

## AI Tools in Iraqi EFL Classrooms: Learners' Perceptions and Challenges

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أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في قاعات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لغة  
أجنبية في العراق: تصورات المتعلمين والتحديات

### Abstract

The study investigates the perceptions of Iraqi university learners concerning the use of AI tools (Grammarly, Duolingo, ChatGPT) in learning the English language. 120 students from the Department of English, Mustansiriyah University, were surveyed in terms of their perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and challenges of AI integration. SPSS software version 26 was used to run the data, which show statistically significant differences based on academic level (year of study) in the university. Students overall possess positive views of AI tools, especially when it comes to vocabulary and grammar. However, they also believe that students may become too reliant on the tools, and that teachers are not directing students on how to use them. The

paper gives recommendations on the integration of AI in EFL instruction with a structured and pedagogical design.

KEYWORDS: AI TOOLS – GRAMMARLY- DUOLINGO – CHATGPT – EFL CLASSROOMS

### الملخص

تناول هذه الدراسة تصوّرات طلبة الجامعات العراقية تجاه استخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي Grammarly (AI) و Duolingo و ChatGPT في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. شارك في الدراسة ما مجموعه 120 طالبًا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة المستنصرية، حيث أُجري استطلاع لقياس مدى الإفادة المتصوّرة، وسهولة الاستخدام، والتحديات المرتبطة بتكامل أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في عملية التعلم. جرى تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج SPSS الإصدار 26، وكشفت النتائج عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية تعزى إلى المستوى الدراسي. وبينما ينظر الطلبة عمومًا إلى أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي نظرة إيجابية — ولا سيما في تنمية المفردات والقواعد — ما تزال هناك مخاوف تتعلق بالاعتماد المفرط عليها ونقص التوجيه من قبل المدرّسين. وتختتم الدراسة بتقديم مجموعة من التوصيات الخاصة بدمج أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بصورة منظمة وسليمة تربويًا. الكلمات المفتاحية: أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي – كرامرلي – دولينغو – جات جي بي تي – صفوف تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية.

## 1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is altering traditional concepts of teaching and learning, especially in the second and foreign language context. AI tools in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can enhance personalized learning and effective practice environments. Additionally, AI tools can provide feedback to the learners instantaneously (Luckin et al. 2016).

In Iraq, where English is taught as a foreign language and native speakers are hard to come by, the use of AI tools can help make

up for the lack of exposure and practice. Nevertheless, their adoption, whereby the technology is employed for language instruction, tends to happen less due to infrastructure issues, training, and resistance (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2016).

The study explores how students of Mustansiriyah university, specifically the ones from the Department of English, view and use AI tools. The opportunities and challenges that these tools present will be explored, especially how perceptions differ by year of study.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definition and Types of AI Tools in Education**

Luckin et al. (2016) remarked AI in education is any artificial system which is able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. In EFL classes, we can find commonly used AI Tools.:

- Grammarly: Provides real-time grammar and style suggestions.
- Duolingo: Offers gamified language learning modules.
- ChatGPT & other LLMs: Used for writing assistance, conversation simulation, and content generation.
- Edpuzzle & Quizlet: Adaptive platforms that tailor content to individual learner needs.

Language learning tools boost independence, motivation and efficiency in learners. It is worth mentioning that the AI tools used in the EFL context serves different purposes. Some software like Grammarly uses rule-based algorithms and machine-learning algorithms to detect mistakes and offer suggestions. Some generative AI like ChatGPT can generate any long language output you ask it to. An AI system (for example, Duolingo) modifies tasks in a computer game environment. Recognizing the

difference between learning tool and teacher tool clarifies their pedagogical functions.

Although platforms such as Edpuzzle and Quizlet are discussed here for contextual completeness, the present study focuses empirically on Grammarly, Duolingo, and ChatGPT.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon two key theories:

### **2.2.1 Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1954)**

According to constructivism, knowledge is actively constructed by the learners. AI tools assist this process through interactive environments that are centered on student's learning where they get instant feedback.

### **2.2.2 Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)**

The model explains, how users accept and use the technology. According to the theory, the key factors influencing adoption are perceived usefulness and ease of use. This model explains why certain students adopt AI tools while others refuse them.

## **2.3 Related Studies**

### **2.3.1 Global Perspectives on AI in EFL**

Rapid growth has characterized studies on AI in language learning. According to Zheng et al. (2020), Chinese EFL learners speaking skills improved significantly with the help of AI. According to the research conducted by Sun and Zhang (2021), the use of AI- writing assistance technologies, such as Grammarly, enhanced the writing accuracy of university students.

Patrício and Almeida (2020) assessed the impacts of Duolingo and noted that it was effective for vocabulary learning according

to the CEFR levels, but ineffective in communicative competence.

Zaw, Win, and Tun (2022) investigated the application of the use of AI in Myanmar. They recommended that students and teachers get institutional support.

### **2.3.2 Studies on Iraqi EFL Learners**

Limited studies about Iraqi EFL learners in relation to the digital tools at their disposal. The study of Al-Shehri (2020) on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) shows that Iraqi students are increasingly using applications like Duolingo for vocabulary learning even though that is not formal.

According to Al-Faifi (2021), students think that when they have access to AI-written messages such as Grammarly, they get instant feedback. Still, they find it hard to implement the corrections sent to them without their instructor's support.

Further, Kadhim (2021) explored the effect of reading materials that incorporated AI features on Iraqi EFL learners' comprehension and motivation. AI-generated texts sometimes helped students show greater interest in academic subjects, but confusion arose when they lacked cultural/contextual nuance.

The qualitative study on AI acceptance of Abdul-Kareem and Al-Dujaili (2022) showed mixed feelings of Iraqi university teachers, whose pessimism was due to unreliability, equity and ethical issues.

### **2.3.3 Benefits of AI Tools in EFL Classrooms**

Several studies have documented the advantages of AI tools in EFL instruction:

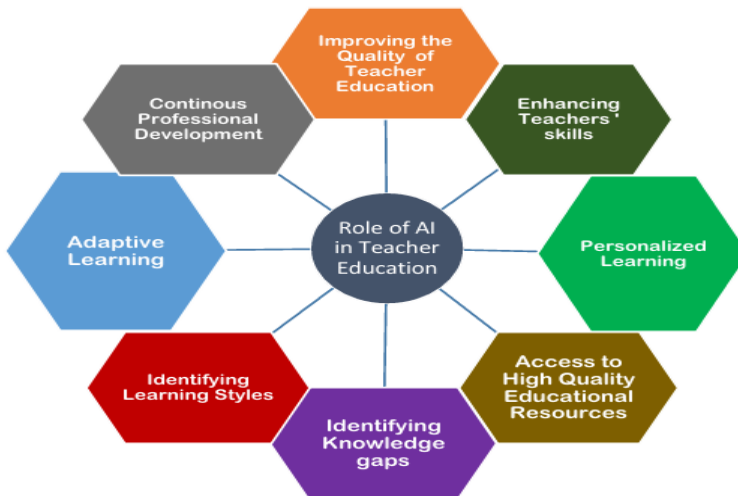
- Personalized learning (Chen et al., 2023)
- Instant feedback and error correction (Sun & Zhang, 2021)

- Increased learner autonomy (Patrício & Almeida, 2020)
- Gamification and motivation (Zaw et al., 2022)

Yet, they depend on context including hardware, learner and teacher proficiency, and instructional design.

Furthermore, teacher education's professional development and classroom management are being provided with new roles for AI. Artificial intelligence can offer personalized training modules for a teacher, access to real-time feedback on teaching practice, data-driven insights into student performance, and much more. For example, Holmes et al. (2021) show that AI helps educators develop technological competencies to leverage digital tools in teaching practice. It enhances teachers' confidence in using AI. Also, it allows them to reflect on classroom interactions and recommend changes.

Figure 1 illustrates the role of artificial intelligence in teacher education, adapted from Jamal (2023):



**Figure 1**  
**Roles of artificial intelligence in teacher education**  
**Note. Adapted from Jamal (2023).**

### **2.3.4 Challenges of AI Integration**

There are many hurdles that need to be surmounted before integrating AI:

- Technological infrastructure limitations (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2016)
- Lack of teacher training (Abdul-Kareem & Al-Dujaili, 2022)
- Over-reliance and reduced critical thinking (Chen et al., 2023)
- Privacy and ethical concerns (Kadhim, 2021)

Moreover, Al-Faifi (2021) warns that without proper scaffolding, AI may promote superficial learning rather than deep comprehension.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do EFL learners in Iraq view the usefulness of AI tools in enhancing their English proficiency?
2. Do perceptions significantly differ according to scholars' academic level status?
3. What are the key difficulties EFL students encounter while using AI tools?
4. How far do learners think AI tools should be integrated into the formal EFL instruction?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Participants

One hundred twenty participants were chosen from Mustansiriyah University's Department of English. They were split into four groups based on their academic year.

**Table 1. Participants**

Academic Year	Number of Participants
First Year	30
Second Year	30
Third Year	30
Fourth Year	30

Based on internal placement tests aligned with CEFR descriptors, all participants were classified at the B1 proficiency level. Despite the fact that all the participants satisfied the minimum requirement, B1 proficiency in the English language, their varying academic experiences and exposure to AI tool led to differences in perception score.

### 4.2 Instrumentation

- A total of 20 items in three sections were used to collect data from a Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Chen et al. (2023)
- Perceived Usefulness
- Ease of Use
- Challenges and Concerns

On a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), participants rated each item.

### **4.3 Procedure**

The survey was given online through Google Forms and was administered during regular class hours. Students were provided with 30 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. The information was assessed using SPSS version 26.

### **4.4 Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA to examine them between academic levels:

- Overall perception scores
- Differences between academic levels
- Correlation between perceived usefulness and ease of use

Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data obtained from open-ended responses on using AI tools.

### **4.5 Reliability of the Instrument**

Cronbach's alpha coefficient is used to calculate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The instrument was reliable overall ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). The probes and subscales have a acceptable reliability values. The probes regarding generic tools (Perceived Usefulness) had  $\alpha = 0.85$ , Ease of Use  $\alpha = 0.83$  and Challenges and Concerns  $\alpha = 0.79$ . The overall reliability of the probes was  $\alpha = 0.85$ . Since these values exceeded 0.70, it was determined that this questionnaire was reliable for this study.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Overall Perceptions of AI Tools

Descriptive statistics showed that all participants were positive about AI tools with an average score of 4.1 of 5 for all participants.

**Table 2. Mean Scores Across All Items by Academic Level**

Academic Year	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
First Year	3.8	0.7
Second Year	4	0.6
Third Year	4.2	0.5
Fourth Year	4.4	0.4

As table 2 shows, higher-level students rated the AI tools more positively than lower-level students. With the exposure of things comes a liking for it.

### 5.2 Perceived Usefulness of AI Tools

Most participants strongly agreed that AI tools aid specific skills.

**Table 3. Skills Improvements**

Skill Area	% Agreement
Vocabulary	82%
Grammar	76%
Writing	69%
Listening	61%
Speaking	54%

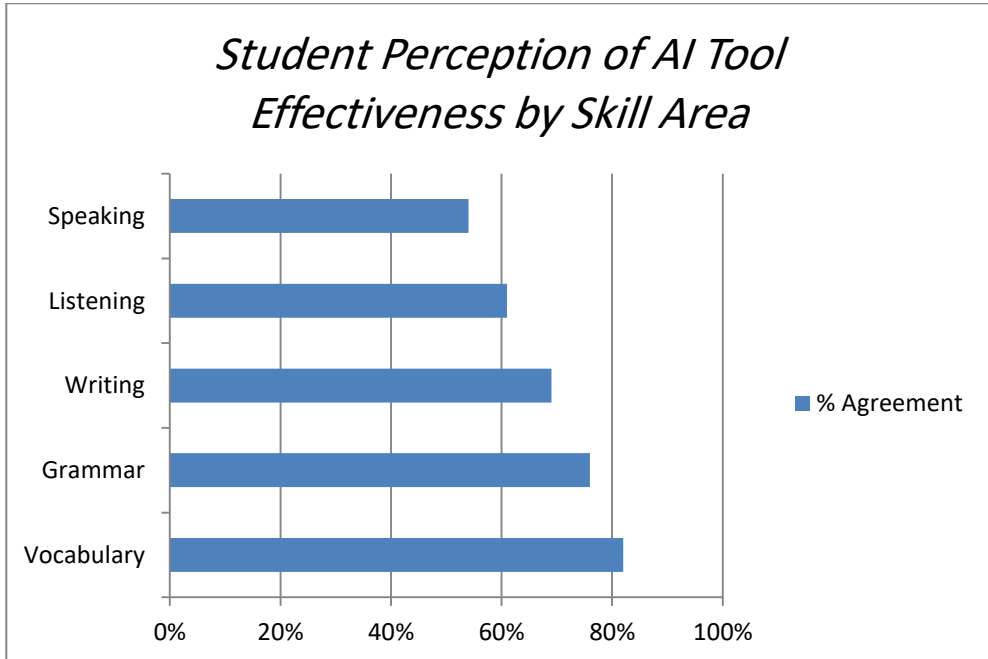
The fact that they reported so much lower speaking skills (54%) than vocabulary (82%) and grammar (76%) suggests that they are still reluctant to rely on AI tools for producing spoken text. The

cause of the gap may lie in the habit of talking, said the spoken nature of the interaction. It is also a socially interactive process, which involves negotiating meaning, tracking and activating the emotional response and immediate feedback human to human. Although there are tools that generate written output and that give corrective feedback that are useful, especially chatbots, these do not fully replicate authentic interactional contexts, especially in regard to pragmatics, turn-taking and bodies.

Moreover, Iraqi EFL learners may question the suitability of AI-generated answers for speaking practice because they fear inaccuracy and unnaturalness, and a lack of human judgement. This finding aligns with previous research where learners feel AI is suitable for receptive and form-focused skills but does not seem appropriate for productive and communicative skills (Patrício & Almeida, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). The results highlight the continued importance of human interaction in developing speaking proficiency and suggest that AI tools should complement, rather than replace, classroom-based communicative practice.

Most users employed AI tools for vocabulary and grammar development as they are likely effective in these areas, possibly because tools like Grammarly and Quizlet do well in these areas. The majority of respondents said that AI tools should be incorporated into formal EFL instruction with third- and fourth-year students showing more agreement.

There was found to be a moderate positive correlation between perceived usefulness and ease of use ( $r = .48, p < .01$ ).



**Figure 2**  
**Student Perception of AI Tool Effectiveness by Skill Area**  
**5.3 Statistical Analysis**

To find out whether there were significant differences between mean perception scores across academic levels were tested using ANOVA:

**Table 4. ANOVA Output**

Source	Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.3	3	4.1	9.8	0.001
Within Groups	116	116	1		

According to the ANOVA results, the perception scores among the different academic levels significantly differed with a value of  $F(3, 116) = 9.8, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$ .

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that:

- Fourth-year students scored significantly higher than first- and second-year students ( $p < .001$ ).
- Third-year students scored higher than first-year students ( $p < .01$ ), but not second-year students.

These findings suggest that as students progress academically, they develop a more favorable view of AI tools, possibly due to greater exposure and independent learning habits.

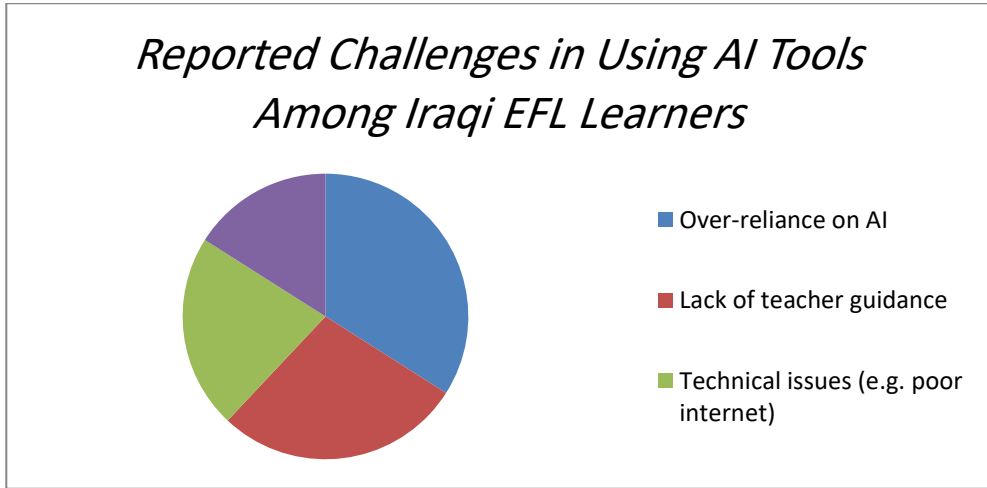
#### 5.4 Challenges Identified by Learners

Open-ended responses highlighted several recurring issues. They are shown in the following table:

**Table 5. Top Challenges Reported by Participants**

Challenge	Frequency (%)
Over-reliance on AI	34%
Lack of teacher guidance	28%
Technical issues (e.g. poor internet)	22%
Ethical concerns (plagiarism risks)	16%

Similar studies found that unguided use of the tool may result in a loss of criticality and authenticity in writing (Chen et al., 2023).



**Figure 3**  
**Reported Challenges in Using AI Tools Among Iraqi EFL Learners**

As illustrated in Figure 3, over-reliance on AI tools and lack of teacher guidance emerged as the most frequently reported challenges among Iraqi EFL learners.

## **6. Discussion**

Iraqi EFL learners look favorably on AI tools for improving their skills, particularly with vocabulary and grammar. Students of higher levels were more probably favorably disposed due to greater autonomy.

People have both worries. So, these AI tools should never be adopted blindly because of such dependency and. Teachers must teach students the right way of using any AI technology at their disposal.

Statistical data clearly shows a trend in the development of perception. Essentially, educational technology is used as per students' own familiarity and maturity level.

As a result, it enhances understanding of technology's use in language learning contexts with some empirical evidence which will give a good insight for pedagogical decisions.

## **7. Conclusion**

As revealed by the findings of the study, Iraqi EFL learners deem AI tools useful for enhancing English skills in general and also in vocabulary/grammar specifically. Despite their benefits, these tools can be disadvantageous if not appropriately integrated and guided by the teacher. Important results consist of:

- A developmental trend in perception across academic levels.
- High agreement on AI usefulness for writing and grammar correction.
- Persistent concerns about over-reliance and ethical issues.

EFL teachers can benefit maximum from AI by integrating them into lesson plans while encouraging critical usage and providing scaffolding to learners in order to develop autonomous learning.

Although AI tools may be successful in developing controlled forms of skills, speaking proficiency still seems to rely on human interaction and guided communicative practice.

Future studies could examine long-term actions involving AI in EFL education. Or it could research the teachers' view in addition to students' to examine AI in EFL education further.

## **8. Limitations of the Study**

The paper has many limitations while contributing. To start, I collected data from one university. This might restrict applying the findings to other Iraqi or worldwide EFL settings. Moreover, perceptions reported by an individual may not result in learning outcomes. In particular, the cross-sectional design does not

consider the development of attitudes. Going forward, it can also include a variety of other institutions for research, etc.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following statements using the scale below: 1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neutral

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

#### Section A: Perceived Usefulness (Items 1–7)

1. I find AI tools helpful for improving my English vocabulary.
2. AI tools make grammar easier to understand.
3. AI tools help me improve my writing skills.
4. AI tools provide useful feedback on my language errors.
5. AI tools help me learn independently.
6. AI tools save time when studying English.

7. AI tools enhance my overall English proficiency.

**Section B: Ease of Use (Items 8–14)**

8. AI tools are easy to use.

9. I feel confident using AI tools for learning English.

10. AI tools have clear instructions.

11. I can use AI tools without technical help.

12. AI tools are accessible whenever I need them.

13. I understand how AI tools work.

14. AI tools are user-friendly.

**Section C: Challenges and Concerns (Items 15–20)**

15. I rely too much on AI tools for writing assignments.

16. I worry that using AI tools affects my creativity.

17. AI tools may reduce my critical thinking skills.

18. I face technical problems when using AI tools.

19. My teachers guide me on how to use AI tools properly.

20. I believe AI tools improve my speaking skills.

**Appendix B: Sample Student Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

Prompt	Sample Response
"What do you like most about AI tools?"	"They correct my mistakes instantly"
"What do you dislike most about AI tools?"	"Sometimes they give wrong answers"
"How can AI be better used in class?"	"Teachers should explain how to use them"

### Appendix C: Coding Scheme for Qualitative Responses

Theme	Description
Positive Perception	Statements indicating approval or satisfaction
Negative Perception	Statements expressing concern or dissatisfaction
Suggestions for Use	Ideas on how AI can be better implemented
Technical Issues	Mention of connectivity or software problems
Ethical Concerns	References to plagiarism or over-dependence

### Appendix D: SPSS Output Tables

**Table D1: Descriptive Statistics**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
First Year	30	3.8	0.7	2	5
Second Year	30	4	0.6	2	5
Third Year	30	4.2	0.5	3	5
Fourth Year	30	4.4	0.4	3	5

**Table D2: ANOVA Output**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.3	3	4.1	9.8	0.001
Within Groups	116	116	1		

**Table D3: Post Hoc Test (Tukey HSD)**

Comparison	Mean Difference	Sig.
First vs Fourth	-0.6	0.001
Second vs Fourth	-0.4	0.003
First vs Third	-0.4	0.005