

Navigating the AI Frontier: A Personal Reflection on ChatGPT as a Language Learning Companion

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Abstract

This personal reflection manuscript analyzes my three-year experience in the classroom, implementing ChatGPT as a writing and language learning tool for young adult EFL students at a Turkish university. Based on direct observations of nearly 350 students in the classroom, the paper critically examines the strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT in four main areas: improving writing and giving feedback, learning and using new words, practicing conversation and fluency, and understanding cultural differences and context. ChatGPT proved to be a valuable educational resource by being easy to use, patient, and responsive. It gave personalized feedback, suggested different words, and gave students chances to practice without feeling anxious. However, this reflection critically examines its limitations as a teaching tool. Based on well-known theories of second language acquisition, such as Zone of Proximal Development, Input Hypothesis, and Interaction Hypothesis, the paper indicates that relying too much on AI could hurt learner autonomy, weaken authentic voice, and create superficial language competence. The reflection suggests that the socially embedded and culturally dynamic aspects of language learning cannot be sufficiently addressed through algorithmic interaction alone. The paper ends with suggestions for language teachers on how to use AI tools in language classrooms in a responsible and well-informed way.

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Introduction

Technology plays a critical role in today's educational landscape. Due to its rapid development, various new tools and platforms are constantly being introduced, each

contributing uniquely to educational advancement. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of these influential technologies, and as AI rapidly integrates into educational contexts, its role in shaping education, particularly in language education, has become a subject of both enthusiasm and caution. Numerous studies have sought to shed light on the effects of various AI tools on learners' learning experiences.

Inspired by recent advancements, as a language educator and researcher, I have actively integrated AI tools into my own teaching context. For six years, I have been teaching English to young adults majoring in various departments where 30% of the curriculum is delivered in English (English as a Medium of Instruction - EMI). My students learn English for both their departmental requirements and their academic and professional development.

For the last three years, my primary responsibility has been to enhance my students' reading and writing skills. As a researcher keenly interested in technology integration into language education, I subsequently began utilizing AI tools to improve their overall English proficiency. When I first introduced ChatGPT, one of the emerging Generative AI platforms, into my writing lessons, I was curious whether it could genuinely support learners' development in complexity, accuracy, and fluency, or merely serve as a grammar checker with polished output.

I started using ChatGPT for writing tasks for my students three years ago. I had a crowded class with almost 50 students, and the same number for the other three groups as well. Each week, I assigned a writing task to my students based on the syllabus of the lesson. As it was hard to revise and check all the mistakes of students in a few days to give them feedback about their writing tasks, I asked them to use ChatGPT as an assistant for both editing their tasks and asking for more explanations. During this time, I have observed many instances of my students, from the ones who are in lower levels to the ones who are in higher levels in English proficiency. Grounded on these observations, I would like to share the personal observation notes on the use of ChatGPT as a writing and learning assistant for young adults who learn English for their academic and professional lives. During the paper, I will cover the notes on grammar correction, vocabulary choice, writing enhancement, critical thinking, general effects, and ethical considerations. I will start with the background and theoretical framework by briefly overviewing ChatGPT, relevant language learning and acquisition theories. The following section will focus on the personal journey of learners with ChatGPT as a foreign language writing and learning assistant. This section will be centered on the description of specific illustrations and the ways ChatGPT is used in the classroom, reflecting on the reasons for using it that way, the expectations, and the results. Then it will continue with the assessment of the effectiveness, benefits, and drawbacks of ChatGPT in that specific area, and linking my observations to the theoretical framework we established in the previous section. The next section will focus on the drawbacks of using ChatGPT as an assistant in the foreign language learning process. The last part will recap the main points of my experiences

with students, cover the recommendations for learners and educators, and the speculations on the potential evolution of AI tools and their role in language education.

Background and Theoretical Framework

ChatGPT is a conversational AI assistant developed by OpenAI, and it has rapidly emerged as a transformative technology in various areas. At its core, ChatGPT is a large language model (LLM), trained on a massive dataset of text and code from the internet (Farina & Lavazza, 2023). This extensive training allows it to understand and generate human-like text in response to a rich diversity of prompts. Unlike traditional rule-based programs, ChatGPT learns patterns, grammar, semantics, and even elocutionary nuances from the vast amount of data it has processed (OpenAI Help Center, n.d.). Therefore, its capabilities go beyond clearly generating coherent text. ChatGPT can understand and respond to natural language because it is designed to interpret human-written and even oral requests, enabling fluent and contextually meaningful conversations (Bonner et al., 2023). This conversational ability allows it to follow complex instructions and remember previous turns in a discussion, adapting its responses to the evolving context (OpenAI Help Center, n.d.). ChatGPT can generate diverse text formats, including stories, reports, emails, poems, essays, and even creative visuals from text prompts (OpenAI Help Center, n.d.). ChatGPT can summarize lengthy texts and explain complex concepts in simpler terms (OpenAI Help Center, n.d.). It can translate between languages, making it a valuable tool for cross-linguistic communication and understanding (Liao et al., 2023). And the last but not the least, ChatGPT can analyze input and offer suggestions for improvement, ranging from grammatical corrections and alternative phrasing to ideas for brainstorming and outlining (Alberth, 2023; Xiao & Zhi, 2023).

ChatGPT's features are important for language learners because they give them many chances to learn in a way that works for them. Scholars attempted to better understand this significance. One of the most frequently cited benefits of ChatGPT is its ability to offer continuous, personalized conversational practice (Irianto et al., 2024; Metruk, 2024). Unlike human teachers who may not always be available, ChatGPT can engage learners 24/7, providing immediate feedback on their output. This interaction in real time helps students correct themselves and learn language rules more quickly. (Al-Hoorie & AlShakhori, 2025). Furthermore, ChatGPT can serve as a powerful writing assistant, helping learners with grammar and syntax correction, expanding vocabulary, and improving overall writing fluency and coherence (Barrot, 2024; Xiao & Zhi, 2023; Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020). It can assist with outlining, paraphrasing, and even generating ideas for assignments, thereby boosting confidence in academic writing (Farrokhnia et al., 2023). Students can also use ChatGPT to ask for definitions, synonyms, antonyms, collocations, and example sentences in certain situations. This can help them learn more words and understand how to use them (Farrokhnia et al., 2023). ChatGPT can generate customized instructional materials and adapt explanations to different proficiency levels, creating a more engaging and less confusing learning experience (Al-khresheh, 2024; Koraishi, 2023; Yastıbaş, 2023).

Studies also suggest that using ChatGPT can positively influence learners' attitudes toward language learning, increasing motivation and curiosity due to its interactive and personalized nature (Klimova et al., 2024; Noordin & Mohamad, 2026; Zhou et al., 2024).

The incorporation of AI, especially tools such as ChatGPT, into language learning methodologies offers a substantial foundation for examining its alignment with various second language acquisition (SLA) theories. First, the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985), which claims that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, slightly beyond their current level ($i+1$). In this regard, ChatGPT excelled in providing tailored, comprehensible input in various ways, such as customized texts, simplification and elaboration, targeted vocabulary and grammar explanations, and simulated dialogues. Second, the Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1983) which emphasizes the importance of interaction in SLA, particularly through the negotiation of meaning. Here, learners and interlocutors add their output to make it more comprehensible. While ChatGPT is an AI and not a human interlocutor, it facilitated a form of negotiation of meaning by clarification requests, error correction dialogue, and adapting output to the learners' level (Al-Kadi & Ali, 2024; Dong, 2024). The other theory behind using ChatGPT is the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) by Vygotsky (1978), which claims that learning is a social process, mediated by tools and signs, and often occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners achieve more with assistance than they could do alone. ChatGPT functions as a powerful mediational tool and scaffolding agent for students within this context. It can scaffold the writing tasks with possible ideas and generate content for further practice (Barrot, 2024). The other theory is the Output Hypothesis by Swain (1985), which claims that language production (output) is significant for language acquisition. ChatGPT facilitates self-correction to re-examine the output of learners, generate responses to the complex prompts, and practice specific linguistic functions to engage in dialogues (Seo, 2024; Yu & Xie., 2025). Finally, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that learners with high anxiety, low self-esteem, or low motivation have a "filter" that blocks comprehensible input from the reading of the language acquisition device (Krashen, 1985). ChatGPT is effective in lowering the affective filter by providing non-judgmental practice, patience, and availability, immediate and private feedback (Al-khresheh, 2024; Zhang & Jiang, 2026; Zhou et al., 2024).

Classroom Observations on ChatGPT as a Language Writing and Learning Assistant

Over several years, I have taught English writing skills to a total of nearly 350 students. After the launch of ChatGPT by OpenAI, at the beginning of each term, I introduced ChatGPT as a tool for seamless learning, guiding my students on how to use it as a writing and learning assistant. Our weekly routine involved covering new vocabulary and useful expressions, followed by an assignment to write a paragraph (later on, an essay) based on the theme of the week (daily lives, dreams, psychology, linguistics,

health, etc.). Students completed their first drafts in class, scaffolded by me and their peers.

Afterward, I instructed them to input their drafts into ChatGPT's chatbox, emphasizing the importance of accuracy in spelling, vocabulary selection, grammar structures, and even punctuation. My aim was to enable my students to receive comprehensive feedback from ChatGPT about their even smaller spelling or punctuation mistakes. Then I provided a short, to-the-point prompt, directing ChatGPT to analyze its errors/mistakes and offer corrective feedback. At first, students had a hard time getting used to this new way of doing things, but they eventually got the hang of using the tool to help them learn more. There were a number of interesting things that happened during this implementation.

One notable example occurred when students were tasked with writing a paragraph about their daily routines. A student submitted a short text and requested ChatGPT for editing. While ChatGPT accordingly provided feedback on writing mistakes related to sentence structure, vocabulary choice, and punctuation, it also offered an unprompted suggestion about the student's lifestyle, not the writing itself. The student had mentioned smoking after waking up, before breakfast. Surprisingly, after correcting the text, ChatGPT added, "By the way, it is not advisable to smoke before breakfast as it will harm your health. You should not smoke before breakfast!". This moment was quite staggering for all of us, as ChatGPT not only delivered structural feedback but also provided personal health advice, even without any prompt on this issue.

Beyond that surprising experience, one of my most frequent observations involved the reactions of more proficient language learners to ChatGPT's corrections. When these students prompted ChatGPT for feedback on their writing, they sometimes encountered phrases like, "Well done, you do not have any problems with your writing task.". Faced with such expressions, students would ask me what to do next, as ChatGPT had not offered them any specific feedback. Clearly, these students were not fully aware of their own advanced abilities, nor did they recognize ChatGPT's attempt to motivate them.

Another recurring observation, also related to proficient learners, emerged when their writing had no apparent mistakes in sentence structure, punctuation, or spelling. In these instances, ChatGPT frequently suggested changes to their vocabulary selection. When confronted with these stylistic suggestions, students would often ask me why ChatGPT had changed their word choices. I usually explained that their original vocabulary was indeed correct, but ChatGPT had proposed alternatives to make the text either more understandable or more native-like. This particular type of feedback proved somewhat demotivating for proficient users, as they felt their initial word choices perfectly conveyed their ideas. Consequently, they often expressed

dissatisfaction with ChatGPT's suggestions in these moments and refused to change their first versions.

Moreover, less proficient users also encountered significant challenges when engaging with ChatGPT's feedback. Given the numerous grammatical, structural, and lexical issues often present in their initial drafts, ChatGPT frequently rewrote their writing tasks almost from scratch. When presented with these substantially revised texts, students found it difficult to fully comprehend the extent and nature of the corrections. This phenomenon meant that instead of receiving targeted feedback on specific errors they could readily understand and address, less proficient learners were often given a near-perfect output that felt alien to their original work. Consequently, the core pedagogical goal of independent error identification and correction was undermined. These students struggled to bridge the gap between their original, error-laden sentences and ChatGPT's polished versions, often failing to grasp why certain changes were made. This observation led to concerns about the potential for passive learning or over-reliance on the tool, as it risked preventing students from developing their own metalinguistic awareness and self-correction skills.

Briefly, grounded on these observations, the following subheadings outline the findings.

Writing improvement and feedback

ChatGPT improved students' writing performances by providing constant feedback on their tasks. They had the opportunity to see and comprehend their structural problems in their writing tasks. The punctuation rules and spellings got better at the end of the education year. For most of the students, feedback provided by ChatGPT was enormously useful to enhance their writing abilities, especially when they prompted for more explanation for mistakes. Students were able to ask for clarification without any hesitation and receive feedback whenever and wherever they wanted, without any loss of time.

Vocabulary acquisition and usage

Students had an opportunity to see alternatives for vocabulary and grammar structure to explain what they meant. Even if for some proficient users it may be demotivating, they increased their lexical usage by observing alternatives. Sometimes ChatGPT provided explanations for the reasons of not using some specific words in every situation, by giving examples from the related contexts, and therefore students comprehended the importance of context while using words appropriately.

Conversational practice and fluency

One of the most significant effects of ChatGPT was on the conversational practice for students. As living in a country where English is not spoken widely, and having just learnt English as a foreign language in schools, students had a disadvantage in practicing their English skills. With the help of ChatGPT, they had an opportunity to

have an assistant whenever they want to practice their English skills. Some students also experienced ChatGPT for speaking skills, and they reported that they enhanced their speaking fluency with the help of ChatGPT. The most important point here is that, according to the feedback from the students and my observations, ChatGPT never rushes, calmly listens to the students and interacts with them regarding their needs. This creates a positive effect on the student and improves the learning experience.

Understanding cultural nuances and context

ChatGPT identifies the context and provides feedback based on that context. Students introduced themselves at the beginning of their first interaction with ChatGPT and it enabled ChatGPT to observe the context, and somehow culture, of the students. ChatGPT mostly focused on basic cultural elements, as it was created by a company in the United States and did not include much data in the Turkish context.

The Drawbacks of ChatGPT as Learning Companion in Language Education

This section will focus on the observations on the disadvantages of using ChatGPT for writing improvement and feedback, vocabulary acquisition and usage, conversational practice and fluency, and understanding cultural nuances and context. A recent study by Kavak et al. (2024) claims that the use of AI in educational settings brings lots of disadvantages, such as false information or inconvenient instructions, along with it as well. The following observations were also supported by the previous studies, reporting that AI tools lack human connection, personalized interaction, correct and suitable responses, grasping context and meaning, and cultural sensitivity (Mohamed, 2023; Athanassopoulos et al., 2023), in addition to having bias (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023).

First, in terms of writing improvement and feedback, students may start relying on ChatGPT in place of developing their own skills. Relying too much on AI could mean missing out on the productive struggle that is so important for writing growth. Vygotsky (1978) claims that authentic learning develops through intentional involvement within the Zone of Proximal Development — a process that automated feedback fundamentally interferes with. AI may not fully understand the context, and the suggestions it provides can be superficial or even alter the intended meaning. Additionally, sometimes ChatGPT focuses more on technical corrections than original thought, which can hinder the students' creative writing skills. Most importantly, when AI changes the way students write, it quietly takes away their voice and original thought. This is not what meaningful writing instruction is meant to do (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Second, in terms of vocabulary acquisition and usage, as ChatGPT is an AI tool, the word examples it provides may not always align with real-life usage. AI-generated examples could be semantically correct but not useful in the real world, which could lead to learners picking up wrong word patterns as they learn. Schmitt (2008) posits

that profound vocabulary knowledge goes further than only basic definitional comprehension, incorporating collocational, cultural, and contextual dimensions that remain beyond the complete mediation of any algorithm. Besides, looking up words quickly without active engagement may reduce long-term retention and understanding. Real vocabulary learning needs exposure to different contexts, repeated use, and active mental processing. Passive AI-assisted lookup does not provide these conditions (Nation, 2001).

Third, in terms of conversational practice and fluency, unlike real-life conversations, ChatGPT lacks the ability to convey natural tone, gestures, and facial expressions. Conversational fluency is not just a language skill; it is also a social and physical skill. Therefore, it may struggle to demonstrate empathy or cultural sensitivity in emotionally nuanced conversations. Sometimes, it suggests changes to correct sentences, which can confuse and mislead learners. This is important for teaching because Bygate (1987) says that oral fluency comes from negotiating meaning in real, unpredictable communication situations, which is exactly what AI can't do. AI's tendency to flag pragmatically appropriate utterances as incorrect is more concerning, as it could hurt learners' confidence and make them feel insecure about their language skills. Such interference could lead to speakers who are technically cautious and no longer trust their own instincts when it comes to communication.

Finally, in terms of understanding cultural nuances and context, ChatGPT may fall short in conveying the richness and subtlety of real-life cultural experiences. It may be claimed that ChatGPT's limited ability to convey the complexity of cultural experience is perhaps the most troubling aspect. Culture is not a fixed collection of facts; it is a dynamic, evolving system of values, humor, identity, and social norms that defies algorithmic representation (Kramsch, 1993). When AI simplifies cultural knowledge into generalizations or ancient clichés, it may reinforce stereotypes instead of fostering intercultural competence. Learners primarily exposed to AI-mediated cultural content may cultivate what Holliday (2011) describes as "essentialism", a reductive inclination to perceive cultures as homogeneous and immutable. It might not always reflect up-to-date cultural elements such as current trends, humor, or evolving social norms. Authentic cultural comprehension necessitates immersion, interpersonal discourse, and critical reflection, elements that no AI tool, regardless of sophistication, can genuinely replicate.

Conclusion

As a language educator in this highly technological era, it is not possible to deny the role of innovative technologies in the field. The more the technology develops, it seems that the less people want to learn languages with the help of pen, paper, and books; instead, they tend to use these novel tools to learn and develop their language skills. In such a world, it is not reasonable to prevent learners from using these tools, which may really offer great opportunities for language learning. On the other hand, not only these technological advancements, but also the alteration in youth behaviors affect

learning processes as well. As a result of living in a technology-surrounded era, everyone, from seven to seventy, is eligible to use technologies for various purposes, so that they can access information easily, which steps them back from asking another person for help.

Briefly, based on my observations in my classrooms, AI tools, especially ChatGPT in this context, served as a useful writing assistant providing constant feedback, alternative lexical choices, and as a language learning assistant which they can practice language skills in any context, in addition to having some concerns and problems related to the lack of human-touch, overreliance on AI, and unnatural conversations with cultural lacks.

Therefore, we as language educators need to be aware of all these potentialities of new technologies and educate our students to be better equipped with all the necessary aspects of them. By doing so, we can enable our students to develop their language skills and become better generations for the future and the 21st century in terms of both technology and AI awareness. It should not be forgotten that students' AI awareness, AI literacy, and correct and effective use of AI would also enable them to become better global citizens.

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