that the majority of the respondents believe that 57% of the respondents agreed that Chat-GPT empowers them to control the learning process. It suggests that Chat-GPT is an effective tool in promoting learning autonomy by giving them the chance of steering their learning process. Khan et al. (2024) highlighted that when learners lead their learning process, it provides learners autonomy in an ESL context. A similar study conducted by Bin-Hady et al. (2023), who proposed that Chat-GPT enables the learners to take control of their learning process and learn according to their pace and level of proficiency. Thus, the findings directly addressed the main question of the undertaken study whether Chat-GPT promotes learners' autonomy. Consequently, it is found that Chat-GPT fosters learners' autonomy and offers advantages to ESL learners. Moreover, Chat-GPT also motivates the learners while using it for their personalized learning. The results of this study indicate that 55% of the respondents believe that they feel motivated when using Chat-GPT for improving English language skills. Motivation is one of the essential factors that contributes to independent learning and learners' autonomy. According to Benson and Voller (2014), independent learning needs motivation of the learners which promotes learners' autonomy in an ESL classroom. Therefore, it is inferred that Chat-GPT motivates the learners, provides them personalized guidance and control of the learning process which ultimately fosters learners' autonomy.

Despite so many opportunities that Chat-GPT offers to ESL learners, it presents some challenges for ESL learners while using Chat-GPT for the purpose of English language learning. Chat-GPT is an AI tool created by human beings and therefore has several limitations. Thus, the results of the study find that over-reliance on Chat-GPT hinders the critical thinking of the learners, provides inaccurate and biased information, at times, does not have access to advanced libraries,

and lacks human-like interaction and guidance. It is a matter of fact that technology cannot replace human beings as noted by Ullah, Ali and Hussain (2021) that the absence of teachers creates problems for ESL learners in clarifying confusing concepts. According to the results of the current study, 66% of the respondents believe that Chat-GPT hinders their creativity while constantly engaging with it for English language learning. Likewise, 85% of the respondents stated that sometimes Chat-GPT provides inaccurate and biased information. The reason the presented is that Chat-GPT only retrieves information from open sources which is not always true. To support the stance, Kostka and Toncelli (2023) claimed that Chat-GPT does not verify the information, rather obtained it from available websites which sometimes it is inaccurate. In the results, 57% of the respondents expressed that Chat-GPT does not have access to advanced and paid libraries. Mostly, the latest research work is paid and Chat-GPT is unable to obtain ideas from that, so it provides outdated information which is freely accessible on the internet.

Finally, the results of the respondents indicate that Chat-GPT lacks human connection where personalized guidance and counseling is vital to clarify certain situations. Thus 79% of the respondents believe that Chat-GPT lacks human interaction and guidance. It reveals that human interaction is important aspect of language teaching and learning process. Tolstykh and Oshchepkova (2024) proposes that Chat-GPT requires the human assistance in providing the most relevant and authentic information and ideas for ESL learners. Technology aims to minimize the role of human being in teaching the target language. However, the presence of teacher is always productive for clarification the confusion, maintaining classroom discipline and steering the lessons into meaningful goals and objectives. Therefore, Chat-GPT is useful tool; however, it lacks human feelings in explaining difficult concepts.

The qualitative part of results contains the Word-Cloud presentation of the responses of the learners. To observe the picture, the most visible words are the ones which are related with positive aspects of Chat-GPT and its usages. For instance, the words information, learning, vocabulary, autonomy, personalized and enhance demonstrate that the Chat-GPT has a positive role in promoting the ESL learners' autonomy. In addition, it offers more advantages to the ESL learners in terms of personalized learning, enhancing their skills, and keeps them motivated. Thus, it is inferred from the results that Chat-GPT plays a significant role in promoting learners' autonomy in positive direction. Contrary to this, the results of the Word-Cloud also reveal some challenges for the learners using Chat-GPT. For instance, lack of critical thinking, no human interaction and biased information are the main challenges it presents to ESL learners.

Conclusion

This research paper investigated the role of Chat-GPT in promoting learners' autonomy and the opportunities and challenges it offers to ESL learners. The researchers used questionnaire as data collection tool to collect the data from the respondents. The questionnaire included open-ended and closed--ended questions based on Likert scale. An online Google Form was created to collect the data from the learners. After collection of the data, the results were presented in charts and Word-Cloud picture as Word-Cloud was used to interpret the responses of the learners for frequently occurring answers. The study found that Chat-GPT is an effective tool for promoting learning autonomy of ESL learners. Furthermore, the study also investigated that Chat-GPT offers independent and personalized learning to the students, which consequently leads to learners' autonomy. Moreover, the study also revealed that the learners feel motivated when they are using Chat-GPT for their English language skills. Conversely, the study found that Chat-GPT

also presents some challenges to ESL learners. The study revealed that the frequent use of Chat-GPT hinders critical thinking of the students. It also sometimes offers inaccurate and biased information when the topic is not available on the open sources. Likewise, Chat-GPT lacks human interaction which is also a challenge for ESL learners while using it. Thus, it is necessary to improve and update Chat-GPT to address these problems.

Based on the findings of the above research, some recommendations are made for the future researchers regarding this area of research. A comparative study can be conducted on the impact of writing skills of ESL students while using Chat-GPT for English language skills. In addition, the writing pattern of Chat-GPT generated text can be investigated to find out the most frequently occurring words of Chat-GPT. It will highlight the gap between the frequently used and rarely used words and why some words are not used by Chat-GPT. Similarly, a study can be conducted to investigate the level of motivation of the ESL learners and academic achievement while using Chat-GPT for English language learning.

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