# Students' Perspective on Applying AI in English Learning and Teaching – A Study at UEH

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#### **ABSTRACT**

With the rapid advancement of technology, the integration of high-tech tools, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), into language learning and teaching has become increasingly popular. This surge is accompanied by numerous studies exploring the evolving roles of teachers and the effective application of AI in English instruction. This research explored students' perspectives on AI in English learning and its use by teachers at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH). Using a mixed-method approach, data was gathered through a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with 50 first-year students majoring in Accounting, Finance, and International Business. The findings indicate that students hold realistic and well-balanced views on teachers' use of AI in English teaching, showing appropriate attitudes toward its classroom application. The results suggest that English teachers should adopt AI sensibly and creatively to maximize its potential benefits while avoiding over-reliance on this powerful tool.

Keywords: AI application, students' perspective, teachers' roles

#### Introduction

Using artificial intelligence (AI) in language teaching and learning is becoming increasingly popular, not to say, a must nowadays. There have been numerous studies on the redefined roles of teachers in the AI era, wherein educators are expected to act as facilitators, assisting students in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of AI as well as its practical applications (Malcolm, 2023) and guiding them in using AI tools for learning (Campell, 2024). According to Abdulrahman's study (2024), college instructors can take on the roles of learning coaches and designers of learning experiences, helping students navigate AI-driven learning environments and create learning experiences that AI enhances. At the TESOL 24 International Convention & Expo organized in America in March 2024, the participants were impressed by a band roll that read: "AI will not Replace us but Those who do not Use AI Will Be Replaced By Those who do" (with some capitalized letters to highlight the point). It is obvious that

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irrespective of which group they are in - early adopters, early majority, late majority, or laggards, English teachers working in the era of the rapid advancement of technology are expected to employ this powerful tool to improve their work efficiency and effectiveness. At the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH), English teachers have also been encouraged to explore and include AI in their teaching, with seminars/workshops on AI organized to keep them up to date on this new trend. To guarantee effective classes and prevent squandering time and energy, it is imperative, to begin with the needs of the students by carefully examining their perspectives and expectations regarding the AI application. The data collected then can be used by UEH's English teachers to decide how best to incorporate AI into their daily tasks.

To meet the study's objectives, the following research questions were addressed in the survey:

- 1. What are the students' perspectives on using AI in English learning?
- 2. What are the students' perspectives on the teachers' AI use in English teaching?

#### Literature review

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Huang et al. (2023) meant that AI applications are mostly learning systems designed for particular groups of learners. These applications could be either language learning applications suggested for practicing or interactive platforms for interaction (Zou et al., 2023). Therefore, those mentioned trends should only be for AI applications supporting language learning in general. It is understandable that there was no clear classification of AI systems and technologies used for language acquisition in or outside of the classroom in the 512 contemporaneous journals Huang et al. (2023) examined among Web of Science, Scopus, and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) till 2019.

According to Huang et al. (2023), the application of AI in language learning has caught the interest of many researchers in this century. These authors' systematic review of three popular scientific sources of educational journals shows that the number of publications for "AI-enhanced language learning" skyrocketed from 2000 to 2019 (Huang et al., 2023, p. 116). From a moderate amount of 31 papers in 2004, this topic was mentioned in 249 journals from the Web of Science, Scopus, and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) in 2019. This recorded a significant rise in the frequency of AI in the scope of language learning.

More importantly, AI applications have been investigated in many aspects of this profession. Lee et al. (2015) mentioned an AI system providing real-time mistake corrections, which took after the prompt type of corrective feedback in second language teaching (Nava & Pedrazzini, 2018). This benefits learners in recognizing grammar usage for writing in the studied language. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2017) found that interactive narratives from AI systems support practicing reading comprehension amazed learners. Interestingly, Wijekumar et al. (2017) indicated that learners adopting the AI system to support reading comprehension outperformed students who did not use it in exams. These findings could demonstrate AI systems' significant impacts on language learning over the last decade.

From the categories of AI applications for language learning mentioned above, it can be stated that applications for practicing should be for self-learning, while interactive platforms have been examined to create a significant difference for in-class learning (Zou et al., 2023). These authors pointed out that interactive-based AI channels would create a "hybrid" approach in class

to boost the motivation of learners to commit to producing oral outputs in language learning (Zou et al., 2023, p. 11). This argument has been reaffirmed by Pham (2022), who said that AI tools did help language teachers engage the class efficiently. More importantly, AI tools did adequately impact participants' learning efficiency compared to the group without AI usage (Zou et al., 2023). Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) found similar results when they learned that AI applications could boost performance in language learning. This could be the case when examining the effectiveness and efficacy of AI tools in in-class language learning.

Despite the stated growth of AI applications in language learning, there are obstacles to implementing AI in the classrooms. Huang et al. (2023) recognized three positive points for using AI in language learning, most of which are from applications and systems for self-learning. Meanwhile, regarding the disadvantages of this trend, many publications pointed out the issues of reliability and acceptance of both teachers and students for in-class usage. Grimes & Warschauer (2010) and Johnson (2007) criticized accuracy in feedback and evaluation of AI systems assisting language acquisition for faults in assessing learners' performance, causing uncertainty in use. According to Lin et al. (2017), this drawback triggered reluctance to use AI from learners who had limited experience with e-learning platforms. Meanwhile, Pokrivcakova (2019) mentioned the teachers' resistance to AI systems due to challenges from knowledge and experience in using this type of technology. Therefore, there are still constraints to applying AI systems for language learning in a classroom context.

These aforementioned studies illustrate that AI applications for language in-class learning could be explored further. Henceforth, this study will investigate how students perceive this trend, which goes beyond learning to recommend preferred ways to use AI tools in the classroom to maximize benefits and minimize the drawbacks stated by Huang et al. (2023).

#### **Methods**

## Pedagogical Setting & Participants

To explore how the students at UEH perceived and expected AI to be used in their English classes, the first-year students majoring in Accounting, Finance, and International Business in three classes were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and 50 of them voluntarily agreed to become the participants to answer the questions on a paper questionnaire. Those students have a high level of language proficiency because they come from classes where all instruction is conducted in English, and the program requires IELTS certificates with a minimum score of 6.5. Of these fifty, eighteen willing participants consented to participate in follow-up, structured interviews to elaborate on their responses to specific topics. The data was gathered on the final day of their English course, giving the students sufficient time to reflect and thoughtfully respond to the questions.

## Design of the Study

The paper-based questionnaire comprised different questions, including closed, open-ended, and rating. The first eight questions focused on the students' employing AI in studying English. The other three were to find out how they expected AI to be used by teachers in language classes, to which 50 participants just responded quickly with short answers. Meanwhile, the focus of the informal interviews was to delve deeper into the participants' expectations relating to AI in language learning and teaching. Therefore, the eighteen willing participants would

work more closely with the researcher on these last three questions, especially question 11, elaborating on their opinions regarding how teachers should exploit AI in teaching English. All questions were asked in Vietnamese to ensure they were fully understood and appropriately addressed. Additionally, a pretest was conducted with ten students, and improvements were made to the questionnaire before the final one was delivered to the participants. This action is to create a prolonged observation for the efficacy of the questionnaire that assures credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 2003).

#### Data Collection & Analysis

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In each class, before the participants were delivered the paper questionnaire, they were again clearly informed about the study's aim. Then, some questions were elaborated to ensure there would be no misunderstanding. The students were also encouraged to ask for clarification if they felt confused by any words/phrases or ideas in the questionnaire. After the questionnaire was collected, each volunteer student had an informal interview with the writer in ten or fifteen minutes.

Epistemologically, this paper adopts interpretivism based on the described research context. According to Bryman (2016), interpretivism is the concept that brings out knowledge by explaining the actions of humans in a specific discipline. He defined interpretivism by contrasting it with positivism, the epistemology standpoint to advocate knowledge in natural science by finding "the truth" from testing theories, which contributes to establishing universal laws of nature (Bryman, 2016, p. 24). In the context of this research, the participants will give detailed answers to the questions about specific topics related to the usage of AI in higher education. With these inputs, analyzing the meanings of the students' words should be a suitable and preferred method. This would also be synchronized with Bryman's interpretivism concept mentioned above.

This research collects data via a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interview to discover participants' viewpoints. Hence, the research method identified should be a mixed one. On the one hand, qualitative research is suggested to be a sound approach for studying "naturally occurring cases" using subjective verbal data rather than objective statistics by Cohen et al. (2018, p. 245). The qualitative research approach would be effective for this study as the research questions mentioned above are open-ended and are intended to learn about the students' perception of AI applications in language learning and their expectations for AI usage in English classes at UEH. On the other hand, as this research studies students of a university, the qualitative approach should be more efficient as it needs a certain number of samples from a large population (Cohen et al., 2018; Bryman, 2016). Therefore, a mixed-method study should be the most suitable description for this paper's approach. This research strategy would provide insights extracted from an in-depth understanding of the behaviors and attitudes' meanings toward specific cases while assuring certainty when researching innumerable populations (Bryman, 2016, Cohen et al., 2018).

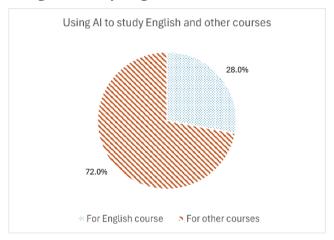
## **Results/Findings and Discussion**

The data collected from the first eight questions were to answer Research question 1: What are the students' perspectives on using AI in English learning?

# Questions 1 & 2. AI and English learning

The first question was about employing AI for courses at school. It was a little surprising to find that only 14 students (28%) replied they used AI more for English learning. The other 36 ones (72%) stated that they primarily utilized AI for other courses since it was very helpful to them in gathering and organizing ideas for the assignments and projects assigned by the lecturers. For question 2, most students (92%) responded they had heard a lot about using AI in language teaching and learning.

Figure 1
Using AI to study English and other courses

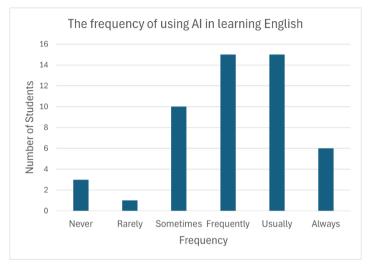


Question 3. The frequency of using AI in learning English

When asked about the frequency of using AI for language learning, three students (6%) stated that they did not use AI when studying English. The explanations were that they did not think it was necessary to do so and preferred to listen to the teacher's voice or would rather learn/work directly with their English teachers.

Among the other 47 students, the same number (15) replied that they used it frequently and usually. Six students responded that they always used AI for English learning, 10 ticked the 'sometimes' box, and only one chose the option of rarely using AI.

Figure 2
The frequency of using AI in learning English



## Question 4. AI apps/tools used

From the list of popular AI tools for language learning, 84% of the students circled Chat-GPT, 66% chose Grammarly, and 28% went for Notion. For the apps, Duolingo was the most popular one with 30 votes, and Elsa came next with 8 ticks. Besides the tools and apps listed on the questionnaire, the students added some others such as Gemini, Quizlet, Quillbot, and eJoy.

## Questions 5 & 6 Benefits and Drawbacks of AI for English learning

As far as advantages are concerned, the participants responded that AI, with its very high processing speed, strongly supported them in finding and learning business terms for their disciplines, and it was extremely useful in the brainstorming phase when they had trouble coming up with ideas or ran out of them. Moreover, since there were no restrictions on time and place when using these apps and tools for language learning, the students could study English anytime and anywhere with AI. Therefore, they could efficiently allocate and save significant time when completing assignments or homework. Besides, they were assisted in consolidating their knowledge of grammar and, to some extent, in improving their pronunciation. In particular, since there were so many students in one class and their teacher was unable to correct every writing paper in-depth, the students found it very helpful that AI could edit their projects or write papers. Another significant benefit of using AI in language learning was that this tool helped to customize their learning pathways and provide appropriate guidance for their study. In addition, there was a marked increase in interaction with English, which is a crucial contributing factor for successful language learners.

With regards to the disadvantages, most of the responses were mainly about the incorrect information or data provided by AI's large database, which resulted in the students spending a lot of time checking and even double-checking the answers given. Moreover, AI provided either stereotypical information/data or wrong answers due to the fact that it was "lazy" and/or could not comprehend the instructions entered. Another concern was that the students did not have the required and profound knowledge of using technology. Therefore, they could not take advantage of the apps or tools for language learning and failed to prompt AI well, leading to confusing and unexpected answers. A few students also mentioned the drawback of high fees

for certain apps/tools, deterring some students from exploiting AI. The last disadvantage mentioned was working alone with AI, the students gradually became bored, lost their persistence, and finally ceased their independent learning.

## Question 7a. The main reasons for the widespread use of AI in English learning

When asked about two main reasons for the extensive use of AI in learning English, the participants replied that they could develop their autonomy due to its convenience, user-friendliness, time-saving, and cost-saving features. Moreover, they could choose from many free apps/tools to work with. From those facilities, the students could enlarge their vocabulary, improve their ideas for presentations, and complete writing papers, which required sound knowledge and composed from various sources of information in a short time without the teacher's support. In particular, to some students, AI could be viewed as a friend with whom they could interact, chat, and even debate or argue when bored. Additionally, privacy was guaranteed, and users were greatly satisfied with having their shy-to-ask questions promptly answered.

# Question 7b. The main reasons for the low use of AI in English learning

On the other hand, a variety of responses about why AI is not utilized extensively in language learning were also provided. The first reason was that many other effective ways to learn English existed. For example, they could learn from or interact with other teachers/learners by using video calls. The second reason cited was that they did not want to rely too heavily on AI, preferring to challenge themselves in completing the tasks given. Overusing AI made them become passive and dependent, losing the ability to think independently and even inhibiting their creativity. Specifically, they were unable to create a distinctive writing style for their work because AI produced ideas and outputs that were identical or duplicated. They might eventually lose interest in studying as they begin to adopt passive learning habits over time.

Furthermore, the results produced by AI, particularly the conversation scripts and speeches, may seem robotic or "unnaturally" sounding in both written and spoken languages. Frequently, the content was inappropriate, or the vocabulary used was too complicated for the context. Besides, there was a worry regarding the protection of personal data.

## Question 8. Self-studying with AI

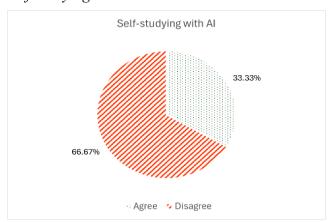
Regarding the opinion that AI was just suitable for self-studying outside class, two-thirds of the students showed their disagreement. They explained that though in most cases, the main drivers for utilizing AI were searching for information and finding answers/solutions to questions/tasks, both teachers and students could make use of AI in their own ways, provided that it was appropriately exploited, either for individuals or group work. The other explanation for this option was that there should be a combination of using AI inside and outside classes. To make the most of its benefits, information or data provided by AI should be used as references, or in other words, AI was just a device to support in the learning process.

A third, however, concurred that AI was only useful for independent study at home or outside of the classroom. They clarified that class time should be used for teacher-student interaction as well as the development of creativity and logical/critical thinking. Moreover, the primary purpose of AI was to support autonomous learning, which would optimally work when studying without teachers' help and guidance. Again, using AI in classes would make the students depend more on AI and concentrate less on teachers' instructions and lessons, wasting their time in

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searching for information and finding answers/solutions to questions/tasks.

Figure 3 Self-studying with AI

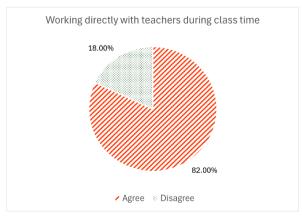


The responses from questions nine to eleven helped answer Research question 2: What are the students' perspectives on teachers' AI use in English teaching?

Question 9. Working directly with teachers during class time

According to statistics derived from the questionnaire, nine respondents showed their disagreement that class time should be for directly working with teachers. In contrast, 82% of the participants agreed that class time was for direct working with the teacher. In the interview, the students provided more details to clarify their answers, explaining that during class, students were expected to collaborate on discussions in pairs or small groups with their classmates as well as engage with the teacher. They highlighted the teacher's role in bringing effective learning time with clear instructions and detailed explanations for their questions, which AI definitely could not perform. They also expressed their preferences for working with humans over with AI. Teachers' sharing of their experiences was especially helpful, something that AI was unable to offer them. One student mentioned it was about money value – they paid the school fee to work with teachers, not with AI at school.

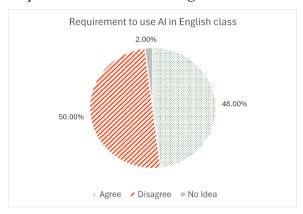
Figure 4 Working directly with teachers during class time



## Question 10. Teachers' requirement to use AI in English class

Regarding whether the teacher should ask the students to employ AI in class time, half of the interviewees gave a negative response, 24 of them had the opposite opinion, and one replied that he/she had no idea. The explanations they had for selecting the No option were identical to the ones they gave for not utilizing AI substantially for English learning, which included diminishing their ability to think critically and work independently and becoming increasingly reliant on AI. One student explained that he/she felt it was as if the teacher was promoting dependence on AI if there was such a requirement, and another stressed that this requirement would not help learners develop their autonomy.

Figure 5
Requirement to use AI in English class



Question 11. Using AI in English classes at UEH

Most of the interviewees responded that AI should be used moderately or appropriately, accounting for only around 30% of a class session to avoid being heavily dependent on AI. With a large English class of nearly 50 students, the teacher should leave certain tasks for AI to perform. Specifically, AI should be employed to assist the teacher in teaching speaking and writing skills by setting up virtual speaking and writing rooms where the learners' pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and ideas can be improved and/or corrected. In their opinion, AI could greatly support creating quizzes and games to make the lessons more interesting. The teacher could also have various topics for discussions and conversations for listening and speaking activities from AI. One interviewee suggested that the students could be asked to talk or write about a topic, and then they would compare their works with the ones produced by AI, which helped them develop their autonomous learning. Once students have worked with AI beforehand, the teacher might cut down on their workload by only providing assistance with issues they cannot handle independently. Again, it is strongly recommended that AI should not be overused, especially when practicing writing emails or business letters because it would reduce the learner's critical thinking and creativity.

In particular, the students expected that the teacher would guide them in writing appropriate prompts or crafting suitable questions for AI, enabling them to receive accurate or suitable results from the system. Even more demanding, one student expected that an AI would be created especially for UEH students to utilize in their studies.

#### **Discussion**

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The responses to the first two questions reflected that although participants perceived the importance of using AI in English learning, they prioritized using it for other courses. Their high level of English proficiency may explain that emphasis.

From the students' responses to questions 3 and 4, it is obvious that they are quite proactive in choosing and deciding how to use AI in language learning. They can be regarded as tech-savvy learners who can take advantage of new learning tools and apps without teachers' guidance or support. They are learners who were described as getting used to e-learning platforms, leading to adopting AI systems for language learning at ease, from Lin et al.'s (2017) arguments.

The answers to questions 5 to 7 revealed that, generally, the study subjects are fully aware of the benefits and drawbacks that AI brings to language learners. However, there are some conflicts in their responses relating to learner autonomy (questions 6 and 7a). While some students highlighted how AI helped them become autonomous learners, others expressed worry that their reliance on AI would grow overly strong, reducing their capacity for independent work.

One interesting finding from the comments on the benefits of AI is that because it may be regarded as a friend to the student, AI's support was not only for activities and task completion in the classroom but also in terms of emotion or spirit. This is a noteworthy point because, in reality, some students have struggled to form friendships with their peers. Despite participating in English class activities in pairs or groups, they have stated that they feel lonely and experience communication difficulties. This is affirmed by Zou et al.'s (2023) findings, which stated that AI interactive-based platforms could connect learners and boost their motivation to deliver oral language output. Johnson et al. (2017) also stressed that AI systems could amaze students when learning a language.

For questions 8, 9, and 10, statistically, there seems to be a little inconsistency in the participants' answers. Most of them advocated that class time should be spent working directly with the teacher, but only half disagreed with using AI in class. Nevertheless, their explanations for their choices showed that they have had a proper perception/awareness of the teacher's roles and AI's advantages and disadvantages. This inconsistency may come from the fact that there was a difference in the way they interpreted the questions and what the teacher aimed at. In addition, though encouraged to ask for clarification if there were any confusing ideas or words/phrases, they raised no inquiries to these questions.

The students' recommendations relating to question 11 are extremely useful to teachers. They reconfirm the teacher's roles with the low percentage of using AI in class. Their concrete examples offer clues or suggestions for teachers to creatively incorporate AI into their lessons. However, the teacher is expected to employ AI sensibly and effectively so that he/she can reduce the workload, enhance the learner's critical thinking and creativity, and support the development of their autonomy. This viewpoint, once again, is concurrent with Zou et al.'s (2023) findings that learners would prefer a "hybrid" approach in which AI systems should be applied in the classroom along with teachers' instructions, and may result in effective learning and improved exam performance.

## **Conclusion**

The results indicate that students have appropriate attitudes toward the use of AI in English classrooms. They support the use of AI applications while fully understanding the advantages and disadvantages of AI, particularly the risk of becoming dependent on it. Their views on the teachers' use of AI in English instruction are realistic and well-balanced; factors such as the effectiveness, role of the teacher, and extent of application are all taken into account.

It is inevitable that AI has to be used in language teaching and learning. However, it should be used only as a virtual teaching assistant. With their background strengths and ever-significant roles, English teachers should creatively and wisely employ AI in their own ways. Then, both learners and teachers can avoid being heavily dependent on AI and, even more, take advantage of and benefit greatly from this new trend in the era of rapid advancement of technology.

In this study, the fact that the participants come from classes where all instructions are given in English slightly influences the accuracy of their responses because they occasionally commented on studying English and other subjects. Besides, with the population of 50 students and their background of high language proficiency, it is impossible to generalize that all the students at UEH have had the same perceptions and expectations about using AI in their English classes, and it is unwise to apply the mentioned-above recommendations to all of the students there. Therefore, it is proposed that further research should be done on different student groupings.

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#### Biodata

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