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Exploring students' attitudes toward ChatGPT utilization on enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' attitudes toward using the artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT in the classroom setting to facilitate EFL learning and enhance students' reading comprehension skills. The study drew on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). A qualitative descriptive method was used to explore students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT to facilitate reading comprehension, using thematic analysis to analyze the data. The participants were ten EFL female high school students who were selected randomly. The study was conducted over seven weeks. Four core themes were identified based on the constructs of TAM. The findings of the study showed that students had positive attitudes toward using ChatGPT in the classroom to support EFL learning and improve their understanding of texts. The study concluded that using an AI tool, such as ChatGPT, may enhance the process of learning and thus improve EFL students' reading comprehension. Educators, EFL teachers, and learners could benefit from this study by using such tools in EFL learning and adapting their methods of teaching and learning to promote more effective learning.

KEYWORDS

Reading comprehension skills, EFL learning and teaching, High school students, AI tools, students' attitudes, ChatGPT

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1. Introduction

Reading is an important receptive skill that plays a major role in language competence (Krashen, 2004). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), many learners may be unaware of the significant role of reading relative to other language skills (Alenizi, 2019; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Ali et al., 2022). Learners often devote more attention to productive skills and subskills such as writing, grammar, and vocabulary when learning English (Ali et al., 2022).

Reading and understanding a variety of texts helps develop students' cognitive abilities and English skills because it encourages making inferences, identifying main ideas, recognizing new vocabulary, and grasping important contextual details. Teachers tend to use traditional methods when teaching EFL reading and thus overlook learners' needs in class (Masadeh, 2015). Consequently, students can feel bored, lack the confidence to read or participate and become demotivated in class. Therefore, teachers could adapt their methods to encourage students to interact and participate more actively in the classroom (Ali et al., 2022).

Over time, technology has demonstrated its effectiveness in making learning and teaching more accessible and engaging (Gruba, 2004). It has made EFL education more flexible by offering a variety of opportunities and learning strategies to optimize real outcomes (Hubbard, 2021). Zhang (2022) argues that technology helps learners to improve more than traditional education does. One such technology is artificial intelligence (AI), whose emergence is leading to a global revolution in many fields, including education. AI is a technological innovation that simulates human intelligence using computers, allowing it to perform a broad range of tasks (Karthikeyan et al., 2021). Scholars and researchers are paying increasing attention to the integration of AI into learning, including improving the language skills of EFL learners (Lee et al., 2026; Torres & Kahveci, 2025; Xu & Wang, 2024).

One of the most widely known AI tools is ChatGPT, an AI-powered chatbot launched by the OpenAI company in 2022. ChatGPT has the potential to expand learners' knowledge by generating summaries, simplified explanations, and questions (or answers) about content, all of which can increase learners' autonomy and stimulate achievement (Kohnke et al., 2023). In the Saudi context, research on this topic has been limited to exploring the effect of AI tools on productive skills, such as writing, primarily in university settings. The literature largely lacks experimental studies of ChatGPT's impact on reading comprehension skills in different contexts

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and across different educational levels. To address this research gap, this study aims to explore EFL students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT to enhance reading comprehension skills in the classroom.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The technology acceptance model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) guided the current study. This model focuses on the extent to which people accept or reject using technology to perform different tasks. The TAM model has four constructs: 1) Perceived Usefulness (PU), which can be defined as the degree to which a learner believes that using a technological tool would enhance his or her performance; 2) Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), which is the degree to which a learner believes that using a tool would be free of effort. These two constructs may affect the other constructs identified by Davis (1989) : attitude, intention and behavior in the use of technology. The current study used Davis's model to explore students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT to enhance EFL reading comprehension and whether they perceived it as useful and easy to use.

2.2 Reading comprehension

Reading is a fundamental aspect of EFL learning. It is considered one of the pillars for mastering the English language due to its role in expanding learners' knowledge. Nuttall (2005) defines EFL reading as the process of obtaining meaning from a text by recognizing written words, understanding the text's structure, and incorporating the reader's background knowledge. Mastering reading in a second language empowers the learner to understand any text, regardless of the length of the text or time constraints.

Most EFL learners struggle to understand what they read (Alshenqeeti & Alrahaili, 2020). Research has identified the challenges and factors that hinder EFL learners' understanding and lead to limited reading comprehension skills. For example, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) highlighted that the difficulty of understanding a text is a major factor that greatly influences learners. The selection of reading materials and interesting topics are influential in encouraging students to read and enable them to understand the text more easily (Nguyen, 2020).

Vocabulary knowledge is considered one of the major factors that influences understanding. Al-Khasawneh (2019) examined the role of vocabulary knowledge in the reading comprehension of 64 Saudi EFL learners. By using tests to measure vocabulary size and reading comprehension, he found that there was a strong correlation between the two factors. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge was not the only factor that influenced reading comprehension among EFL learners; lack of reading practice also played a crucial role. Another factor affecting reading comprehension that has been widely explored by researchers is students' reading anxiety. The anxiety often increases when reading for tests, rather than for pleasure (Valizadeh, 2021).

2.3 Technology and language learning and teaching

The integration of technology into language learning and teaching has been widely discussed by language scholars. For example, Chapelle and Sauro (2017) discussed the impact technology has on the process of language learning and teaching and how it contributes to creating effective, engaging environments for learners. Technological tools encompass the production of language, assessment of its use, and feedback to the students, as well as communication and collaboration tools. Importantly, teachers can utilize digital tools to enhance the learning process and improve students' English language skills.

Hubbard (2021) emphasized that if digital tools are carefully selected to align with teaching, they significantly enhance language skills and help achieve learning goals. Zhang (2022) highlighted that educators need ongoing professional development to adapt their teaching methods to keep pace with technological innovations in education. The use of technology in teaching and learning makes the environment more engaging and student-centered by leveraging these tools to support learning activities and strategies and increase learners' autonomy (Liu et al., 2026).

AI tools are one example of these technologies. Integrating these tools can improve the process of learning and therefore develop students' language skills. In the light of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the Saudi Ministry of Education has made considerable efforts to develop the teaching and learning of English by supporting the implementation of technology at different educational levels (Aljameel, 2022).

2.4 Artificial intelligence and language learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia

AI has revolutionized the way people learn languages. AI has multiple definitions; scientists often define AI based on the tasks that it can perform. It can be defined more broadly as the subfield of computer science that imitates human intelligence, solves different problems, and performs different tasks (Mar, 2018, as cited in Viktorivna et al., 2022). Language learning is one of the fields that is being transformed with the use of AI. With its help, learners can learn a language in creative ways and perform multiple tasks. It offers individualized learning experiences based on the learner's goal, level of competence, needs and learning style (Alazemi, 2024).

In the Saudi context, studies have investigated the impact of ChatGPT on language learning and teaching. For example, Alsagoor et al. (2025) examined the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving vocabulary among 50 Saudi female EFL university students and explored their perceptions of using it for vocabulary development. The findings indicated that ChatGPT can be a valuable tool for learning vocabulary.

A systematic review conducted by Alhusaiyan (2024) investigated the development and the current status of AI-supported language learning among EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. By analyzing 15 empirical studies, the review discussed a range of factors, including teachers' training, continuous development, and AI efficacy in educational settings. Alharthi (2024) used a quantitative methodology to explore Saudi students' perspectives toward using ChatGPT. Using a questionnaire, Alharthi collected data from 299 Saudi EFL university students. Alharthi found that ChatGPT can improve English skills, and students perceived ChatGPT as a useful tool for practicing and developing their use of English.

Using the TAM model, Alotaibi et al. (2025) investigated the factors influencing the acceptance and use of ChatGPT in the teaching and learning of English among Saudi students in Saudi Arabia. Researchers used a TAM survey. Results showed that learners' acceptance of using ChatGPT was primarily influenced by perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Based on the literature, ChatGPT may improve the process of learning and reading comprehension by offering personalized, effective, and engaging experiences.

2.5 Reading comprehension and ChatGPT

ChatGPT has the potential not only to provide responses but also to generate questions, provide individual support and feedback, and explain and paraphrase sentences (Teng, 2024). Several studies have investigated its effectiveness in enhancing English language skills. Karatas et al. (2024), for instance, found that ChatGPT assisted EFL students in developing their skills in grammar, writing, and vocabulary, while also increasing motivation and student engagement.

However, a few studies have been conducted to examine its role in enhancing reading comprehension skills. For example, Kainta and Umarella (2026) conducted a systematic review to examine 12 peer-reviewed studies, published between 2024 and 2025. These studies employed experimental, quasi-experimental, and mixed methods designs to examine ChatGPT's role in reading skills, including comprehension, proficiency, identifying the main idea, inferencing, and critical reading. The findings highlighted that ChatGPT can be used as an interactive mediational tool to help students with reading comprehension. A mixed-methods study was conducted by Kim (2024), which examined the effects of ChatGPT-assisted instruction on the reading comprehension of 40 Korean EFL high school students using top-down processing. The findings of the study indicated that ChatGPT was useful in identifying main ideas and improving students' reading comprehension. Dal Negro (2024) employed a mixed methods approach to investigate the effectiveness of ChatGPT in generating reading comprehension exercises to improve middle school students' skills. It was found that ChatGPT has capabilities to generate effective language exercises for students. A study conducted by Deng (2024) examined the role of ChatGPT-generated summaries in the reading comprehension of 130 Chinese university EFL learners. Deng found that these summaries were useful, but they were not sufficiently comprehensive to promote deeper understanding. Lin and Chen (2024) investigated the potential of ChatGPT to generate multiple-choice questions (MCQs) to assess reading comprehension. The findings of the study revealed that it could help teachers and learners by generating high-quality multiple-choice questions to assess reading comprehension.

Within the Saudi context, Alyami (2026) investigated the effectiveness of using a ChatGPT-mediated mind mapping technique to enhance university students' reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that ChatGPT had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension performance. Similarly, Al-Otaibi and Al-Homidhi (2025) conducted a study on the effect of a teaching program created by ChatGPT on the reading comprehension skills of 60 EFL undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that ChatGPT enhanced students' reading comprehension skills by enabling them to interact and discuss texts. Ali et al. (2025) investigated the impact of using ChatGPT on reading proficiency among 10th-grade Saudi male students and discovered that using ChatGPT helped students understand the texts more effectively.

Research has primarily examined EFL teachers' and university students' attitudes and experiences regarding the use of AI tools in language learning, with limited attention to high school students. More studies investigating the role of ChatGPT in enhancing reading comprehension skills are needed. The current study aims to fill this gap and shed light on high school students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT in the classroom and to explore the role of this tool in enhancing their reading comprehension.

3. Methodology

This study explored EFL high school students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT in classroom settings to facilitate English learning, and specifically to improve reading comprehension. The participants were 10 EFL Saudi female high school students in a private school in Ar-rass city, Qasim region. Random sampling was used to gather in-depth information, and to ensure that each individual had an equal probability of being selected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Participants were 17-18 years old and spoke Arabic as their native language. They shared a similar background and had studied English as a foreign language for almost eight years as part of their school curriculum.

The researcher employed a qualitative method to explore students' attitudes and experiences. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is a way of collecting a detailed understanding of an issue. The researcher conducted an intervention using ChatGPT in the classroom to facilitate learning and enhance reading comprehension skills.

The intervention involved three stages and lasted for seven weeks. The first week was devoted to obtaining students' consent and providing them with instructions on how to use ChatGPT appropriately for the intervention. This was followed by 10 sessions, around two sessions per week. In these sessions, students used tablets during reading classes and were provided with a digital

copy of the required texts. After reading a text, they were required to use ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) to facilitate the process and help them

Theme	Subthemes
Perceived usefulness	Identification of Main ideas
	Vocabulary improvement
	Inferences
	Key details
Perceived ease of use	Accessibility
	Clarity of information
	Direct prompts
Attitudes toward using	Engagement
	Enjoyment
	Confidence and Reduced Anxiety
Behavioral intention to use	Personalized learning
	Concerns
	Intentions for future use

understand what they had read by using the direct prompts that were provided to interact with ChatGPT to identify main ideas and important contextual details, recognize vocabulary, make inferences, and generate comprehension questions. Students were exposed to interactive reading activities using AI for five weeks. In week seven, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT by asking five wide-ranging questions.

3.1 Instrument

The researcher used semi-structured oral interviews, a commonly used method of collecting qualitative data, providing a systematic approach to identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview instrument was developed by the researcher according to the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). The constructs of the model (perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards use, and behavioural intention to use) guided the design of the interview questions. The interview was carried out in the students' first language – Arabic - to allow students to freely express their experiences and opinions. An audio recording of each interview assisted in the transcription of the data and helped the researcher to analyze students' responses. The students' quotations were translated into English for the purpose of inclusion in the study.

3.2 Data analysis procedure

To analyze the qualitative data, ATLAS.ti (Version 26) was used to assist the researcher in analyzing and coding the data. The researcher followed certain steps according to the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher recorded students' responses and transcribed the audio into texts. These texts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Second, the researcher coded the data and highlighted words, phrases and sentences using ATLAS.ti. Third, the researcher organized and categorized these data into broader, meaningful categories to identify patterns and to generate general themes. Fourth, the researcher reviewed these themes. Fifth, the researcher named the themes. The sixth step was reporting the findings.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, the researcher piloted the interview questions before the main study. These questions were also reviewed by professors in Applied Linguistics at Qassim University and were revised as appropriate based on the feedback received.

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, when analyzing the interview data, the researcher consulted an independent second coder, who specialized in qualitative data analysis. Inter-coder agreement was then assessed. The results indicated almost perfect agreement (Cohen's Kappa = 84). A discussion was held to resolve any disagreements in the coding process, and four core themes and subthemes were identified based on the TAM model constructs (perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards use, and behavioural intention to use).

4. Results & Discussion

The results from the analysis revealed that students had positive attitudes toward using ChatGPT to enhance their reading comprehension skills. Four themes and subthemes were identified according to the TAM model : perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes toward use, and behavioral intention to use, as shown in Table 1.

Core themes and subthemes

The first theme identified was perceived usefulness (PU). This theme highlighted how students perceived ChatGPT as a useful tool to enhance their reading comprehension skills. All students reported general improvement in their reading comprehension performance. This aligns with the results of Alharthi's (2024) study, which found that students perceived ChatGPT as a useful tool to practice English and improve language skills. Students emphasized the positive effect of using ChatGPT to identify main ideas in texts. For example, Student 1 said,

"In my opinion, ChatGPT is extremely useful; it greatly enhanced my comprehension in several ways, such as helping me identify the main idea and organize the key concepts related to the text."

Student 1's view agrees with Alyami (2026), who investigated the use of a ChatGPT-mediated mind mapping technique to enhance university students' reading comprehension and found that using this tool improved students' performance in identifying main ideas. Students emphasized ChatGPT's impact on vocabulary improvement. For example, Student 2 said,

"Using ChatGPT during reading classes not only improved my text comprehension but also expanded my vocabulary."

This is consistent with the study conducted by Alsagoor et al. (2025), who found that ChatGPT significantly improved students' vocabulary knowledge. Students also reported that ChatGPT helped them with inferences and key details. Student 8 stated,

"I used to struggle with making inferences, but ChatGPT helped me overcome this issue and trained me to extract inferences from texts through the frequent use. It also provides important details to enhance understanding."

Students also highlighted the useful MCQs generated by ChatGPT that helped them to evaluate their performance in reading comprehension. For example, Student 4 stated, "Asking ChatGPT to generate multiple-choice questions helped me assess my comprehension." Similar results were found by Dal Negro (2024), who revealed that ChatGPT has the potential to generate high-quality exercises for students. This demonstrates that ChatGPT has the potential to enhance students' reading comprehension.

The second theme from the analysis was perceived ease of use (PEU). This theme clarified the extent to which the students found ChatGPT easy to use. All the students highlighted that they perceived it as an easy tool to use. They were also in agreement about easy access to ChatGPT. Student 8 said, "Using ChatGPT is easy, free, and saves a lot of time and effort." Almost half of the students highlighted the clarity of information ChatGPT provides. Student 10 stated, "ChatGPT gave us information clearly and concisely due to the specific prompts we provided." Students 5 and 9 reflected on the direct prompts that were provided. For example, Student 5 stated, "The prompts were very useful and helped us focus on the key points in the text." Student 9 expressed, "I think it is important to write specific prompts for ChatGPT to help us with reading, because sometimes the information can be overwhelming." The responses revealed that students perceived ChatGPT as easy to use and were open to learning by using this tool.

The third theme was attitudes toward using ChatGPT. This theme concerned students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT as a learning aid in the classroom setting. The students expressed that ChatGPT enhanced their classroom engagement. They became more active and motivated and participated by confidently sharing what they learned about the assigned texts. Student 3 reported, "I find reading very boring, but using ChatGPT made it a different experience." Students noted that using ChatGPT in the classroom helped them to reduce anxiety and participate by confidently sharing what they learned about the assigned texts. Student 6 reported, "I always hesitate to participate out of fear of making mistakes, but using ChatGPT in the classroom made me much more confident." Overall, students expressed their excitement and enjoyment about taking reading lessons with the help of ChatGPT. Student 1 said, "I was excited and looked forward to the upcoming classes just to use ChatGPT in the lesson." These results were similar to those reported in a study conducted by Alotaibi et al. (2025), who found that students had positive attitudes toward using ChatGPT and they were influenced by its perceived usefulness and ease of use.

The fourth theme was the behavioral intention to use ChatGPT in the future. This theme concerned students' intentions to use ChatGPT in classroom settings. During the intervention, students were encouraged to ask, discuss, and answer questions without hesitation. Moreover, they received feedback that helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Participants frequently highlighted that ChatGPT was useful for encouraging them to practice English. Student 8 noted,

"Sometimes I encounter difficult-to-understand sentences, so I used ChatGPT to simplify them and help me figure out word meanings. This enabled me to participate confidently in class."

It is evident that these responses supported the use of ChatGPT in providing a personalized learning environment.

Despite overall positive attitudes, some students identified concerns regarding the use of ChatGPT in the classroom. For example, some students emphasized that it needs a good internet connection, accuracy problems could occur, and its use might lead to an overreliance on AI. Student 2 added, "ChatGPT might provide inaccurate information, and it can sometimes confuse or distract students." Student 1, meanwhile, said, "I believe we should not rely entirely on it, and it should only be used when necessary."

Students provided some recommendations for the future use of ChatGPT in classroom settings. For example, Student 10 suggested, "I think using ChatGPT in group work would be very effective." Student 9 stated, "I believe it is very useful to use it in other language skills, such as writing." These opinions aligned with the findings of Alharbi and Al-Ahdal (2025), who found that

Saudi students expressed clear intentions to use ChatGPT in learning. This study suggests a need to carefully consider the integration of AI into language learning and teaching and to consider the challenges that may emerge in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore EFL Saudi students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT in the classroom setting to facilitate reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that PU and PEU significantly influence students' attitudes and intentions to use ChatGPT in the future. The majority of the students had positive attitudes toward using ChatGPT to enhance reading comprehension in classroom settings. ChatGPT helped students to identify main ideas, learn vocabulary, make inferences, and grasp important and contextual details in various text types. It could also provide learners with immediate feedback, explanations, and suggestions, offering personalized learning experiences. This study offers valuable insights for educators, EFL teachers, and learners regarding the use of ChatGPT in classroom settings and how it can make learning more engaging and interactive for high school students. While the current study provides valuable insights, it has limitations. For example, the study examined the attitudes of Saudi female students, which restricts the findings to one gender. Future studies should include both genders. The study also utilized one instrument to collect the data. Future research should consider using more than one instrument to gain in-depth information. The qualitative data were collected from high school students in a private school and so the small sample size may restrict the generalizability of the findings.

Further studies should also explore in more detail the role of ChatGPT in enhancing EFL reading comprehension skills and examine its effectiveness in classroom settings with students of different educational levels.

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[46] Appendix

[47] Interview questions:

[48] 1- Do you think that utilizing ChatGPT can enhance your reading comprehension? If yes how? Has it affected your performance? If so, how?

[49] 2- How was your experience with utilizing ChatGPT in identifying main ideas, making inferences, details, and new vocabulary?

[50] 3- How did ChatGPT make you feel about reading lessons during the class?

[51] 4- How easy or difficult was it to use ChatGPT for reading comprehension? Give examples

[52] 5- Would you want to use it again? Why or why not?