



“Why Can’t I Use ChatGPT for My Academic Learning?” Voices from Ph.D. Students in a Thai University

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the integration of AI tools in education, ChatGPT is considered prevalent for its potential capacities. Although research into this phenomenon has been conducted by worldwide scholars, little has been known about the perceptions of Ph.D. students of non-English speaking countries. Hence, this qualitative study shifted the focus to this marginalized group of participants in a specific university in Thailand. Based on the constructivist worldview, the study featured interviews with four Ph.D. students. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study uncovered a nuanced view of the use of ChatGPT in empowering academic advancement for Ph.D. students while the challenges are also significant, including the impacts on critical thinking, ethical issues, and specialized terms. The findings further advocated responsible ChatGPT use and called for institutional support in terms of academic integrity. This research design contributes a unique perspective to the discourse on using ChatGPT in education, emphasizing a contextualized experience and the needs of non-native English-

	speaking Ph.D. students in utilizing ChatGPT for academic purposes.
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Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has become integral in worldwide education. Among this burgeoning integration, ChatGPT is recognized for its potential to revolutionize learning and teaching processes (Jeon & Lee, 2023; Sumakul et al., 2022). Although the use of ChatGPT in education has lived up to its promise in enhancing both language learning and research practices (Shaik et al., 2022), there remains a significant gap in understanding its impacts on specific groups of learners, particularly Ph.D. students in non-English speaking countries.

ChatGPT is an advanced language generation AI developed by OpenAI. ChatGPT has the ability to generate human-like text by predicting subsequent words in a sequence based on the context provided by the previous words (OpenAI, 2023). Moreover, this interactive tool is trained on a diverse range of internet text and is capable of performing different language tasks, for example, translation, question answering, and conversations (Brown et al., 2020). What is more, ChatGPT can understand and generate natural language, which makes it a valuable tool in educational settings, particularly in language learning, where it can provide immediate interaction and feedback to its users (Liu & Ma, 2023). Hence, the use of ChatGPT implemented in education seems to be trendy, offering areas for both language learners and academic scholars worldwide.

Moreover, the advances in technologies implemented into language education have encompassed the transformation of pedagogical methods and learner engagement (Liu & Ma, 2023). With the growing use of AI in educational settings, it is crucial to investigate its impacts on different users of the educational system, especially students (Shaik et al., 2022). This idea is comprehensively applicable to Ph.D. students, who are involved in academic learning activities, including reading academic papers and critically synthesizing them for their academic work.

Despite advancements, the adoption and perception of AI technologies like ChatGPT in academic learning remain underexplored, particularly among Ph.D. students in non-English speaking contexts. This group presents a unique case because of their advanced academic activities and potential language barriers. Most studies have concentrated on teachers and undergraduate students at universities (Firat, 2023; Liu & Ma, 2023; Ulla et al., 2023) or investigated the perceptions of

Ph.D. students who speak English as their mother tongue or first language (Firat, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring the perceptions of Ph.D. students of non-English speaking countries towards the use of ChatGPT in academic learning. The use of ChatGPT by Ph.D. students in non-English speaking contexts may be different from other user groups. They rely on ChatGPT to diminish language barriers and translate and comprehend complex academic materials in English.

Furthermore, the differences in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in non-English speaking countries add another layer of complexity to the use of ChatGPT. Studies such as by Mao (2022) suggested that language barriers and cultural differences may influence the use and perception of AI technologies in academic learning. This underscores the need for conducting research focusing on how Ph.D. students in these contexts perceive and use ChatGPT in academic learning.

From the above-mentioned gaps, the current study aims to uncover the perceptions of Ph.D. students in a Thai context toward the use of ChatGPT in their academic learning. A qualitative research methodology was employed. Qualitative research design allows for a nuanced in-depth understanding (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) of how the participants perceive the impacts of utilizing ChatGPT in their academic learning. Hence, this case study explored the perspectives of four Ph.D. students majoring in English Language Studies. As discussed previously, these non-native English-speaking participants may use ChatGPT for their academic learning more than other graduate students majoring in other fields. Thus, the findings from this research are expected to provide insights regarding how Ph.D. students in non-English native contexts perceive the use of ChatGPT in their academic pursuits. Moreover, this study also aims to provide practical implications for educators, and policymakers in tailoring AI tools to assist the use and implementation of ChatGPT for diverse learner groups, particularly at the doctoral level.

Literature Review

The purpose of this current study is to explore the perceptions of Ph.D. students at a university in Thailand on how they perceive the use of ChatGPT in academic learning in terms of its benefits, and challenges. Based on the qualitative inquiry, the study also seeks participants' suggestions in terms of the school policies toward the use of ChatGPT. In this section, the related literature review will be presented.

ChatGPT's Capabilities and Its Implications for Language Education

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, can understand and generate humanlike text (OpenAI, 2023). Previous studies have investigated the possibilities of this AI tool offered for the area of language education (AlAfnan et al., 2023; Firat, 2023; Truong et al., 2023).

Farrokhnia et al. (2023) identified strengths and opportunities that ChatGPT presents for education. ChatGPT can be tailored to individual learners, supporting their learning because this AI model's advanced natural language processing abilities can generate feasible responses from the input prompts. This idea was echoed by the idea that states that ChatGPT serves as a tool for research because it enables users such as students or educators to synthesize information quickly and promptly generate ideas (Baskara et al., 2023). Moreover, this tool can also provide real-time interaction and improvement, which reduces the workload and enhances the efficiency of learning (Farrokhnia et al., 2023). The interactive feature of ChatGPT also facilitates a more engaging and collaborative learning environment for users (Liu & Ma, 2023).

However, the integration of AI technologies, such as ChatGPT in education at higher education also bears limitations alongside benefits (Limna et al., 2023). This dual aspect has been a controversial topic, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Dual Nature of ChatGPT in Academic Learning: Benefits and Challenges

Liu and Ma (2023) conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study to explore the usage of ChatGPT by EFL learners in informal digital learning environments. 405 participants were involved in the study assessing perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards use, behavioral intention, and actual use of ChatGPT. The findings confirmed that ChatGPT was perceived as useful, leading to the association of a higher behavioral intention to use this AI tool in learning English outside the classroom. This study highlighted the potential of ChatGPT in language learning for tertiary-level students. Yet, insights from the participants have been unknown from this study. Qualitative data should be collected to give a comprehensive insight into this phenomenon.

Besides the benefits, significant weaknesses and threats associated with the use of ChatGPT in educational settings were also the concerns (Farrokhnia et al., 2023). ChatGPT lacks the deep understanding to assess the quality of its responses because this tool merely gathers data from large datasets and presents its responses. This raises concerns about its reliability when using ChatGPT as an educational aid. In addition, the absence of higher order thinking skills is considered a critical issue challenging educators. From a broader perspective, there are warnings of threats to academic integrity, the potential for increased plagiarism, and the possibility of a

decrease in critical thinking skills among students at all levels due to over-reliance on ChatGPT (Zhou et al., 2023).

Hong (2023) discussed the dualistic nature of ChatGP's impacts on foreign language teaching. While this web tool presents opportunities for enhancing autonomous learning, it presents some challenges regarding reliability and dependency for language learners. The author suggested that ChatGPT can be a transformative tool for language educators considering technological advancements. However, this study failed to provide the empirical data. This significant gap limits the study's ability to generalize the impacts of ChatGPT in specific educational settings. Future research should collect data from participants who have interacted with ChatGPT in a particular learning environment.

Ulla et al. (2023) examined how teachers in higher education in Thailand perceived the use of ChatGPT when using it as a language teaching tool. This qualitative research design involved 17 EFL teachers who participated in an online interview. The findings revealed that the participants held positive attitudes towards ChatGPT and its potential for lesson preparation and classroom activity creation, leading to the enhancement of learning and teaching practices. In addition, the dependability and trustworthiness of the AI tool were the main concerns of the participants. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a nuanced understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of using AI tools like ChatGPT through the lens of teachers in the context of language education at the tertiary level. Yet, how this AI model is perceived by learners, such as graduates at the doctoral level, has not been revealed.

The study by Firat (2023) explored the perceptions of academics and students at the Ph.D. level on the influence of ChatGPT in universities. The findings identified nine themes regarding the potential and challenges of ChatGPT in higher education, such as the evolution of learning systems, the changing role of educators, and ethical considerations. This study recruited participants from Turkey, Sweden, Canada, and Australia. The participant may use English as their native or second language. Hence, it may not fully represent the perspectives of students from contexts that use English as their foreign language. The lack of diverse linguistic backgrounds could affect the transferability, presenting a need for further research that includes participants from non-English speaking countries to capture more nuanced perceptions.

There were 10 teachers and 15 students at a university in Thailand involved in a study conducted by Limna et al. (2023). This study explored the teachers' and students' perceptions of the implementation of ChatGPT in education. The findings revealed that the participants held a positive attitude regarding the use of ChatGPT in education. This interactive tool was considered an effective tool since it reduced the workload for teachers. Moreover, they are also concerned about the accuracy of the generated information provided by ChatGPT and the loss of the interactive

nature of teaching language among teachers and students. The study successfully contributed to teachers' and students' voices in terms of the use of ChatGPT in the area of education. However, both graduates and undergraduates should have been involved in the study to capture a broader picture of their perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT in an educational environment.

Ethical Considerations and Academic Integrity in the Use of ChatGPT at Higher Education

ChatGPT presents several ethical considerations that are vital to address. One of the major concerns is about data privacy and security. The use of ChatGPT in educational contexts involves the collection of personal data of users. This presents potential risks related to data breaches, misuse, and ethical issues (Kasneci et al., 2023; Qadir, 2022). Additionally, the reliance on ChatGPT for educationally academic activities may raise questions about its impact on critical thinking and academic integrity. This means that the use of ChatGPT may discourage students from original thinking (Jeyaraman et al., 2023). In particular, students at the doctoral level are required to have more intellectual virtues (Mowbray & Halse, 2010) while critical thinking skills and academic conduct should be the top priorities (Rusandi et al., 2023). Future research could uncover whether ChatGPT enhances or deskills critical thinking from the perspective of graduate students.

Kasneci et al. (2023) argued that if learners continue to use ChatGPT in their academic learning, students' outcomes and development will be greatly affected. In addition, some universities in Australia such as Tasmania, Queensland, and Western Australia have banned students from using ChatGPT in their learning to create an equal learning environment (Szefer & Deshpande, 2023). In addition, Ienca (2023) highlighted that it was crucial to establish regulations for teachers and students in terms of using ChatGPT in their academic learning and teaching, adapting to the changes in future opportunities brought by ChatGPT.

Research Gaps and Study Justification

While existing literature provides insights into the perceptions of teachers and students at the tertiary level toward the use of ChatGPT in learning English, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on how graduate students of non-English speaking countries at the doctoral level, especially those majoring in English language studies, perceive ChatGPT's potential in their academic learning. Studying the constructivist understandings of this marginalized group of participants will, firstly, give insights into the complexity of using ChatGPT in language learning and doing research, offering a more comprehensive perception of ChatGPT's users.

Secondly, these students may offer valuable insights into how ChatGPT assists them in academic learning, producing a complex academic discourse in English.

Moreover, little has been known about the perceptions of these potential participants in terms of institutional policies. Understanding learners' suggestions regarding the policy of using ChatGPT in academic learning may help policymakers and stakeholders develop effective guidance. Hence, the current study seeks to bridge the research gap by exploring the perceptions of Ph.D. students majoring in English Language Studies toward the utilization of ChatGPT in their academic learning within a Thai contextual setting.

There are three research questions of this study as follows:

1. In what ways do Ph.D. students in the English Language Studies program at a university in Thailand perceive the benefits of ChatGPT in their academic learning?
2. What challenges do the Ph.D. students identify when using ChatGPT in their academic learning?
3. What recommendations do the Ph.D. students offer for the use of ChatGPT in academic learning?

Methodology

The present study follows a qualitative descriptive research design, in which the exploration and description of the Ph.D. students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in their academic learning were investigated. Qualitative research design allows researchers to obtain a thick and nuanced comprehension of the studied phenomena (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Moreover, subscribers to the constructivist worldview believe that knowledge is socially constructed through the understanding of humans in a particular setting. This research paradigm reflects the nature of constructivism, in which researchers seek comprehensive insights from participants in a natural setting rather than from numeric data (Slawecki, 2017).

Research Setting and Participants

This research was carried out at a university located in the northeast of Thailand, in which the doctoral program of English Language Studies has been offered for more than 2 decades for both domestic and international students. Graduate students majoring in English Language Studies are involved in the coursework phase, offering diverse fields related to English studies. Moreover, the use of English as the medium of instruction in academic learning may require graduate students' proficiency in English language skills at the C1 level based on the CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference) framework.

The 2022 cohort welcomed international students from Vietnam alongside domestic Thai students. A purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants of this study. Firstly, the emphasis of qualitative research is on the depth of data rather than the breadth of data (Patton, 2014). In addition, a small number of participants will allow the researcher to collect richer and more detailed information from the participants' understanding and experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Given the specificity of the participants of doctoral students in a Thai university, each was likely to be an informant of a wealth of information. Secondly, a set of criteria was comprised to span out the appropriate participants. The criteria include (a) doctoral students majoring in English language studies at a university in Thailand; (b) possessing knowledge and experience in using ChatGPT, and (c) providing insightful perceptions into the research objectives. Thus, there were four participants, whose nationalities are Thai (1 participant) and Vietnamese (3 participants) recruited in this qualitative research design.

Each participant brings a unique perspective shaped by their academic pursuit, and experiences with language and technology. Participant 1 is a Thai national. With a background in Business English, she brings a rich understanding of the nuances of language and cultural context. Participant 2 came from Vietnam and is working on her thesis proposal, offering an insightful experience of how she has used AI in her academic learning. The two remaining Vietnamese participants, namely participants 3 and 4, are in phase 1 of the learning journey. While Participant 3 specializes in English Language Teaching, Participant 4 engages in translation studies. Adhering to ethical research practices (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) all participants were informed about the study's objectives, and their consent was obtained before commencing the research.

Research tool

A set of written questions for semi-structured interviews was developed by the researcher as the research instrument of this study. Given the constructivist nature of the research, a semi-structured interview was selected for its flexibility, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions while accommodating the emergence of new ideas and themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In addition, the interview questions and interviews were conducted in English. The participants were asked about their experiences with ChatGPT in their academic learning, and their perceptions of ChatGPT in terms of benefits, challenges, and policies. Each virtual interview lasted for roughly 30 minutes via Google Meet followed by informal conversations with the participants as a method of triangulating the data to obtain insights from the participants. The interview was recorded after receiving consent from the participants. English was used as the

communication language because of the different nationalities and all the participants were bilingual, in which English is the shared language.

Data Analysis

The written interview recordings were generated automatically by Microsoft Word. Then, all the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants for member checks (Mirhosseini, 2020). This process allows the participants to confirm and clarify some points in the interviews. After receiving feedback and revising the participant transcripts, we reviewed the transcripts using the following stages, including manual coding and thematic analysis.

There was a repetition of this step to enhance the rigor of the qualitative data. A thematic analysis approach was employed in analyzing the data. The Braun and Clarke (2014) framework for thematic analysis was utilized, involving (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes among codes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

Peer debriefing is a method of enhancing credibility while analyzing qualitative data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this study, there was another Ph.D. student employed to be a debriefer. The debriefer had already conducted qualitative design and understands the nature of qualitative research as well. At first, we coded the collected data into six themes of benefits (Enhancement of learning and research, support in Idea Generation, Facilitating In-Depth Knowledge, Positive Influence on Learning, Critical Use of Technology, Convenience and Support), six themes of challenges (Difficulty with Specialized Terms, Influence on Critical Thinking, Limitations and Challenges, Concerns Over Information Accuracy, Ethical Considerations and Academic Integrity, Technical Difficulties) for using ChatGT for academic activities, and 6 themes of suggestions (Promotion of Ethical Use, Strategic Integration in Learning, Institutional Support and Training, Development of Critical Thinking, Policy Development and Enforcement, Advocacy for Independent Learning) for utilizing ChatGPT in academic learning.

After a discussion with the audit coder, there was an agreement that for research question 1, one thematic code (“Academic Advancement Empowerment through ChatGPT”) would be the most appropriate. For research question 2, the themes were reduced to two major themes (“Academic and Intellectual Challenges”; and “Ethical and Technical Challenges”). These themes succinctly present the key challenges identified from the data. Regarding research question 3, the themes were refined into two themes, which are “Responsible and Effective Usage of ChatGPT” and “Institutional Support and Policy Development”.

In addition, the principal method of enhancing confidentiality and anonymity in qualitative research is to remove all means of the participants’

identification. Hence, the pseudonyms of the participants, namely P1, P2, P3, and P4 were given in this study.

Findings

This section of the study presents the themes found in the collected data concerning three research questions. There is one general theme regarding the benefits of using ChatGPT in academic learning, two main themes regarding the challenges, and two themes regarding suggestions that emerged.

Empowering Academic Advancement through ChatGPT

Participants in the interviews shared their experiences of how they used ChatGPT in their academic progress. One participant described the transformative potential of ChatGPT in assisting complex academic tasks namely a journal article required for her graduation:

“Yeah, [...] it would be a very useful and a very fantastic tool for us to use when it comes to any challenging assignment or any problem regarding the writing, the manuscript for publications...” (P1).

When mentioning the benefits of ChatGPT, participant 2 insisted, “I’m so surprised about the information that ChatGPT has provided me. That is why I insist on continuing to use ChatGPT because of their intelligence and thoughtfulness.” (P2). To be more specific, “It responds to me quickly with several kinds of information that I can choose from. Furthermore, it gives me guidelines of how to access further information” (P2).

Another participant, working on a research course assignment, emphasized that ChatGPT helped with idea generation, “I think definitely yes, but as I said, I use ChatGPT to generate the ideas and then I paraphrase if some of the ideas are out of my reach...” (P2).

Moreover, ChatGPT has the capacity to facilitate in-depth knowledge. This idea was underscored by Participant 3, “From any discipline, and then I can use ChatGPT to gain in-depth knowledge into my assignment or test to have more illustration or examples” (P3). When requested to make a comparison between ChatGPT and Google, participant 3 showed a preference for ChatGPT. They commented:

“It [ChatGPT] could be better than Google because it saves time. The answer is quick or sometimes if you ask for references it can provide you with both answers and citations or it can, in terms of not only looking for the information but also creating the content. It can do much better than Google” (P3).

The participants also revealed a forward-looking view of how ChatGPT can shape their academic learning. They expressed the broader impact of ChatGPT on learning and research orientation in a positive way. Participant 4 commented:

“And in some ways, ChatGPT also creates positive influences on my learning and my researching orientation in the near future...” (P4).
Or,
“I noticed that it is very important and advantageous to use the ChatGPT for my learning, so I started to use it from January until now.” (P4).

Besides, the importance of mindful use of technology like ChatGPT was also highlighted. One participant expressed “I just think that humans in the 21st century...we use technology to support everything in our life.” (P3).

Lastly, the convenience and support offered by ChatGPT were also the benefits perceived by the participants. One participant recognized its practical benefits, “It’s very useful then we know what are the limitations that ChatGPT cannot” and “You can take the advantage of ChatGPT, but not everything” (P1).

To sum up, ChatGPT serves as a versatile tool for enhancing diverse activities within participant learning. The participants recognized numerous benefits of ChatGPT, such as idea generation, in-depth knowledge learning, and future-shaped academic direction.

Academic and Intellectual Challenges

The participants shared several challenges that go beyond the umbrella of academic and intellectual issues in using ChatGPT for their academic activities. One notable challenge was the limitations of ChatGPT in dealing with specialized terms. A participant exemplified a situation in which she searched for the phrase “Higher Order Thinking Skills”, then ChatGPT could not respond to the information correctly, which made her double-check the information from other sources, such as books (P1).

However, participant 2 revealed that he used ChatGPT for academic-term search, “Difficult terms or strange terms, or some knowledge that I forgot, I will ask ChatGPT to give me the definition, examples and how to use.” (P3). When asked which terms she asked ChatGPT, the participant revealed, “I’m working on reviewing materials for my thesis proposal, so I search for the terms such as “Cultural Exchange”, “Communication”, “English Learning and Teaching Methodology” (P3).

Another significant concern was the impact of ChatGPT on their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Regarding these issues, Participant 4 noted, “I think definitely yes, but as I said, I use ChatGPT to generate the ideas and then I

paraphrase if some of the ideas are out of my reach. I will try to control it in my own words by writing more or less with those pieces of information.” (P4).

Adding to this idea, one participant observed, “However, there are some of the limitations. This is the problem that makes our brain not able to be creative anymore.” (P4). In contrast, participant 3 shared a partially agreed statement, saying “I believe that activities [of using ChatGPT] have influenced my critical thinking and problem-solving skills, maybe in positive and negative ways.” (P3).

One challenge perceived by the participants was that ChatGPT could generate information that was not accurate. One participant complained:

“And I see the weak point that there is a lot of fake information when I use ChatGPT because I have to double check it and check the references. And it wastes a lot of time to check the reference again and finally, I decided that I needed to read the books and reliable materials instead of just relying on ChatGPT.” (P1).

Regarding the accuracy of the information, participant 2 also shared their experience of using ChatGPT, “We need to think about it carefully when using this information, especially the references of research studies. Many times, I find they are fake and from unreliable sources. (P2).

Participant 1 revealed that she had to read books because she could critically synthesize information from the books, which, according to the participant, ChatGPT could not do (P1). Contributing to the idea of being critical, participant 2 added, “If we use it without critical thinking, we just copy and paste, then sometimes the message that AI provides may miss communication.” (P2).

Ethical and Technical Challenges

Ethical considerations and academic integrity were also the prominent themes of the collective interview. One participant emphasized the vital role of ethics, stating, “Yeah, the ethical issue is very important. So as a graduate student, we should think about that carefully.” (P2). Another participant expressed their worry about plagiarism:

“I know that there are some programs that can detect the use of AI-generated texts which will cause many problems if my professor detects this in my writing.” (P4)

Consideration of how much effort Ph.D. students contribute to their writing also the prominent idea shared by Participant 3, “Maybe it can be related to the ethical issues. Because it [the work] is created by ChatGPT, not your own words or your original thoughts. It also reflects how hard you work on your writing. And maybe it is also related to plagiarism.” (P3).

Sharing the same idea, participant 1 emphasized the role of a researcher, “That’s something that belongs to the ethical value of the researchers, so we need to realize that [the use of ChatGPT in academic learning]” (P1).

When asked about the technical issues encountered in using ChatGPT, the participants showed a positive attitude. One of the participants commented that:

“We need to have an account and then we install [...] Not difficult. It’s really user-friendly and I [...] I think it’s not difficult.” (P1).

Echoed with this sharing, participant 4 stated “It requires me to have an account and then I just drop the prompts [...] into the chat box, I will receive the answer, so I don’t think that I don’t have any technical issues.”

Responsible and Effective Usage of ChatGPT

Participants in this study offered several recommendations regarding the responsibilities and effectiveness of using ChatGPT in academic activities. A key highlighted finding was the promotion of ethical practice. One participant underscored the essence of academic integrity. The participant suggested that “To ensure academic integrity, it is advisable for supervisors, teachers, and instructors to advise their students not to use ChatGPT in a wrong way.” (P4).

Another participant mentioned the strategic integration of ChatGPT in learning, and stated, “Students need to use it [ChatGPT] wisely so that they can take advantage of ChatGPT, enhancing their in-depth knowledge in general” (P3). Moreover, participant 2 also recommended that “We should write in our own words and can let ChatGPT or fix the word into more academic.” (P2).

Invented information was also the main concern of the participants. A participant advised, “You need to make sure that whenever you double-check it [information generated by ChatGPT], it’s not the fake news” (P1). Accepted the advance of technology in academic learning, participant 1 acknowledged the use of ChatGPT, yet with hesitation, “I still value the development of technology. I just think that humans in the 21st century, use technology to support everything in our life, but we use it critically.” (P1).

In addition, advocacy for independent learning was highly recommended. A participant remarked on the value of traditional learning methods: “And we shouldn’t depend on ChatGPT because as I used to tell you, I really appreciate the value of reading” (P1). Or as suggested by participant 4:

“I will try to read the articles every single day by using the Google Scholar [...] and I think that [...] attending academic events would be very effective instead of using ChatGPT to get more knowledge” (P4).

Lastly, given the use of ChatGPT in assisting with their thesis work, the participants were asked if they would acknowledge ChatGPT in their thesis

dissertation. They shared quite the same viewpoint, in which ChatGPT was merely a tool, not an assistant to be acknowledged in their thesis.

“I don’t think that we need to acknowledge this because these require a lot of steps and procedures. [...] ChatGPT is also considered as software like SPSS.” (P4)

Or,

“Because the ChatGPT to me is just a tool to look up the information. And I have to double-check it. [...] ChatGPT is the way to show me the results, not everything, so I don’t cite it in my thesis.” (P1)

Institutional Support and Policy Development

The participants also suggested the need for institutional support and policy development to optimize the use of ChatGPT in academic activities. Institutional support and training were pointed out to be necessary by one participant “We just need to have advice from the university, and then they give some consultants to the teachers from the faculty member as well” (P4). This was further elaborated with the suggestion to organize workshops on using ChatGPT in academic learning (P4).

Another participant shared their thought on teachers, which state “Teachers should open their minds and talk to students about the use of ChatGPT explicitly and even teach them how to use it. [...] Because of the use of ChatGPT, today, it’s inevitable and therefore we should know and should be aware of the usage and be able to use it to serve our purpose (P2). The participant also shared that they were taught how to use ChatGPT by their instructor in class (P2).

Policy development and enforcement were also considered crucial. A participant highlighted the importance of having clear guidelines: “It’s better to have guidance. You should do something, and you shouldn’t do something.” (P3). For example, “A policy of allowing ChatGPT in the process of an institutional review board approval needs to be clearly addressed.” (P3). Additionally, the need for monitoring tools to detect the use of AI in academic writing was mentioned: “And maybe we should have some tools to discover whether the student uses ChatGPT or any AI tools for their writing, especially the research writing. It is very important.” (P2).

Discussion

The current qualitative research design explored the perceptions of four PhD students at a university in Thailand regarding the benefits, challenges, and recommendations of using ChatGPT in their academic learning. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the key themes from the interview transcripts. In this section, we will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the previous literature review.

Research question 1: In what ways do Ph.D. students in the English Language Studies program at a university in Thailand perceive the benefits of ChatGPT in their academic learning?

Research question 1 seeks the perceptions of the four participants on how they perceive the benefits of using ChatGPT in their academic learning. Firstly, the study's findings confirm that Ph.D. students at a Thai university perceive ChatGPT as a beneficial tool for their academic learning. They highlighted its transformative potential in assisting with complex academic tasks, echoing the strengths identified in previous research by Farrokhnia et al. (2023) and Baskara et al. (2023).

As can be deduced from the findings, the participants emphasized the ability of ChatGPT to facilitate idea generation and provide in-depth knowledge. The finding aligns with its recognized capabilities in enhancing learning experiences (AlAfnan et al., 2023). This reflects a broader trend in using AI in the field of education research. Moreover, we argue that the finding of this study also amplifies the significant role that AI can play in supporting personalized learning and academic research.

Yet, we recommend that future studies should invest more in how these marginalized groups of participants use ChatGPT in their academic learning from quantitative data. The combination of numeric data and an in-depth understanding of qualitative data will draw a complete picture of the phenomenon.

Research question 2: What challenges do Ph.D. students identify when using ChatGPT in their academic learning?

Research question 2 identifies the challenges that the participants perceived as using ChatGPT for their academic learning. A key finding from our study is the concern of the participants in handling specialized terms and their impact on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These challenges resonate with the findings of Zhou et al. (2023) and Hong (2023). These scholars warned about the limitations and potential threats to academic integrity and higher-order thinking skills when it comes to the implementation of ChatGPT in the general educational section. However, findings from our study thicken the perceptions of Ph.D. students regarding the challenges of using ChatGPT. Therefore, it enriches the understanding of ChatGPT's impact in a particularly contextual setting.

In fact, results generated from ChatGPT are collected from large datasets, hence, it may inherit various biases such as culture, gender, and sociolinguistics. These biases may lead to the unbalanced output from ChatGPT. Hence, the findings of the current study add to the complexity of this aspect as the findings reveal how Ph.D. students of the English language perceive ChatGPT's challenges and threats to their learning.

Another novel insight from the group of non-English speaking graduate students is the threats to academic integrity when using ChatGPT in their academic learning. While the findings from Firat (2023) presented the perspectives of students from other contexts, voices from non-English speaking country Ph.D. students in this current study may extend these understandings by confirming that Ph.D. students who were the participants in this study also perceived the threats of using ChatGPT in academic learning in terms of academic integrity. Hence, future investigations could explore the strategies employed by these groups of students in their academic activities to benefit the use of ChatGPT and stay away from being misconduct.

Secondly, the participants' concerns about information accuracy and over-reliance on AI-generated content underscore the need for critical engagement with AI tools in academic settings. These findings contradict to the findings of Liu and Ma (2023) and Baskara et al. (2023), which acknowledge the convenience of using ChatGPT in educational tasks in terms of time-saving and workload improvement for teachers.

On the other hand, consistent with the findings from Jeyaraman et al. (2023), the findings of the current study also question the critical thinking aspect of Ph.D. students if ChatGPT is overused in academic activities. Moreover, in our opinion, it is essential to consider the limitations of ChatGPT's corpus. The responses from ChatGPT are from the latest training data, this leaves a gap in responding to outdated or false information for its users. So, it is vital for users like Ph.D. students to use ChatGPT with ethical considerations in terms of accurate information. Hence, this dual impact of ChatGPT's impact on education highlights the necessity for a broader academic discourse and further explorations.

Thirdly, the current study reveals that the participants have no difficulty regarding technical issues when using ChatGPT, adding to its potential for users of all levels. However, participants in this study experienced the free version of ChatGPT offered by OpenAI at the time of this research conducted. Future studies could expand the inquiry to the use of the ChatGPT Plus version, which is said to be more multifunctional.

Research question 3: What recommendations do Ph.D. students offer for the use of ChatGPT in academic learning?

Along with the perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in academic learning, in research question 3, we uncovered the critical recommendations from Ph.D. students for the use of ChatGPT in academic learning. One prominent contribution of the current study is the specific and contextual recommendations, including ethical practice, strategic integration, and institutional support. It can be seen that these suggestions are aligned with the recommendations

of previous studies (Firat, 2023; Ulla et al., 2023) which advocate for clear guidelines and responsible use of AI tools in educational settings, especially for graduates at the Ph.D. level.

Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasize the development of policies at the university level and the crucial need for monitoring tools. Although these aspects of academic integrity and utilization of ChatGPT have been discussed in previous studies (Ienca, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023), findings from this research underscore the importance of policy regulations and establishment from the stakeholders towards the use of ChatGPT among graduate students.

Interestingly, the participants emphasized independent learning as a noteworthy theme from the interviews. Despite the capabilities of ChatGPT in language education, they expressed a preference for traditional learning. This paradox highlights the significance in the context of graduate learning, where critical thinking and in-depth knowledge are paramount. This finding pinpoints another implication to the academic discourse; while the integration of AI should be embraced, there is a need to foster independent learning skills.

Conclusion and Implications

This qualitative design explores the perceptions of four Ph.D. students at a university in Thailand towards the use of ChatGPT in academic learning. The findings reveal that ChatGPT aids in complex tasks and academic performances while its challenges present harm to academic integrity and critical thinking skills. Moreover, the participants also offered recommendations for students on how to be ethical users of ChatGPT and at the institutional level, how to manage and develop AI-using skills for graduate students.

Firstly, for graduate students in non-English speaking contexts, this study's findings offer guidance in enhancing their academic journey with ChatGPT, emphasizing both the capabilities and limitations of ChatGPT. Students at the graduate level should critically engage with ChatGPT, learning how to analyze and implement ChatGPT work while applying critical thinking. Moreover, the ethical use of ChatGPT regarding academic integrity should be prioritized.

Secondly, educators should train students on how to judiciously utilize ChatGPT, ensuring academic integrity in their academic learning. In addition, workshops should be developed to enhance graduate students' ability to critically evaluate ChatGPT's content which can promote a better balance between ChatGPT assistance and independent analysis. In addition, other natural language processing tools, e.g. Translation Machines, should be integrated into ChatGPT to enhance the use of technology in language learning and research.

Thirdly, academic institutions should standardize concrete and transparent policies regarding ChatGPT usage in academic work, focusing on ethical practices.

It is crucial that ChatGPT be used responsibly and effectively at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

However, the research also bears some limitations. This is a qualitative study employing only interviews as the research instrument. More methods of collecting data should have been used to triangulate the findings and make them more rigorous. In addition, the participant sample of the study is limited to only four members from two nationalities. More participants from other non-English speaking countries as well as teachers, and school managers should be involved in future research. When this research was conducted, ChatGPT was the most prominent AI tool among others. However, there have been other AI-based applications that have proven their potential in language education. Hence, future research should focus on expanding the scope of participants to include a more diverse range of non-native English-speaking countries, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the global impact of ChatGPT on higher education. In addition, the impact of other AI-based tools should be investigated to contribute to growing layers of understanding of this burgeoning phenomenon.

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