



Striking the Balance of AI Use in EFL Education: Maximizing Benefits, and Minimizing Risks

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Abstract

Over the past decade, technological advancements, especially in Artificial Intelligence, have significantly transformed educational practices. However, there are growing concerns about its misuse. Instead of using these technologies as a supplementary tool, many students are becoming increasingly dependent on these platforms. This rising reliance threatens to diminish its benefits, possibly restricting students' abilities and weakening their academic performance. This paper seeks to examine both the potential and challenges associated with employing Artificial Intelligence tools in education. By addressing this growing concern, the study offers valuable insights into how these tools are reshaping education and highlighting the need for a balanced integration. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study uses a web-based questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions, administered to twenty EFL teachers from various universities in Algeria. The research emphasizes the adverse effects of excessive reliance on AI on student creativity and academic outcomes while also proposing solutions to reduce students' misuse of these technologies. The results highlight the need for careful consideration and thoughtful strategies to minimize the risks of overreliance, ensuring that technology serves as a helpful tool rather than a hindrance.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, educational technology, EFL classrooms, higher education, teachers' perceptions

ملخص

أحدثت التطورات التكنولوجية على مدى العقد الماضي ، وخاصة في مجال الذكاء الاصطناعي، تحولاً كبيراً في الممارسات التعليمية. ومع ذلك، هناك مخاوف متزايدة بشأن إساءة استخدامها. بدلاً من استخدام هذه التقنيات كأدوات تكميلية، أصبح العديد من الطلاب يتكلمون عليها بشكل متزايد. مما قد يحد من قدرات الطلاب ويضعف أدائهم الأكاديمي. استجابة لهذا القلق المتزايد، يسعى هذا البحث إلى دراسة كل من الإمكانيات والتحديات المرتبطة باستخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم كما تقدم الدراسة رؤية قيمة حول كيفية تسخير هذه الأدوات للتعليم من خلال الاستعمال المتوازن. تم إجراء بحث وصفي مندمج/ مختلط الأساليب حيث تم توظيف استبيان متصل بالشبكة. تم إرسال الاستبيان إلى عشرين أستاذاً للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من جامعات مختلفة في الجزائر. حيث تم تبيان الآثار السلبية للاعتماد المفرط على أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي على إبداع الطلاب والنتائج الأكاديمية بالإضافة إلى اقتراح حلول للحد من إساءة استخدام الطلاب لهذه التقنيات. ساهمت النتائج في تسليط الضوء على الحاجة إلى دراسة متأنية واستراتيجيات مدروسة للحد من سلبيات الاعتماد المفرط، وضمان أن تكون التكنولوجيا بمثابة أداة مفيدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، التكنولوجية التعليمية، التعليم العالي، اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تصورات المتعلمين

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Introduction

As technology continues to advance, educators and students alike face new opportunities and challenges. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education revolutionizes the way we teach and learn. Sumakul (2019) highlights the essential skills educators must acquire to navigate the transformative effects of AI in the classroom, emphasizing its potential to reshape traditional teaching methods across various subjects, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Recent developments in AI suggest that EFL instructors are witnessing a shift in their roles within the classroom. While AI technologies offer invaluable support by streamlining tasks and providing personalized feedback to learners, they also raise concerns about the potential displacement of teachers. The prospect of AI assuming teaching responsibilities prompts perspectives on technology integration (Cope & Ward, 2002; Ding et al., 2019; Ertmer, 2005; Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2018 as cited in Sumakul, 2022).

In the context of Algerian university classrooms, the reliance on AI tools presents a double-edged sword. While these tools offer immediate answers and assistance, they risk undermining the development of critical thinking skills and fostering dependence on technology among students. This highlights the need for a balanced approach to AI integration that preserves the essential elements of learning and promotes student autonomy.

Recognizing the complexity of the issue, this study seeks to explore the drawbacks and challenges associated with the integration of AI in educational settings, with a specific focus on its implications for both teachers and students. Considering previous research findings, the study aims to uncover the impacts of AI on EFL Learners while also proposing strategies to address potential pitfalls and safeguard student creativity and academic outcomes. Through this comprehensive examination, we aim to contribute to a more informed approach to AI integration in education, one that maximizes its benefits while mitigating its drawbacks. In doing so, the study not only provides practical solutions for reducing the risks of over-reliance on AI but also emphasizes the importance of preserving student creativity and autonomy in the learning process. Furthermore, it helps to highlight the crucial role of educators in ensuring that AI serves as a supportive tool rather than a replacement, thus maintaining the core values of education.

To reach the research objectives, the study focuses on the following key questions:

1. How do EFL university teachers perceive the balance between the benefits and drawbacks of AI integration, particularly regarding potential misuse and its impact on students' efforts?
2. How do teachers evaluate the influence of AI tools on traditional EFL teaching methods, and what are the perceived effects of students relying too heavily on these tools?
3. What specific challenges do educators associate with the use of AI in EFL instruction, and how can these challenges be addressed to enhance learning outcomes?

Exploring these questions will provide a deeper understanding of AI's role in education. It can help educators make informed decisions about how and when to integrate technology in ways that support, rather than hinder, student development and learning.

Literature Review

In exploring AI's impact on EFL teaching, Zitouni (2022) highlighted the benefits of AI in enhancing online EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Chen et al. (2022) emphasized the growth of AI in education, predicting a significant rise in AI applications for teaching and learning.

Regarding Automatic Evaluation Systems (AESs), Bai and Hu (2017) and Gao (2021) demonstrated the positive effects of AESs on writing accuracy and oral proficiency in EFL contexts. However, Liu and Kunnan (2016) raised concerns about the accuracy and quality of feedback provided by AESs.

Jiang (2022) explained how AI is being applied to empower English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. She examined six key AI applications in the EFL context, highlighting research gaps and outlining technical and teacher-facing challenges that need to be addressed to fully harness AI's pedagogical potential in EFL.

In the context of critical thinking, Baidoo-Anu and Ansah (2023) explored the interaction between AI and education, shedding light on AI's role in enhancing critical thinking among EFL students. Li et al. (2023) suggested that AI could significantly impact language education.

Furthermore, Alasadi and Baiz (2023) discussed EFL students' varying perceptions of AI, from empowerment to skepticism, emphasizing the need to understand students' views on AI integration in learning processes. To enrich academic essay writing, Dale and Viethen (2021) highlighted the transformative impact of AI in education, particularly in language correction, grammar checking, and proofreading. They also emphasized the importance of AI-driven tools in enhancing students' writing processes.

Guemide (2023) explored the feasibility of incorporating AI applications into English language teaching to enhance EFL learning and provide feedback to students. The study found a remarkably positive attitude among EFL students towards using AI tools, with strong support for their integration. This encouraging finding suggests that students are open to embracing AI in their learning journey. However, some challenges and obstacles need to be addressed for the successful implementation of AI in EFL settings.

Imane (2024) evaluated the use of AI technologies to supplement writing teaching and examined their impact on students' writing skills and competency. It explores the effects of ChatGPT on students' writing abilities. The findings provide useful insight into students' and teachers' perspectives and attitudes on employing AI technologies, notably ChatGPT, their usage patterns, and their perceived impact on writing skill development.

The review of the literature underscores AI's growing influence in Algerian EFL contexts, showcasing its potential to revolutionize teaching, learning, critical thinking, and academic writing. Existing studies predominantly highlight the perceived benefits and positive attitudes of EFL students toward AI in academic writing and language learning. Nevertheless, this exploration unveils a significant research gap, as there is limited discussion of the drawbacks or challenges of AI usage for EFL students in Algeria.

Artificial Intelligence

McCarthy (2006) considered the father of AI, coined the term in 1955, describing AI as machines that can use language, form concepts, solve human-reserved problems, and self-improve (p. 12). The field has since expanded, enriched by contributions from multiple

disciplines, such as anthropology and psychology, leading to varied interpretations and developments within AI (Luckin et al., 2016). The pursuit of defining AI remains complex due to the diversity of perspectives offered by numerous scholars.

AI research has significantly impacted education, especially in language teaching and learning (Nilsson, 2011). AI is envisioned as a language instructor, with developments aimed at mimicking the pedagogical roles of human teachers. This involves creating AI tools that incorporate teaching methodologies conducive to language acquisition.

AI's infiltration into education has led to innovative learning enhancement methods. It has introduced powerful tools and technologies that have transformed educational practices, making learning more effective and accessible (Zhao & Nazir, 2022). Studies by researchers like Gao (2021), Pikhart (2021), and Klimova et al. (2022), as summarized by Vera (2023), have shown AI's positive effects on language instruction, facilitating personalized learning, adaptive training, and intelligent feedback tailored to individual learner needs.

As AI evolves, understanding its integration into educational settings, particularly through the lens of EFL teachers, is crucial. This insight will help gauge the effectiveness of AI applications in teaching and explore future advancements in educational AI technologies.

AI Use in EFL Classrooms

The use of AI in EFL classes is gaining traction to address students' needs (Arias-Contreras & Moore, 2022). Studies show that AI can play a significant role in enhancing linguistic skills, providing practice opportunities, and personalizing language learning (Chemir & Kitila, 2022). Students' attitudes toward AI-assisted language learning tools are positive, highlighting AI's ability to tailor learning, increase engagement, and boost motivation (Zitouni, 2022). This shift towards AI integration reflects a modernization push in Algerian education to meet learners' evolving needs.

AI is reshaping EFL education by offering innovative tools to enhance language learning. According to Vera (2023), AI technologies assist in teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking skills through the use of machine learning, natural language processing, and other advanced techniques. These technologies provide EFL educators with new ways to refine and innovate teaching methodologies, moving beyond traditional grammar-centric approaches. They create interactive and adaptive learning environments that cater to individual student needs.

AI-enabled tools, such as Language Tutoring Systems, Virtual Language Assistants, Speech Recognition Technology, Language Learning Apps, Intelligent Writing Tools, and Language Learning Platforms, transform language education. They offer personalized feedback, monitor learners' progress, and facilitate engaging interactive sessions. By leveraging adaptive learning methods and AI algorithms, these tools enhance a broad range of language skills, making language acquisition more effective and responsive to the unique challenges faced by EFL learners.

Drawbacks of AI Overuse in EFL Classrooms

Overreliance on AI in EFL classrooms can pose several drawbacks that educators need to consider carefully. A major concern revolves around AI's potential to impede the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students (Smith & Johnson, 2020). When AI tools take charge of tasks like language assessment or correction, students might overly rely on these systems, hampering their capacity to think independently and

creatively. Additionally, the integration of AI in EFL classrooms may result in a dearth of personalized feedback and human interaction, both of which are vital for effective language learning. Students derive immense benefits from the emotional connection and nuanced feedback provided by human teachers, aspects that AI systems may struggle to replicate effectively.

Another notable drawback lies in the risk of perpetuating biases inherent in AI algorithms (Lee & Kim, 2019). Without careful design and monitoring, AI tools might reinforce stereotypes or inaccuracies in language instruction, potentially disseminating misinformation or fostering cultural insensitivity in the classroom. Moreover, excessive reliance on AI in EFL classrooms raises valid concerns regarding data privacy and security. Given that AI systems gather and analyze extensive student data, it becomes imperative to ensure that this information is safeguarded and utilized ethically to protect student privacy.

Therefore, while AI can undoubtedly offer valuable support in EFL classrooms, educators must exercise caution regarding its potential drawbacks when used excessively. Striking a balance and cautiously implementing AI is essential to maintaining an effective and equitable learning environment.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, to investigate teachers' perspectives on integrating AI into university English as EFL classrooms. The open-ended questions provide qualitative information by allowing respondents to express their thoughts in their own words, while the closed-ended questions yield quantitative data through structured responses that can be statistically analyzed.

Participants

The study specifically targeted EFL teachers from various Algerian Universities during the academic year (2023/2024). A questionnaire was sent via email to fifty teachers, but to ensure a manageable sample, we randomly selected twenty responses for analysis. This final sample included twenty participants from Khenchela, Barika, Batna, Guelma, Biskra, and Annaba universities.

Research Instruments

To reach the research objectives, we have used a web-based questionnaire to investigate the beliefs, experiences, and attitudes of selected Algerian university teachers regarding the integration of AI in EFL teaching. This questionnaire, comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions, aimed to capture diverse perspectives and insights. It was sent to the teachers via email.

Research Procedures

The research began with the design of the questionnaire, which included both qualitative and quantitative elements to ensure comprehensive data collection. The questionnaire was then pilot-tested with a small group of EFL teachers to ensure clarity and

reliability. Following revisions based on the feedback from the pilot test, the finalized version was distributed to fifty EFL teachers across various Algerian universities via email.

Participants were given one week to complete the questionnaire, with two reminder emails sent during this period to encourage responses. After collecting the responses, twenty submissions were randomly selected for analysis.

Findings

Teachers' Views on AI Integration in EFL University Contexts

The participants were asked nine questions to find out what they thought about the integration of AI in the EFL university context. Table one displays the results:

Table1. *Teachers' views on AI integration*

Item (N=20)	Yes	No
Do you believe that AI tools have enhanced the EFL learning experience?	80%	20%
Have you encountered students misusing AI tools in your class?	65%	35%
Do you think that AI tools can potentially undermine students' efforts in EFL learning?	50%	50%
Are you comfortable integrating AI tools into your teaching methods?	72%	28%
Do you believe that the benefits of AI in EFL outweigh its drawbacks?	58%	42%
Do you feel adequately trained to use AI tools in your EFL classes?	55%	45%
Do you believe that AI tools can replace human EFL teachers in the near future?	15%	85%
Do students express a positive reaction when AI tools are incorporated into lessons?	78%	22%
Do you believe that AI tools help in assessing students more accurately?	40%	60%

As shown in Table One, 80% of the teachers replied that AI tools have enhanced the EFL learning experience. It means that teachers are benefiting in various ways by integrating AI into their classrooms. Moreover, since 58% believe that the strengths of AI in EFL outweigh its weaknesses, the overall attitude toward AI implementation is positive. This is supported by the view of 78% of the teachers, who also agreed that when AI tools are integrated, then the students react well to such a move; therefore, educators and learners alike do appreciate the value AI tools bring.

While the general feeling about AI tools is positive, there are concerns, as 65% of the teachers reported cases of students misusing them. Thus, the guidelines on the use of AI tools, appropriate training, or ways of preventing misuse will help ensure that AI tools serve their purpose effectively and ethically. Another important point is the evenly split opinions; 50% believe that AI tools undermine student effort. Emphasis is given that a balance should be achieved in cases where AI needs to support learning, not provoke overdependence or laziness among students. Furthermore, 72% of educators are confident that they can embed AI tools in their teaching practices, but only 55% of them are well-trained. This difference might indicate that while educators are enthusiastic and see the possibility of AI on the one hand, on the other hand, they are conscious of the need for further professional development. The teachers are rather optimistic; at the same time, 85% do not believe that AI will replace human EFL teachers shortly. In other words, though AI is a strong tool in EFL contexts, it seems that the role of the human teacher stays paramount.

Teachers' Perceptions Towards University Students' AI Use in EFL Classes and its Drawbacks

The following figure summarizes the teachers' perceptions towards university students' AI use in EFL classes and its drawbacks:

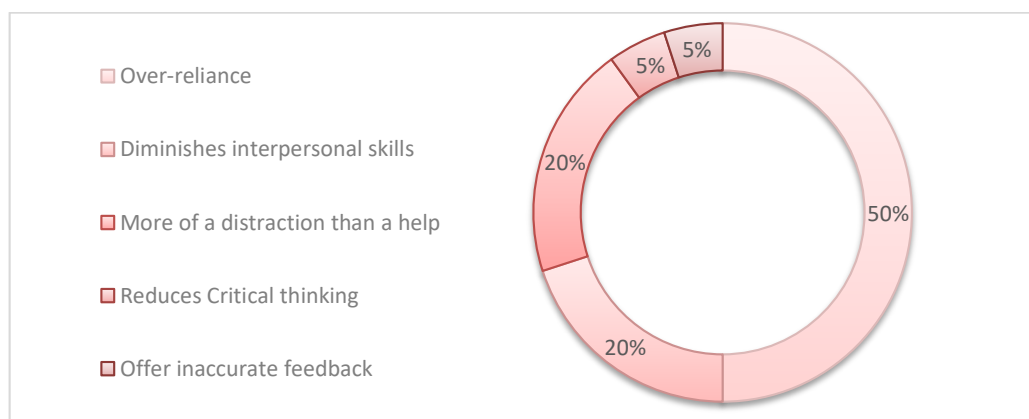


Figure 1. Teachers' perceptions towards university EFL students' AI use

Results in Figure One show that 35% of educators are concerned that students rely too much on AI tools. More than one-third of teachers are afraid that students will become too dependent on AI tools and stop trying to solve complex problems without assistance.

Furthermore, 25% of the teachers believed that the introduction of AI might make or disrupt traditional teaching techniques ineffective. Specifically, 20% of the teachers agreed that excessive use of AI platforms reduces interpersonal communication among students. Less face-to-face, peer-to-peer, and student-to-teacher interactions reduce the development of some important social and collaborative skills often included as salient features of a successful EFL learning environment. Ten percent of the teachers mentioned that the use of AI tools was distracting. This may show the setbacks possible in the integration of technology. The students could easily get distracted when using these technologies and detract from the main aspects of the lesson.

Only 5% emphasized how AI reduces critical thinking, as it reflects the belief that with the ease of access to AI-driven answers, there can be no development in critical thinking because the provided answers and solutions are immediate.

Finally, the same number of respondents, 5%, reported that they cannot trust AI tools for giving appropriate and reliable feedback. Even though AI has improved, It can provide misleading or even wrong feedback. These results show that while AI holds immense promise for improving learning outcomes, teachers and students should be cautious and aware of its drawbacks.

Discussion

Results from this study provide valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of AI integration in the EFL classroom. An overwhelming majority of teachers indeed consider AI a good addition to the learning process since many have agreed that such tools make EFL learning more enjoyable. This view is supported by Zitouni (2022), who noted the potential for

AI to support online EFL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, more than half of the respondents believe that the benefits brought about by AI surpass the drawbacks it introduces. This is in agreement with the study of Chen et al. (2022). However, the results of the study also reveal a few pressing issues that need attention. The first identified threat relates to learners misusing AI tools, as teachers reported observations of their students over-relying on these tools. Teachers also mentioned the effect that AI might have on student effort; they believe that students will become passive learners relying on AI for quick and easy solutions to problems instead of putting in the effort. In a related but distinct vein, Guemide (2023) evinced cautious enthusiasm for AI among students and noted that setting very clear boundaries can help avoid over-reliance on such technologies.

Additionally, the study reveals a worrying gap in the preparation of teachers for integrating AI into their teaching. Whereas an overwhelming number say they have become comfortable with the use of artificial intelligence tools, only about half think they have to get the training needed for implementation. Until teachers are properly trained, the full potential cannot be let out, and students' learning or engagement will be affected.

Other concerns observed by the teachers relate to how AI is affecting the pattern of learning behavior in students and their social interactions. Some teachers felt that the use of AI tools weakens the students' interpersonal relationships by reducing face-to-face interactions. The other challenge is that AI will replace conventional teaching modes. About a quarter of the participants believed in the possibility of AI to overshadow conventional teaching methods. This supports the skepticism displayed by some EFL students in Alasadi and Baiz's 2023 study, whereby apprehensions were generated on the capabilities of AI replacing human-driven educational processes.

Some teachers mentioned the misleading feedback given by AI tools, which aligns with Liu and Kunnan's findings (2016) regarding Automatic Evaluation Systems. Despite some achievements, AESs are not yet reliable in the delivery of precise and meaningful comments, at least when referring to the language learning context.

This is indeed an original contribution to the literature already existing on AI in EFL education, particularly in the context of Algeria, where very few studies have engaged with the subject, by pointing out a few less-discussed challenges. While most literature discusses the advantages brought about by AI, this study presents the concern of students misusing AI, which will affect their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, the study identifies a deficiency in teacher training in effectively integrating AI into classrooms. These indeed provide a broad comprehension of both the pros and cons of AI integration in EFL education for better future practices.

Teachers Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the insights of university teachers, it is evident that there is a need for clear guidelines on using AI in English as a Foreign Language EFL classes.

First of all, teachers urged the need for 'tech-free' sessions, where students can engage themselves in conventional language exercises. This not only strengthens their knowledge and skills but also ensures that they do not become over-dependent on AI. Second, by setting clear limits and guidelines on when and how to use AI devices, we will ensure less distraction from the learning process.

Teachers also suggest that there should be workshops on the risks of being excessively reliant on AI while highlighting the human effort in the learning process. Teachers, for

instance, can encourage incorporating AI tools after class to provide detailed feedback regarding pronunciation, grammar, and even vocabulary so that students can further improve their speaking or writing skills through AI-interfaced applications and get immediate feedback that benefits their learning of the target language.

Moreover, the teachers need to make it clear that most of these AI tools have the potential to give out wrong, irrelevant, and unreliable answers, references, or scenarios; hence, students should not depend entirely on the information given by these AI tools.

It is, therefore, important to instill in them the habit of cross-checking using reputable sources such as Google Scholar and other reliable platforms. Moreover, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide students in the critical analysis of the output from any AI tool. By comparing and contrasting the translations and texts produced by AI with human ones, the students can have insightful discussions on the limitations of these technologies and thus appreciate the human brain and effort.

Conclusion

This study offers a detailed understanding of the relationship between technological advancements and traditional educational approaches. Most educators acknowledged that AI could bring certain gains to language learning since it really enhances teaching while engaging students in interactive ways. Yet, the risk of overusing these technologies threatens the learners' autonomy and social and cognitive skills.

Educators did not oppose the integration of AI tools into the learning process. While some generally felt comfortable with integrating AI technologies, a percentage raised concerns regarding their training on these, which highlights a gap that educational institutions need to address. Teachers supported the idea that AI tools can enrich the learning experience; however, remained cautious not to allow these tools to override the irreplaceable value of human interaction and the personal touch of the teacher.

The study highlights the critical role that careful, informed integration of AI into EFL classrooms plays. It is not about choosing between technology and traditional methods but rather about integrating the two in a manner that preserves the core values of education while preparing students for a technologically advanced future. Teachers suggested practical steps, like tech-free classes and workshops, to discuss how to avoid overusing AI and critically evaluate AI outputs. These could help AI be used more carefully in language learning.

Thus, the research indicates a call for a strategic approach to AI in education—one that complements human educators rather than competes with them and empowers students to become independent, autonomous, and critical thinkers, thereby ensuring that AI serves as a bridge rather than a barrier.

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Statement of AI Use

This research paper entitled “Striking the Balance of AI Use in EFL Education: Maximizing Benefits, and Minimizing Risks” has undergone language correction using the AI-powered tools Grammarly and Scholar AI Chat to address grammatical, spelling, and stylistic errors. It is acknowledged that the use of such tools may introduce standardised patterns typical of AI-generated content. Consequently, a certain percentage of content may reflect AI-generated language structures. Yet, the intellectual content and the analysis remain entirely the work of the authors.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest:

The authors mentioned above hereby solemnly declare that they are not and shall not be in any situation that could give rise to a conflict of interest in what concerns the findings and recommendations contained in this academic article.

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