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Assessment of Reading via AI-Led Oral Conversations: Challenges and Benefits

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Abstract
This study explores integrating an artificial intelligence tool into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading assignment, with a focus on on participants' experiences with AI-facilitated conversations about academic passages. Thirty participants engaged with the tool through both written and spoken interactions based on AI-generated questions. Analysis of journal entries and interview responses revealed that participants valued the tool for enhancing engagement, providing immediate feedback, and facilitating critical thinking and speaking practice. However, challenges such as limited understanding, technical issues, and privacy concerns were noted. The findings suggest that chatbots can effectively supplement classroom interactions by offering pre- and post-class conversations about readings. Future research should refine AI tool design and implementation to better meet learners' needs and investigate the impact on reading achievement and written work assessment.

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[1]Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is widely used in various fields such as education and medicine, and more. Although research into AI as a discipline has a long history, mainly since the 1950s, the emergence of ChatGPT in late 2022 has brought AI into the media spotlight,

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especially in the educational domain, as students have started to embrace this technology (Alm & Ohashi, 2024; Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023).

English language teaching is being transformed by digital technology, with AI leading the way, and integrating AI into various educational tools, such as AI chatbots, and automatic writing evaluation exemplifies the transformative impact of AI (Barrot, 2024; Chen et al., 2020; Czerkawski, 2024; Huang et al., 2023; Kılıçkaya & Kic-Drgas, 2024; Ou et al., 2024). AI technologies present significant potential to impact educational landscape through the provision of tailored and adaptable learning experiences, the visualization of students' learning advancement, the provision of automated evaluations and prompt feedback on their performance, and the recommendation of appropriate resources (Fell Kurban & Şahin, 2024; Su et al., 2023).

Despite this potential, there exists a noticeable lack of scholarly investigation that delves into the learners' experience with chatbots with the ability to comprehend and interact with learners about any text in various modes such as the oral discussion. Therefore, there is a significant gap in the existing literature regarding the impact of AI-integrated techniques on students' language learning outcomes, which was also suggested by Al-khreshehm (2024), and Ayala-Pazmiño and Alvarado-Lucas (2023). Hence, this study considers this gap and inquiries into learners' perceptions and experience with the use of AI as a chatbot to hold conversations on assigned readings for the classroom.

Literature Review

AI: Its Uses in the Educational System

AI can be used in various ways by teachers, learners and institutions. Considering teachers, they can use AI language systems in various capacities, such as in course planning, where they assist in formulating the necessary learning objectives, creating teaching materials such as scripts or slides, or describing course content (Kılıçkaya, 2025; Perkins, 2023). Mureşan (2023, p. 82) mentions the facilitation of adapting "the learning process to the individual needs of pupils/students". In a time of increasing differentiation of students' needs, teachers are expected to implement the most suitable methods to individually support students learning in a group. This can happen through examination of students' progress and performance. In addition, teachers have the option to create examination questions for entire texts, together with an assessment grid. This allows the system to evaluate specific solutions or generate and provide feedback. In addition, intelligent language systems have the potential to be used in the development of online courses and assessments (Çıraklı, 2023; Mayrink et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Teachers can also use AI language systems in various capacities, such as in course planning, where they assist in formulating the necessary learning objectives, creating teaching materials like scripts or slides, or describing course content (Perkins, 2023). Through in depth data analysis teachers can shape their students' learning habits and to

predict their learning behaviors, which supports the process of learning and teaching. (Mureşan, 2023).

AI also offers many opportunities for learners, who can not only monitor constantly their progress but can also have their answers corrected and explained through personalized feedback provided by the artificial intelligence system (Kohler, 2024.). AI tools can be utilized for a number of purposes such as generating texts, codes, images, videos for classroom learning and supporting teaching, and modifying traditionally designed materials. They possess the potential to enhance student engagement through automated responses to inquiries, comments, and feedback. AI language systems can serve as instructional aids. As an illustration, students can be motivated to inquire about writings produced by an AI language system critically and do fact verification. In an alternative approach, students can juxtapose their material summaries with summaries generated by the AI language assistant. Moreover, the AI system can be employed as a chatbot within the educational setting, where learners can interact with theAI language regading their questions. At institutional level, AI can take over administrative tasks like scheduling classes and marking attendance. With AI support many other activities can be automated, like energy saving (Mureşan, 2023, p. 83). In short, AI has many varied applications in education and is increasing its impact on educational reality.

Artificial Intelligence and Assessment of Skills

Assessment is an essential sub-field of language teaching (Hughes & Hughes, 2020). The use of technology in language assessment is a rapidly evolving field with significant implications for second-language learning and language teaching (Sadeghi & Douglas, 2023). AI and AI chatbots play a significant role in assessment, especially in writing, reading, and speaking. AI technologies like ChatGPT can aid in generating naturalistic texts for academic purposes, facilitating text production in scientific papers (e.g., Kothgassner & Felnhofer, 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023), self-directed language learning and content generation (Kılıçkaya & Kic-Drgas, 2024; Li et al., 2024) as well as carrying out digital language assessment (Kılıçkaya, 2022). Additionally, AI chatbots can act as reading companions, maintaining social connections with students and sustaining their interest in reading activities, thus enhancing engagement and interest in learning (Liu et al., 2022). Furthermore, AI chatbots can be used in scientific writing to organize material, generate drafts, and proofread content. However, human review is essential to ensure accuracy, and avoid ethical issues like plagiarism and cheating, as well as developing digital reading lists, providing quick answers, demonstrations, and solutions to enhance educational services, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Cotton et al., 2023; Fyfe, 2023; Kohler, 2024; Salvagno et al., 2023; Wafa & Sulistyaningsih, 2025). AI's introduction in assessment is a trigger to rethink the way language skills are being measured and evaluated, Owan et al. (2023) suggest constant interaction between human and machine elements to achieve the most efficient effect. Use of virtual reality, learning

management systems or online polling systems are only some of the learning solutions available thanks to AI enhancement (Owan et al., 2023, p. 4).

The systematic literature review by Almelhes (2023) highlights the diverse applications of AI in second-language learning, particularly in mastering pronunciation. The study emphasizes the important role of the use of AI tools regarding various dialects and accents for learners and teachers. Similarly, Woo and Choi (2021) underscored the potential use of AI tools and chatbots and how these tools can contribute to self- and individualized learning in teaching and learning practices. The findings indicated that learners improved their language skills after using these AI-based tools. The empirical study conducted by Zhang, Hoang, Pan, et al. (2023) explored the implications of AI usage in language assessment and language tests from the test-taker's perspective, rather than the test provider. It revealed that AI's integration into language assessment could enhance perceptions of fairness and consistency, as human factors can affect the scoring of learners' responses. However, the findings also raised concerns about reliability and interactivity, as the use of AI might not, currently, successfully simulate human to human interaction. A comprehensive review of AI in language assessment is provided by Al-Abbas et al. (2023), who discussed the potential use of AI in language assessment. The review investigated AI use in automated scoring and aimed to determine the benefits as well the challenges of AI in language assessments.

Reading and the Use of AI: Challenges and Benefits

Teachers often assign reading activities, where learners are expected to read and to come to class having read the materials. In this way, teachers plan to allocate more time to discussing the reading materials, to promote critical thinking, express opinions, and recall textual information. However, in many cases, this doesn't work out in practice, as checking that the learners have prepared properly requires effort and time, using various assessment practices such as mini-quizzes, or asking questions, to encourage learners to come to class having read the materials. This is where technology can help, by asking learners questions about the assigned reading and monitoring and recording the learners' performance and readiness for the class (Taylor, 2022). However, ethical considerations are paramount when implementing AI chatbots in education and research, with the need for continuous adaptation and awareness, to ensure the coexistence and sustainability of these systems (Kooli, 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019) since the recorded performance of the learners and their opinions might be used for other purposes without the consent of the teachers or learners themselves.

Learners' Attitudes

Regarding the introduction of AI tools, learners were amazed by these tools, especially the advanced features that enable them to carry out a variety of tasks (Ng & Ravana, 2024). Accordingly, learners express positive perceptions and attitudes towards the use of conversational AI chatbots in language learning, appreciating the ease of use, and the

helpfulness of chatbots in improving language skills (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022; Mohamed & Alian, 2023). Positive learner experiences are reported with chatbots, and these are linked to their design and the relevance of conversation topics, since chatbots carry out engaging and meaning interactions. For example, Fathi et al. (2024) found that that AI-facilitated speaking exercises led to improved speaking abilities and oral proficiency of learners. The findings further indicated the participants' favorable attitudes and perspectives towards infusing AI technology into language skills. Interestingly, in the study published by Garrote Jurado et al. (2023) comparing the attitudes of American and Swedish students toward the use of AI in learning, both groups seemed to see its potential, however, at the same time they expressed their concerns about the use of AI going against the purpose of education. The American students were more skeptical; 40% agreed with the statement "the use of Chatbots goes against the purpose of education", compared to 28% in the Swedish group.

Stöhr et al.'s study (2024) showed that half of the participants were positive to chatbots, which were more closed linked to their familiarity and frequency of use; however, concerns were also voiced about the future use. Also, in Woo et al. (2023, p. 3), in research among 54 students, 16 showed mixed feelings highlighting ultimately: " AI's inadequacies and struggling language autonomy". Negative attitudes towards AI use have been also stressed in the study by Zhang, Zou, and Cheng (2023).

The studies whose findings were briefly reviewed briefly reviewed in this section indicate that although there might be various limitations and issues concerning AI use in teaching and learning languages, AI tools such as chatbots can offer a range of opportunities, to teachers as well as learners. As for English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this study aims to report learner experiences and interaction with an AI tool integrated into reading activities as a chatbot at university level. Based on the research gap and the findings of previous studies, the following research questions were proposed:
RQ_1: What are the benefits of the participants' interaction with the AI-led conversations based on the assigned readings?
RQ_2: What are the challenges of the participants' interaction with the AI-led conversations based on the assigned readings?

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology, as articulated by McKinley and Rose (2019), was adopted in this study to provide an in-depth and nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences with AI-mediated reading tasks. Qualitative inquiry was deemed particularly appropriate for this research due to its emphasis on exploring subjective meanings, individual perceptions, and contextually grounded insights, which are central to comprehending how EFL pre-service teachers engage with emergent technologies in language learning settings. The study sought to investigate not only the participants'

attitudes and reflections but also their evolving interaction with an AI-based learning tool within the broader pedagogical framework of a reading-focused academic English course. To this end, qualitative data were collected through two complementary instruments: semi-structured interviews and participant journals. The rationale for employing multiple data sources lies in the aim to achieve methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility and richness of the findings. The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore participant viewpoints in their own words, while also offering the interviewer the ability to probe further into unexpected or revealing responses. These interviews were used to provide space for participants to articulate their reflections on the affordances and constraints of the AI tool in an interactive manner, revealing their beliefs about its pedagogical value, usability, and potential for fostering learner autonomy.

Participants

The participants comprised 30 EFL pre-service language teachers enrolled in the prep school of a state university in Türkiye. Of the participants, 22 were female, while 8 were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, with the average determined to be 18.9. Based on the university's records of language proficiency tests, the participants' proficiency level in English was determined to be B1/B2.

Procedure

Upon obtaining the participants' consent for participation, the students were first introduced to Sherpa, which is an AI-based website that allows teachers to design voice-enabled assignments for learners to chat about class material, which can be reading or written material. During the first class, the researcher introduced this tool to the students and provided some hands-on experience on how to use the website and check the audio-video settings to interact with the website regarding the uploaded reading materials. The class was taught by another lecturer with more than 8 years of teaching experience, who collaborated with the researcher during the study. The study covered ten weeks of learning activities that consisted of academic reading units of the coursebook, including several reading strategies such as intensive, extensive, scanning, and skim reading. For the selected ten weeks, the teachers informed the researcher of the reading materials assigned that week, and the reading materials were uploaded to Sherpa, where the participants had conversations about these selected reading passages.

The participants were asked to write about their experiences during the ten weeks onabout how the AI-assisted conversations affected their willingness to read in English. In addition to that, at the end of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This was to get responses on the benefits and challenges of holding discussions of the reading activities using the AI, and suggestions on how to benefit from these AI-led discussions. The data was collected in the Spring Semester, 2024, for a period of ten weeks. The duration of the interviews conducted face-to-face lasted between 30 minutes

and 45 minutes. In addition, the provided journal entries were of varying lengths (200 – 500 words) on the AI-assisted reading activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was obtained from two data sources, which included the semi-structured interview responses and the journals. The interviews were taped and later transcribed. The analysis of the two journals and semi-structured interview responses was performed through the method of content analysis (Selvi, 2019). Participants had been instructed to keep a daily journaling report of the assigned reading activities aimed at leading to indicate their failures and successes during the exchange with the AI tool. In addition to the questions posed below, the semi-structured interviews were open to other questions as they deemed fit throughout the course of the research project.

1. Were there any specific features or functionalities of the AI tool that you found particularly useful or challenging during the conversations?
2. How did the AI tool contribute to your understanding of the reading texts and the development of your language skills?
3. Did you find the questions posed by the AI tool during the conversations to be helpful in stimulating critical thinking and discussion about the reading materials?
4. Can you provide examples of instances where you felt the AI tool provided valuable feedback or insights during the conversations?
5. Overall, how do you perceive the role of AI-based conversations in assigned readings?

The responses to the journals were first analyzed by careful reading for codes and categorizing the responses into patterns and themes. The analysis and the emerging codes and themes were checked by the researcher and another expert in qualitative data collection.

Results

Table 1 and 2 indicate the themes and codes that were obtained based on the analysis. Moreover, the tables also include selected quotes from the responses provided in journals and interviews. Table 1 provides the results as to the first research question: What are the benefits of the participants' interaction with the AI-led conversations based on the assigned readings?

Table 1

Themes, Codes, and Sample Responses on the Benefits

Theme	Code	Sample Response
Benefits	Increased Engagement	I believe talking to the AI about the reading is interactive for me. It was like talking to my friend or my teacher. I think I was more interested in the material. I like the nature of interaction. I was asked to express my views and opinions on the texts that I read.
	Immediate Feedback	The tool Sherpa provided feedback immediately on my comprehension and language use. Sometimes I could not express myself about the reading but it allowed me to revise my words and sentences and provided the opportunity to express myself. At the end, it was great to see how I performed and to what extent I could answer the questions.
	Critical Thinking	The website asked me several questions, and some of them were really good. I mean, the questions were critical and asked various types. The questions were in the form of opinion and arguments regarding the text that I have read.
	Speaking Practice	I had the chance to practice speaking in a supportive environment. The speaking was issues about the text such as discussing the main ideas of a text and expressing opinions. There was also a listening practice to some extent, although the questions were provided also in the written form.

Table 1 provides insights into the perceived benefits of interacting with an AI tool within the context of language learning. Under the theme of "Benefits," four codes are identified: increased engagement, immediate feedback, critical thinking, and speaking practice. It can be stated that the code "increased engagement" indicated participants' experiences of increased involvement during interactions with the AI tool for the reading activities (n= 24). The majority of the participants (n=20) indicated that immediate feedback emerged as a prominent benefit of using the AI tool. This was attiributed to the fact that the participants were provided with detailed feedback regarding their performance in answering the questions. The code "critical thinking" showed the participants' perceptions of the role of AI in promoting critical thinking skills. Participants (n=21) noted the quality of questions posed by the tool during the ten-minute interactions, which, as indicated by the participants, encouraged them to engage in critical analysis and to articulate their opinions and arguments about the text. This might suggest that AI tools can provide effective prompts, questions or interactions for stimulating higher-order thinking processes among language learners. Finally, the code "speaking practice" underscored the value of the AI tool in providing opportunities for linking reading with speaking and providing practice within a supportive environment (n=19). Participants (n=23) reported engaging in discussions about the main ideas of texts and expressing their opinions. This migeht lead t othe fact that the tool facilitated both speaking and listening skills development. Table 2 provides the results for the second research question: What challenges are there in participants' interaction with the AI-led conversations based on the assigned readings?

Table 2

Themes, Codes, and Sample Responses on the Challenges

Theme	Code	Sample Response
Challenges	Limited Understanding	Sometimes it was difficult to understand the questions, sentences, or phrases. I tried to understand some references to the text but it was rather complex. It might be due to the nature of the questions asked by the tool. I am not sure.
	Oral Responses	One challenge was the providing the responses by speaking. I mean I read the text and I knew the answers, but it was difficult to say it in English. I was sometimes excited. Or I needed more time to think about my answer and respond. I might have done much better in the written mode.
	Technical Problems	Internet problems sometimes caused problems while I was speaking and trying to provide the answers. Some of my answers were not captured or accepted by the website. Most probably it was due to technical issues on my side.
	Privacy	My teacher informed us that the recordings would not be used for other purposes, but the website could keep and use it for other purposes. I did not open the video setting due to this problem. I was concerned about this.

Under the theme of "Challenges," various codes are identified, each representing distinct difficulties encountered while engaging with the material. The code "Limited understanding" reflects challenges related to comprehending the content, particularly in understanding complex questions, sentences, or phrases. Another challenge highlighted is "Oral responses". The participants (n= 10) found it difficult to articulate their thoughts verbally despite understanding the content while reading. They noted experiencing excitement or the need for additional time to formulate their responses. This might suggest a potential preference for written communication over oral expression. This sentiment was also shared by a substantial portion of the participants (n=25). "Technical problems" emerged as a significant challenge, with the participant encountering issues related to internet connectivity while attempting to provide oral responses. They expressed frustration over answers since their responses were not captured or accepted by the tool. As a result, they attributed these difficulties to technical issues on their end, which was reported by a significant number of participants (n=20).

In the final code, privacy was a consideration. It was found that a number of respondents had concerns about possible uses of such recordings by the website for a purpose that was different from the original context of the learning task. Although a guarantee was sought from the teacher about the limited use of such recordings for this particular study, as stated within the form seeking consideration for the conduct of this study, this consideration was shared by a considerable number of respondents (n = 26).

Discussion

The current findings underscore the complexity of the experiences that the participants had with the AI-supported dialogue through a chatbot in a reading classroom. The findings noted here align with the advantages and disadvantages that had been found in previous works (Almeles, 2023; Fawzi, 2023; Kohler, 2024; Ng & Ravana, 2024; Perkins, 2023; Sadeghi & Douglas, 2023; Su et al., 2023). Like the experiences of the participants, even if these tools have advantages, there is a need to address the concerns identified by the participants since these concerns can affect the effectiveness of these tools for improving skills, including those for reading, and its applications for improving language skills.

The findings of this study confirm the existing body of literature that establishes the beneficial aspect of AI technology to improve linguistic skills and learning processes, especially concerning the aspect of reading. The experiences of the respondents relative to increased engagement, feedback, critical thinking, and speaking skills through interaction with the AI tool conform to the findings of previous works such as Perkins, (2023) and Almeles (2023). These relevant findings of previous studies stressed the exemplary role of AI tools and/or chatbots towards promoting active participation and the development of critical thinking skills. These findings are also in alignment with the the findings of the current study. The interactive nature of the AI tool, which was reflected by the respondents' experiences, is transferrable to the findings of the study by Su et al. (2023) and Kohler (2024) , underlining the exemplary role of AI to revolutionize the mode of engagement among students. Moreover, the immediate feedback offered by the AI tool to this study's respondents was found to be inline with the findings of previous studies by Sadeghi and Douglas (2023) and Ng and Ravana (2024), which also stress the indispensable importance of immediate feedback to facilitate learning among linguistic development learners.

Despite the evident benefits, the current study also identified several challenges associated with interaction with AI-led conversations which were consistent with previous research findings. The participants' struggles with understanding complex questions and articulating responses verbally mirror the challenges reported in several other studies such as Fawzi (2023), Sadeghi and Douglas (2023), Ng and Ravana (2024). These studies highlighted the inherent complexities of language comprehension and expression in AI-mediated interactions, and underscored the need for further research and development to address these challenges effectively. Technical issues, such as internet connectivity problems, also align with research by Cotton et al. (2023) and Fyfe (2023), who discussed the challenges of the integration of technology in educational settings, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, privacy concerns expressed by participants resonate with ethical considerations raised by the studies conducted by Kooli (2023) and Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), which emphasized the importance of continuous adaptation, awareness, legislation, and ethical values in AI

implementation to safeguard learner data privacy and consent. These findings clearly indicate the need for further efforts regarding the technical and ethical challenges associated with the implementation of AI in language learning contexts to maximize its benefits and at the same time to mitigate potential risks.

In addition to shedding light on the participants' experience with AI-led conversations over assigned readings and reading comprehension, the findings have the potential to make a substantial contribution to the ongoing discussion over the role of technology in language teaching. In line with the findings, the following suggestions can be put forward;

- AI tools can be integrated into reading classes to encourage learners to prepare for classes. However, AI integration requires time and effort, as well as raises concerns data privacy and security. Therefore, it is vital for teachers to be informed about and skilled in using AI in an educational context, and at the same time critically question AI and AI-based tools so that they are informed about their potential challenges and benefits in language teaching and learning (Alm & Ohashi, 2024).
- Learners can be encouraged to include AI tools in their self -learning environments outside the language classroom. If they do, it will be imperative for teachers to effectively use these tools in their instructional practices and provide guidance to learners on how to use them in a meaningful and productive manner.
- The use of AI tools, particularly in unsupervised summative assessments, has the potential to significantly impact outcomes. Hence, it is crucial for every examination environment to contemplate the permissibility and intended use of AI language helpers, and to ensure that learners are duly notified. Moreover, it is crucial to develop assessments that will enable students to show their acquired knowledge and skills.
- AI tools and chatbots such as Sherpa can supplement unsupervised written examinations with additional elements, such as short oral examinations or reading reflections. Moreover, these AI tools, or similar ones can also be used to have AI-led conversations on student written work.

Finally, AI tools can support the design of testing materials, both for self- and class evaluation, which can help provide individualized feedback on the learning progress.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the participants' experience with an AI tool, which was incorporated into EFL reading assignments. The participants interacted with this tool over the assigned academic reading passages and held conversations based on the questions posed by AI tools in the written and spoken forms. Content analysis was carried out on the participants' journals, as well as responses to the interviews regarding their interaction and engagement with this tool on assigned readings that lasted around ten

minutes. The results indicated that the participants highly valued the AI-led conversations on the website, and enjoyed expressing themselves regarding the assigned readings. Several benefits and challenges were voiced by the participants. Benefits included increased engagement, immediate feedback, critical thinking, and speaking practice, while challenges comprised limited understanding, oral responses, technical problems, and privacy. The results also indicated that chatbots can also be used for having conversations with learners before and or after the classroom on the assigned readings.

The study was conducted on a group of 30 EFL pre-service teachers, which was certainly important, as in the future these teachers will start to teach and use AI tools themselves. It was, however, interesting to see how receptive a group of already active senior EFL teachers would be to technological change. An additional limitation of the study was that it was carried out in only one country, which should be regarded as a pilot study. In the future, the authors plan to extend the study group and compare the results of the study in similar groups in different countries. Further research and development efforts are needed to optimize the design and implementation of AI tools in educational settings while addressing learners' needs and concerns. Further studies can investigate the effects of the use of AI on learners' reading achievement via conversations. Further research can also investigate the use of chatbots and AI tools on checking leaners' written work, such as essays and assignments. This might be conducted in mixed-ability classes, or classes with a high number of students, where assessing, monitoring and providing feedback and checking authorship are challenging.

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CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Ferit Kılıçkaya: led the conceptualization and overall design of the study, and was responsible for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Joanna Kic-Drgas: contributed primarily to the writing of the findings and discussion sections, refining the analytical narrative and situating the results within the broader literature.

Generative AI Use Disclosure Statement

The manuscript has been revised and linguistically refined with the assistance of digital tools using Grammarly and ChatGPT.

Ethics Declarations

World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

All participants were informed about the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy throughout the research process.

Competing Interests

There are no completing interests.

Data Availability

Dava available upon request.

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