Vietnamese Rural High School Students' Perspectives on Benefits and Challenges of Implementing Artificial Intelligence in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing how students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL), offering students more authentic ways to improve their English. However, challenges remain, particularly for students in rural areas, which may hinder their language development. Despite interest in AI-based EFL education, very few research has been conducted in rural high schools, leaving a significant research gap. Therefore, to address this gap, the study explored the perspectives of 35 rural high school students on the benefits and challenges of using AI in EFL learning. A mixed-methods approach, combining an online survey and semi-structured interviews, revealed that AI presents both positive and negative effects in rural settings. Based on these results, the study recommends solutions such as hybrid models, integrating technology with traditional teaching methods.

Keywords: EFL, artificial intelligence, high school, rural, Vietnam

Introduction

In the past, EFL relied on textbooks and face-to-face instruction to develop skills, mainly reading and writing, similar to how old languages, such as Latin, were learnt (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These methods often featured teacher-centered approaches, including learning-by-heart drills and hard copies of materials. However, innovative teaching approaches emerged, which encourage practical interaction in real-life situations, engaging in meaningful communication (Khamkhien, 2011, as cited in Kim et al., 2021; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This development recognized that language is best learned through real communication, moving "from a one-way, single person, and staged lesson perspective to a more authentic, communicative, and interactive perspective" (Kim, 2017, as cited in Kim et al., 2021). Unfortunately, creating authentic learning opportunities in EFL classrooms can be challenging due to limited class time or large class sizes. Educators have increasingly turned to new technology, including AI, to address these limitations.

Notably, AI has opened positive possibilities in areas such as healthcare, finance, and agriculture (Nadimpalli, 2017, June; Chikatimarla & Rao, 2024, July). In education, AI is

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transforming teaching and learning through technologies like adaptive learning systems and personalized feedback tools (Kaplan, 2021; Holmes et al., as cited in Chikatimarla & Rao, 2024, July; Kumar & Tyagi, 2024). In English teaching, these developments fall under broader trends in the use of Information and Communication Technology (Dinh, 2025), and many educators have adopted AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT, Duolingo, and Google Translate to support students' vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills (Kim et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2023; Vo & Ho, 2024).

Problems

According to Kamarullah et al. (2024), English language proficiency is recognized as "an indispensable asset in navigating the interconnected global landscape," and the implementation of AI in English teaching is gaining more attention. Tools like ChatGPT, Replika, Duolingo, and Google Translate are now used to support language skills both inside and outside the classroom (Kim et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2023; Vo & Ho, 2024). These tools have been shown to improve learners' motivation, self-study habits, and communication abilities (Kim et al., 2021). However, perceptions of AI remain divided. While some learners appreciate AI's support and flexibility, others express concerns about reduced human interaction, over-reliance on technology, or lack of digital literacy while using AI tools (Vera, 2023). In particular, students in rural areas often face unique barriers to adopting educational technologies. Limited infrastructure, digital literacy gaps, and skepticism about AI may influence how these learners perceive and interact with such tools (Kamarullah et al., 2024; Kumar & Tyagi, 2024).

Purpose

As a matter of fact, studies addressing these divided views remains few, particularly for rural high school students. They largely focus on urban and university learners (Kim, Cha, & Kim, 2021; Phạm et al., 2023; Vo & Ho, 2024), leaving a research gap. As Kim et al. (2021) noted, such studies "are still scarce in EFL fields," and Yang et al. (2024) emphasized that "there is a paucity of research examining the specific perspectives of EFL learners," which remains "difficult to find." Pham et al. (2023) also pointed out that by "determining student engagement and perceptions", we "could provide useful insights for developing more targeted approaches." Therefore, this study aims to explore how EFL students in Vietnamese rural high schools perceive the use of AI in their English learning. It focuses on their experiences and perspectives on benefits and challenges while implementing AI-based tools in their study.

Literature review

AI in EFL learning

According to Cambridge (n.d.), AI, or artificial intelligence in full, can be understood as "the use or study of computer systems or machines that have some of the qualities that the human brain has", meaning that it is a system of information made by humans to emulate the behavior of their own creators (Kim et al., 2021). This understanding aligns with Barr (1989, as cited in Vo & Ho, 2024), who stated that AI allows machines to learn, reason, and perform tasks normally done only by humans. These capabilities make AI adaptable to various roles in education, including as a teacher or study assistant.

Kim et al. (2021) found that AI can be simulated to be educators or studying companions, depending on their creators' aims or the users' preferences. A notable example of AI is Grammarly, which works similarly to a writing assistant using "AI algorithms to identify errors and suggest corrections, helping learners enhance their writing proficiency and accuracy"

(Vera, 2023). Adaptive teaching strategies, such as informal training and community-based ones, work well with AI, satisfying the necessity for more improvement when "formal structures might be deficient or absent" (Kamarullah et al., 2024).

Moreover, AI offers significant benefits to teachers by making various aspects of their work efficient and convenient. One of the major advantages is its ability to automate homework grading and provide feedback quickly, allowing educators to offer timely needed support to students (Moybeka et al., 2023; Vera, 2023). Additionally, research by Luckin et al. (2016, as cited in Chikatimarla & Rao, 2024) and Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019, as cited in Chikatimarla & Rao, 2024) found that AI can help teachers with "administrative tasks, analyzing student performance data, and providing insights into effective teaching strategies". In short, AI contributes to a more student-centered classroom by easing teachers' workload and supporting more personalized learning. This is in line with the 2018 English Curriculum (MOET, 2018), which encourages authentic communication "so that when communicating with foreigners we can understand them and they can understand us" (Hoang, 2016).

Benefits of AI in EFL

As mentioned above, AI tools can be employed to help students in EFL. Fryer and Carpenter (2006, as cited in Kim et al., 2021) believed that AI "is indeed a valuable resource for EFL students who have limited opportunities to interact with native speakers". According to study of Haristani (2019), AI chatbots can enhance students' speaking and listening skills in a relaxed learning environment as "they can be used anytime and anywhere, and they are more confident in learning languages using chatbots than when dealing directly with human tutors". From the same study, it is stated that due to its nature as a system of information, "chatbots are willing to repeat the same material with students endlessly" while maintaining consistent and authentic quality in both text and speech provided. In agreement, it is found that ChatGPT is important in improving students' critical thinking and writing skills (Tran & Tran, 2023, as cited in Pham et al., 2023; Pham, 2025, Nguyen et al., 2025). In Thailand, a country closed to Vietnam, WhatsApp is a popular choice because of its consistent and user-friendly features (Chiablaem, 2021, as cited in Pham et al., 2023).

Additionally, learning applications utilized by AI align with multiple intelligences and learning styles. They provide tailored feedback and targeted language practice based on the learner's proficiency level and learning goals (Taylor et al., 2019, as cited in Pham et al., 2023). This is similar in Kaplan's (2021) study; AI-based applications can adapt to students' individual needs, allowing them to learn at their own pace and in accordance with their preferences. For example, Sora.ai can create virtual environments where students can explore and describe what they see in English, "improving both their spatial reasoning and language skills" (Armstrong, 2014, as cited in Pitychoutis & Al Rawahi, 2024). Another instance is Duolingo, using its algorithms, it can "adapt to learners' proficiency levels, track their progress, and provide personalized feedback", helping learners improve English skills while making the experience fun and interesting by implementing gamification elements (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012; Kim et al., 2021; Zhao & Nazir, 2022; Vera, 2023).

AI-based translation tools, which can also be known as AI machine translation, are also helpful for students who want to improve their writing and communication skills, reducing their errors (Fredholm, 2019, as cited in Yang, 2024; Lee, 2020, as cited in Yang, 2024). Google Translate is a popular choice since it would help learners improve accuracy, pronunciation and meaning of specific words, as long as they use carefully, making corrections while consulting with other sources (Kim and Cha, 2023; Vo and Ho, 2024; Yang, 2024). Another good example is Naver Papago, a translation tool in Korea, preferred by students there over Google Translate as

students mentioned that "it can translate into the Korean context better than Google" (Kim and Cha, 2023).

Challenges of AI in EFL

There are also challenges to using AI in local schools. First is the ones from the users themselves. Pitychoutis and Al Rawahi (2024) concluded that there still exists the limitation in resources and infrastructure. For example, some schools do not have enough computers or internet access, and students may not have smartphones or tablets at home. However, as Pedro et al. (2019) stated, AI is only full utilized when there is "reliable internet access and necessary hardware". In addition, the researchers added that AI tools can also be expensive and some require constant subscription, which not all learners can always afford, for full features (Pitychoutis & Al Rawahi, 2024).

The next challenge is, in spite of the prices, limitations from the side of technology itself as well. As mentioned, some AI tools do not function as most expect. Besides its robotic nature, the tools sometimes provide wrong answers, adamantly assuring them being correct, and, in other times, they could not recognize mistakes or misunderstand the given prompts, which can frustrate users (Kim et al., 2021; Yang, 2024). It is necessary to note that mistakes are not always AI's fault but could be the fault of the ones responsible for them. As AI answers through data collected from certain sources, if not carefully curated and maintained, there can be misinformation and negative responses (Moybeka et al., 2023). This matter of ethical concerns, AI bias, also involves data privacy. It is found from their research that students are demotivated from using AI because of AI's ability of collecting users' data to personalize their lessons.

Over-reliance is also should be concerned. Because AI is seemingly able to respond to all the questions and tasks, students may become too dependent on it and lose motivation to learn at all (Moybeka, 2023). Yang (2024) agreed with this, stating that some users "worried that overusing AI for comprehension and vocabulary would hurt their natural language skills." It was explained that the current AI technology, even now, mostly provides responses in a formal, robotic manner, which differs from English is actually used in real-life situations (Kamarullah et al., 2024; Yang, 2024).

It can be concluded that, due to limitations from the users and itself, AI at the moment cannot completely replace human teachers (Kim et al., 2021; Moybeka, 2023; Vera, 2023). Learning a language needs real authentic practice between speakers, and AI, after spending a large amount of spending, may not always understand students well (Moybeka, 2023; Kamarullah et al., 2024; Pitychoutis & Al Rawahi, 2024; Yang, 2024). Therefore, there exists belief that AI is not ready for EFL, including with the fact that it is a new, untested implementation in English education while some prefer the traditional ways (Moybeka, 2023; Vera, 2023).

Learner Perspectives on AI in EFL

From what mentioned above, it suggests that opinions on AI in EFL are mixed. While AI offers benefits, learners also express concerns (Vera, 2023; Hazaymeh et al., 2024). AI tools have become popular with widespread use, hinting their effectiveness and convenience (Kim et al., 2021). However, skepticism remains due to limitations on the user and AI sides. Some common examples are teachers and students, who are inexperienced in technology, and AI with technical issues.

It is important to understand the perspectives from students for a deeper understanding in the matter (Hazaymeh et al., 2024). As explained by them, since the students play the main roles of using AI in EFL classrooms, they can "provide valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of using AI in EFL teaching and learning". Therefore, exploring the perspectives of Vietnamese

students on AI in EFL, specifically the views on implementation which include both the benefits and challenges, is vital. The study is at a rural school due to the research gap discussed in the following section.

Research gap

Although English, particularly EFL, holds great importance, and AI is receiving increasing attention in this field, research on it in rural areas remains limited. This is largely due to the infrequent use of AI in the countryside, where challenges and negative perspectives hinder its adaptation (Kim et al., 2022; Pitychoutis & Al Rawahi, 2024). Furthermore, studies conducted in Vietnam primarily focus on universities in urban contexts rather than rural ones (Pham et al., 2023; Vo & Ho, 2024). And during the studies, "the specific adaptation strategies employed by teachers in resource-limited environments have not been thoroughly examined" (Kamarullah et al., 2024). This paper intends to fill these gaps.

Research questions

In summary, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of rural Vietnamese EFL high school students' perspectives on the implementation of AI in language learning, particularly its benefits and challenges. To achieve this, the research focuses on EFL students in rural settings in Vietnam. Accordingly, the study is going to satisfy the following research questions, adapted from Hazaymeh et al. (2024):

1. What are the perceived benefits of implementing AI in EFL education among Vietnamese high school students in rural areas?
2. What are the perceived challenges of implementing AI in EFL education among Vietnamese high school students in rural areas?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was conducted at a rural public high school in Vinh Long Province, Southern Vietnam, currently serving approximately 1,000 students this year. Most students come from farming families with low to moderate incomes and limited access to modern technology. Additionally, classrooms are equipped with basic infrastructure, such as TV screens, projectors, and laptops, but they still face challenges like and ill-maintained equipment and inconsistent internet connectivity, a common issue in rural Vietnamese schools. Despite gradual improvements over the years, the school still struggles with low academic performance compared to other rural counterparts in the province.

Participants were recruited from one tenth-grade class and two eleventh-grade classes taught by the researcher, using convenience sampling. These classes were selected due to the researcher's direct access and familiarity with the students, which also helped with instructions, consent and participation. Initially, 40 students (20 males, 20 females) from the three classes decided to participate in the questionnaire. However, five withdrew due to difficulties accessing the digital survey, resulting in a final sample of 35 students (19 males, 16 females). The majority were from Kinh ethnic backgrounds and had limited prior experience using AI tools, making their insights particularly useful for understanding technology adaptation in rural areas. For more insights into the questionnaire answers, five students were selected for later semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling. Two participants were chosen based on high English proficiency, two with low proficiency, and one was randomly selected to ensure fairness

and diverse perspectives.

Design of the Study

This paper employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. This approach was conducted to provide both a deep and comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives. The quantitative component involved a structured online questionnaire with 28 Likert-scale items. These were designed to assess students' perceptions of AI in EFL learning, focusing on accessibility, engagement, motivation, personalization, and challenges such as technical issues, over-reliance, and affordability. The qualitative component included semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences in greater depth. The interview consisted of eight open-ended questions adapted from the survey and cross-referenced with students' responses. These interviews explored topics such as students' experience while using AI, the types of AI tools they used, how these tools have helped improve their English skills, the features of AI tools, and the challenges they faced while using AI tools in EFL.

Adapted from Hazaymeh et al. (2024), the survey went through a refinement process. First, four EFL teachers asked to review and give suggestions for the statements. input for the survey. The survey was then pilot-tested with ten students, with five of them from a neighboring high school and the others from a similar rural setting. The test was carried out with permission and support from local EFL teachers. Furthermore, IBM SPSS Statistics was used to calculate Cronbach's alpha value of 0.995.

Before the survey and interviews, permission was also obtained from both the school board and the students' homeroom teacher, and participation was voluntary. It is also necessary to note that, while permitting, the school board suggested carrying out the research on the tenth and eleventh graders only as the twelfth graders would be busy studying for their graduation, which the study complied with. In fact, ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. In addition to the approval, students were informed of the research and their right to participate or withdraw at any time, and all responses were also anonymous to protect their privacy. Moreover, efforts were made to create a comfortable process where the students answered truthfully to their opinions. These measures ensured that the data collection and the study as a whole were conducted effectively without violating ethical research standards.

Data collection & analysis

Initially, data collection was conducted online via Google Forms where the link, as already mentioned, shared in a Zalo chat group. The survey, adapted from Hazaymeh et al. (2024), consisted of 28 Likert-scale questions, ranging from "1 - Strongly Disagree" to "5 - Strongly Agree". These questions were designed to assess various aspects of AI use in EFL learning, including the accessibility of AI tools, personalized learning experiences, engagement and motivation, common AI applications such as chatbots, learning apps, and translation tools, and challenges such as technical issues, over-reliance, and cost. After everything was in order, the data would be analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics the mean (M) and the standard deviation (Std). This was to obtain quantitative data on students' perspectives on AI in EFL

Following the survey, a small amount of the same students was invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to provide deeper insights into their perspectives on AI in EFL. For fairness, half of the students were selected based on their backgrounds and English proficiency levels while the others were chosen randomly. The interview consisted of eight special questions, adapted from the survey statements and cross-referenced with participants' responses, exploring topics such as students' experience while using AI, types of AI tools they

use, how these tools have helped improve their English skills, the features of AI tools, and the challenges they face while using AI tools in EFL. These interviews provided qualitative data to complement the survey findings.

Results/Findings

Presenting the results of the questionnaire survey

Table 1

Participants

Gender	Years of AI Experience		
	Never used before	1-5 year(s)	6 years or more
Male	2	17	0
Female	2	13	1

The first table presents data from 35 participants (19 males, 16 females), out of the expected 40. Among the remaining participants, there are 4 students (11.4%) reported never using AI before, offering valuable insights into perceptions of AI, specifically in EFL. The five students selected for the semi-interviews are labeled S1 through S5 for anonymity. Interestingly, one participant (S3) who reported no prior AI use was found during the interview to have actually used AI tools without realizing it. In his case, the student used AI to enhance his selfies on TikTok but they assumed that it was simply "a feature of the software". Meanwhile, the other 31 students (88.6%) had prior AI experience though, according to other interviewees, they only knew the basics. To ensure fairer outcomes, there should be more research and with more diverse groups in the settings.

Table 2

Students' Perceived Benefits of AI Tools in EFL Learning

No.	Statements	n	M	SD
	Personalization & Feedback			
1	AI tools provide appropriate English learning experience based on my level	35	4.23	2.878
2	AI tools help receive instant feedback on my English learning progress	35	4.25	3.061
3	AI tools adjust to my English learning needs and pace	35	4.10	2.845
4	AI tools help me improve my vocabulary and grammar knowledge	35	4.30	2.729
5	AI tools help me improve my reading and writing skills through interactive exercises	35	4.13	2.784
6	AI tools help me practice speaking and listening skills for authentic situations	35	4.02	2.750
	Engagement & Motivation			
7	AI tools make learning English more engaging and motivating	35	4.13	2.594
8	AI tools offer tracking progress and rewarding achievements	35	4.05	2.791
9	AI tools offer interactive activities that motivate me to learn English	35	4.12	3.014

Students reported benefits of using AI tools in their English language learning. One major benefit was personalized learning. Over 71% of participants agreed that AI tools provided level-appropriate English content, and 77.1% mentioned receiving instant feedback. S3 shared, "AI

pointed out mistakes I didn't realize, and I could review them anytime without needing to ask my teacher." These tools helped students practice at their own pace, making learning more flexible and convenient. However, not all students fully agreed. Fifteen students (42.9%) were neutral about whether AI adjusted well to their learning needs. However, there was another student (S5) said the opposite "AI does help show me my mistakes but it usually doesn't tell me why". In agreement, S1 commented, "Sometimes the exercises are too easy or the feedback doesn't explain why something is wrong."

In terms of engagement and motivation, approximately 68.6% stated that AI made learning English more fun, finding AI tools engaging. Gamified elements like points and rewards were especially appreciated. However, there is a matter to be concerned as S2 noted, "The games are fun, but they get boring after a while." Also, there was an interesting insight from S2 as they revealed that, besides for their study, S2 sometimes chatted with ChatGPT in English simply for fun, saying, "Chatting with ChatGPT makes me feel like I am talking to an American friend".

Table 3

Students' Perceived Benefits of Specific AI Tools in EFL Learning

No.	Statements	n	M	SD
	Chatbots			
10	Help me practice English without feeling shy	35	4.22	3.117
11	Provide authentic English conversations	35	4.08	2.877
12	Allow me to ask questions anytime and get instant answers	35	4.20	2.794
13	Help me practice English without feeling shy	35	4.22	3.117
14	Provide authentic English conversations	35	4.08	2.877
15	Allow me to ask questions anytime and get instant answers	35	4.20	2.794
		Learning Apps		
16	Provide personalized lessons based on my English level	35	4.33	2.625
17	Use games and rewards to make learning enjoyable	35	4.33	2.832
18	Help me track my progress	35	4.27	3.274
	Translation Tools			
19	Help me understand difficult English words/sentences	35	4.45	2.764
20	Help me correct grammar and vocabulary	35	4.15	2.851
21	Help me learn pronunciation of difficult vocabulary	35	4.20	3.014

The survey and interviews also revealed how students used different AI tools in distinct ways to support their learning, including chatbots, learning apps, and translation tools. According to the data, chatbots were found useful by 74.3% of participants for building communication confidence. As S4 shared "I feel less shy when chatting with ChatGPT than with classmates or teachers." Students also valued the ability to ask questions anytime and receive instant feedback. However, some raised concerns that chatbot responses were occasionally inaccurate or unnatural.

Learning apps like Duolingo were highly rated. Over 74% agreed they were both fun and effective for personalizing lessons. S5 noted, "It adapts to how I learn and gives me points." However, as already mentioned, the app sometimes could be repetitive and demotivate the learners.

Translation tools, especially Google Translate, were the most widely used, with 82.9% of students depending on them to understand vocabulary and check grammar. However, they were not without faults. For instance, Google Translate often relies on word-for-word translation,

failing to acknowledge the context, which can lead to inaccurate results. Furthermore, S5 said, "I sometimes ask ChatGPT for English translations of Vietnamese proverbs. At first, it was okay, but then the answers became really weird." This highlights a recurring issue with AI's ability to handle cultural context.

Table 4

Students' Perceived Challenges of AI Tools in EFL Learning

No.	Statements	n	M	SD
	Personalization & Feedback			
22	AI tools can have technical problems (slow internet, app errors, etc.)	35	4.27	2.819
23	AI tools sometimes give incorrect translations or answers	35	4.38	3.506
24	AI tools do not understand Vietnamese culture or context	35	4.00	2.837
25	AI tools' price is too expensive	35	4.20	2.614
26	AI tools can make me too reliant on them	35	4.10	2.373

Although students found AI helpful, they also face challenges, including technical difficulty. While 85.7% had access to devices and 80% had internet, students still faced slow or unstable connections, especially at home. S5 shared, "Sometimes I can't open the app because of slow internet, and then I got nothing done." Five students even withdrew from the survey due to these limitations, suggesting that accessibility still affects participation and outcomes.

Another common concern was the accuracy of AI-generated responses. A large majority (85.7%) said that AI tools sometimes gave incorrect or confusing answers. S2 said, "When ChatGPT could not find the answer, it will create its own answer instead of just admitting that it could not." This could cause misunderstandings and reduce trust in AI tools. For example, students might not notice these mistakes as S1 put it, "Sometimes the answer sounds okay, but I don't know if it's right or not."

Cultural mismatch was also noted. Over half of the participants (54.3%) believed AI tools lacked understanding of Vietnamese. S1 shared, "I asked ChatGPT to translate Vietnamese proverbs, and the more I asked, the stranger the answers got." Another student added that although AI tools were polite and helpful, "they don't really get how we use English in daily life."

Students also expressed concern over becoming too dependent on AI tools. About 62.9% felt they were over-relying on them. S2 reflected "… until one day I realized that I sometimes just copy the answer and don't try to think. I'm afraid that I have relied on AI too much." This may suggest a decline in learner autonomy or critical thinking, especially when AI tools become a shortcut rather than a learning support.

Discussion

Perspectives of Vietnamese high school students in rural settings on benefits of implementing AI in EFL

From the findings, it is safe to conclude that students enjoyed how AI helped them practice their English, answering the first research question. In fact, over 70% agreed that AI tools provided appropriate content and quick feedback, supporting the idea that AI fosters personalized and student-centered learning (Kaplan, 2021; Kim et al., 2021). For instance, the majority of participants agreed that AI is polite, friendly and patient, helping them feel less stress during

English practice. These experiences align with findings from (Haristiani, 2019) and (Kim et al., 2021), who emphasized AI's ability to positively support learners.

As noted earlier, S2 reported using ChatGPT to practice casual English conversations for fun, saying it felt like chatting with a foreign friend. This shows how AI tools may blur the boundary between learning and informal practice, supporting both motivation and exposure to authentic language outside the classroom. Additionally, data revealed that AI could be beneficial for students' engagement and motivation, as long as they are used moderately.

Perspectives of Vietnamese high school students in rural settings on challenges of implementing AI in EFL

However, students also emphasized a preference for human teachers' adaptability and emotional support, particularly when addressing complex or cultural lessons. This is in line with Chen's (2012) study, where students valued teachers' "personal trait-related characteristics included emotion, kindness, fairness, lenience and responsibility". In contrast, while AI tools like ChatGPT can simulate interactions, their "robotic" tone and lack of cultural context limit their ability to replicate authentic human emotion (Yang, 2024).

Furthermore, being in line with research by Kim et al. (2021), Moybeka et al. (2023), Kim and Cha (2023), and Hazaymeh et al. (2024), a large number of respondents encountered AI-generated inaccuracies, such as incorrect translations or made-up answers, while some stated concerns about AI over-reliance (Nguyen et al., 2025). In fact, around 63% admitted depending too much on AI, which may reduce their motivation to think critically or engage actively in learning. Additionally, a study by Sumakul et al. (2022) implied that AI could distance students and their teachers, disrupting teaching roles.

It can be concluded that, answering the second research question, students recognize that AI tools are still not completely perfect for EFL.

Suggestions

A hybrid model combining AI tools with teacher guidance is essential to address these issues. For example, AI could help students with grammar drills or vocabulary exercises, while teachers focus on where AI still falls short such as complex critical thinking and cultural context (Kim et al., 2021). Also, in line with MOET (2018), investing more in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and local AI tools is necessary. These are also recommended by Kamarullah et al. (2024), stating there should be means to improve teachers' AI literacy so that they could support students in their English learning combined with the tools. Besides, a good English learning environment using AI should include "reliable internet access and necessary hardware" (Pedro et al., 2019, as cited in Kamarullah et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is necessary that developers localize or creating local AI tools similar to models like Naver Papago. Hanzii, a Chinese–Vietnamese dictionary website is a good example proving that it is possible. Although Richards and Rodgers (2014) recommended learning English through communicative methods, local AI tools can be very helpful for beginner learners.

Limitations

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. As already mentioned, the results are based on a small sample size of 35 students from a rural high school in Vietnam. Additionally, due to digital difficulties, five participants withdrew during the research, potentially leading the data toward students with favorable opinions for AI. Future research should address these matters by expanding the participants and area of the study, and, to avoid with the stated issue, having more flexible plans.

Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives of Vietnamese rural EFL students on the benefits and challenges of implementing AI in language learning. Through a small sample size, the findings revealed that AI tools, such as chatbots, learning applications, and translation tools, offer significant advantages, including personalized learning experiences, instant feedback, and reduced anxiety in practicing English. Also, students enjoyed AI's role in improving their vocabulary, grammar, and other language skills. Additionally, gamified elements in AI applications were noted to increase engagement and motivation. These examples mean that students mostly have a positive view of implementing AI in EFL.

However, challenges exist in rural settings. Limited access to reliable internet, high costs of advanced AI features, and a lack of cultural understanding from the tools are some challenges students might face when implementing AI in the learning. Students also expressed concerns about over-reliance on AI, technical errors, and the fact that they could not fully replace human teachers. These issues prove the need for a balanced combination of AI with traditional teaching methods to maintain an authentic language learning.

The paper would like to conclude with some recommendations, which include developing affordable, localized AI solutions, enhancing digital literacy training, implementing flexible models, and combining AI with teacher guidance. Moreover, future research should expand to diverse rural populations and explore with backup plans to avoid digital difficulties similar to this study. In conclusion, this research contributes to the underexplored field of AI in rural EFL contexts, offering insights, hoping to create effective AI-based learning environments.

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