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Language Students' Views on Using Generative AI for Language Learning Purposes in Higher Education

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Research Article

Abstract

This study examines undergraduate language students' perspectives on the use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in UK higher education, focusing on their educational value and integration into language learning. Prompted by the rapid rise of generative AI since late 2022, the research is grounded in theoretical discussions on its pedagogical potential and conducted through a survey of 97 students at the University of Manchester. The study explores how frequently students use these tools, for what purposes, and their attitudes toward AI's role in learning and assessment. Results show that while many students recognise benefits such as instant feedback, personalised learning, and support with translation, grammar, and conversation practice, a significant number have not adopted AI tools in their study routines. Concerns about misinformation, ethical risks, and bias in AI-generated content were common, underscoring the need for critical engagement and responsible use. Additionally, most respondents reported a lack of institutional guidance, highlighting a gap in support that universities could address through structured initiatives like introductory modules and ethical frameworks. These findings reveal both the promise and the challenges of integrating generative AI into language education, calling for thoughtful strategies to ensure its effective and ethical use.

Keywords: ChatGPT, language teaching, language learning, students' views, higher education

1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into education is rapidly transforming pedagogical practices and learning experiences. The recent advent of publicly accessible generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Gemini, which are powered by sophisticated large language models (LLMs), represents a significant leap in this evolution. These technologies are particularly impactful in the domain of language learning, as they can generate human-like text, provide translations, offer writing assistance, and simulate conversational practice. Within higher education (HE), defined as post-secondary education at universities, colleges, and institutes, these tools present a paradigm shift. They

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offer unprecedented opportunities for personalized learning pathways, instantaneous feedback, and immersive, on-demand language practice that was previously unavailable at scale.

However, the rapid deployment of this technology has outpaced our understanding of its effective and ethical integration. The potential benefits are counterbalanced by significant concerns regarding pedagogical effectiveness, academic integrity, data privacy, and the potential for inherent biases within the AI systems. Consequently, a critical problem has emerged: educators and institutions are promoting or restricting the use of generative AI without a robust, evidence-based understanding of the primary stakeholders' perspectives—the students themselves. Understanding how language learners perceive, experience, and engage with these tools is not merely an academic exercise; it is a practical necessity for designing effective, ethical, and sustainable AI-enhanced language curricula.

A review of the current literature reveals a discernible gap. While a growing body of research has begun to explore the broader applications of AI in education (e.g., Law, 2024; Ogunleye et al., 2024), few studies have adopted a targeted, student-centered approach to specifically investigate the attitudes, lived experiences, and core concerns of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or Second Language (L2) students regarding generative AI in HE contexts. Existing research often prioritizes theoretical discussions of potential or instructor perspectives, leaving a lack of empirical data on student acceptance, which is a pivotal factor in the successful adoption of any educational technology (Shoufan, 2023).

Therefore, the present study is motivated by a clear rationale: to address this gap and provide a synthesized, analytical overview of language students' views on generative AI. The primary aim of this research is to systematically analyze current literature to identify and articulate the perceived benefits, practical challenges, and broader implications of generative AI from the student perspective. By doing so, this study makes a distinct contribution to the field. It moves beyond descriptive accounts of what the technology *can do* to a critical analysis of how it is *actually perceived and experienced* by learners. The findings will offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in HE, enabling them to make informed decisions that leverage the benefits of generative AI while proactively addressing student concerns and ethical considerations, ultimately fostering a more effective and responsible learning environment.

2. Literature Review

The release of ChatGPT in November 2022 catalyzed an explosion of interest in generative artificial intelligence (AI), a subset of AI capable of creating novel text, images, audio, and video. This technology, powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) and deep neural networks, predicts and generates sequences of words based on vast datasets, producing accessible, human-like content (Law, 2024). The rapid proliferation of these tools has prompted significant discourse within educational research, particularly regarding their potential for language teaching and learning (LTL).

A scoping review by Law (2024) provides a foundational, albeit largely descriptive, overview of this emerging field, categorizing applications into AI-based learning tools, chatbot-based systems, and AI-powered platforms. The reviewed literature predominantly highlights perceived benefits, positioning generative AI as an assistant, tutor, or language buddy that can improve writing skills, provide feedback, and enable personalized learning. Studies suggest it enhances the learning experience, boosts learner autonomy (Agustini et al., 2023), increases motivation (Guo et al., 2023), fosters engagement (Muñoz et al. 2023; Yu, 2024), aids in constructing interactive content (Creely, 2024), and can extend human

creativity (Li et al., 2023). For educators, it is framed as a tool for efficiently generating assignments and quizzes, thereby saving time and effort (Koraishi, 2023).

However, this descriptive optimism is critically tempered by identified limitations. A consistent thread across reviews concerns risks of plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and exacerbated educational inequality (Law, 2024; Kohnke, 2023). Scholars like Creely (2024) further question the accuracy and authenticity of AI-generated text, warning of potential negative impacts on human creativity, integrity, and critical thinking. These concerns are reflected in early empirical studies on perceptions. For example, a survey by Sarwanti et al. (2024) of Indonesian university language students' perceptions of ChatGPT revealed widespread use for academic tasks, particularly writing, alongside strong awareness and readiness. While students recognized its benefits such as personalized learning and increased productivity, they also expressed concerns about accuracy, ethical risks, and diminished critical thinking, underscoring the need for institutional guidance in its responsible use**.** Similarly, teachers have expressed apprehension about decreased writing and critical thinking abilities (Warschauer et al, 2023) or receiving overwhelming or irrelevant feedback (Liu and Ma, 2024), emphasizing the importance of thoughtfully incorporating these tools to enhance rather than replace traditional language teaching approaches led by human educators.

This gap between potential and concern points to a need for stronger theoretical framing. The current discourse would be significantly strengthened by grounding it in established technology adoption and integration frameworks, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Sohn and Kwon, 2020) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model (Venkatesh, 2003). These frameworks provide robust lenses for understanding the core constructs (like perceived usefulness, ease of use, and facilitating conditions) that influence whether and how technology is successfully adopted. For instance, the model by Instefjord and Munthe (2017), which outlines the digital competences (technical proficiency, pedagogical compatibility, social awareness) needed for teachers to integrate AI, aligns closely with the "facilitating conditions" construct in UTAUT. Applying such frameworks would move the field beyond description towards predicting and explaining integration success. Preliminary studies using these models have already begun; for instance, research by Shahzad et al. (2024) applied the TAM model to ChatGPT adoption, finding that ChatGPT awareness significantly influences the intention to adopt this technology and that perceived trust significantly moderates the relationship between ChatGPT awareness and perceived ease of use, usefulness, and intelligence.

A critical synthesis reveals that many of the initially cited findings on benefits and challenges are theoretically based or anecdotal, lacking strong empirical evidence. This underscores the necessity of gathering robust data on user perceptions, which are a primary determinant of effective technology use and improvement (Shoufan, 2023). However, a growing body of empirical work is beginning to address this. For example, a study by Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou (2023) moved beyond conceptual discussion to investigate Hong Kong university students' actual use of ChatGPT for LTL. Their findings confirmed its utility for writing support and generating ideas but also highlighted critical challenges, including the need for prompt crafting skills. Furthermore, research into learning outcomes is emerging. A study by Mahapatra (2024) found that HE undergraduate ESL students who used ChatGPT for iterative writing feedback showed a significant positive impact of ChatGPT on students' academic writing skills, and the students' perceptions of the impact were also overwhelmingly positive.

Future research directions, as identified by scholars like Han (2024) and Ogunleye et al. (2024), must build upon this emerging empirical base. Han (2024) outlines three key strands for future inquiry: examining the technology's functionalities, investigating learner interactions and strategies, and understanding human agency in the learning process. Furthermore, Ogunleye et al. (2024) advocate for

an interdisciplinary approach to develop practical guidelines and curricula, such as introductory modules on AI knowledge, usage, and ethics. Initiatives like those at UCL' Teaching and Learning Generative AI Hub(2024) and the University of Durham (Murrary, 2024), which provide transparent guides and examples of effective use, represent promising steps toward bridging the gap between theoretical potential and practical, ethical implementation.

In conclusion, while the literature provides a valuable preliminary map of the generative AI landscape in LTL, it is evolving from a nascent, descriptive phase towards a more empirical and theoretical one. Early findings on perceptions and outcomes are crucial, but often fragmented. To strengthen the conceptual link between findings and theory, future research must be systematically grounded in established adoption frameworks and prioritise rigorous mixed-methods studies that directly investigate the perceptions, adoption behaviours, and learning outcomes of the primary users: students and educators

3. Methodology

This section includes details about the research objectives and design, participants, data collection and analysis procedures, together with languages and language levels represented in this study.

3.1. Research objectives

This study aims to explore the integration of generative AI in UK Higher Education language education, focusing on student perspectives and experiences. Specifically, the research objectives are:

1. To examine the frequency and purposes of generative AI usage among language students.

2. To investigate language students' current uses of generative AI and their anticipated future applications in language learning contexts.

3. To analyse language students' perceptions of what is considered acceptable in terms of generative AI use in teaching, learning, and assessment processes.

4. To evaluate language students' attitudes towards their institutions' approaches to implementing and regulating generative AI technologies in language education settings.

3.2. Research participants

The study surveyed 97 undergraduate language students at the University of Manchester in April 2024. The cohort consisted of 16% (n=15) degree-programme students from the Modern Languages and Cultures department and 84% (n=81) of the students were optional learners from the University-wide Language Experience for All Programme.

3.3 *Instruments*

This study adopts a quantitative survey-based approach to investigate language students' perceptions, usage patterns and attitudes towards generative AI in UK Higher education. The design facilitated

systematic data collection on frequency of use, applications, acceptability, and institutional policies, aligning with the study's four research objectives.

3.4 *Procedure*

A 15-item online survey was developed, structured into four thematic sections corresponding to the research objectives. The instrument employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses. To ensure validity and reliability, the survey underwent a multi-stage development process. The initial draft was reviewed by two experts in educational technology and language pedagogy to assess content validity, question clarity, and alignment with research objectives. The survey was piloted with a group of 10 language students to identify ambiguities, technical issues and. To estimate completion time. Feedback from this phase informed final revisions to improve comprehensibility and flow.

The survey, designed to minimise bias, employed a mixed-methods approach with Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions and open-ended responses, structured into four thematic sections aligned with the research objectives: (1) frequency and purposes of generative AI use, (2) current and anticipated applications, (3) perceptions of acceptable use and (4) attitudes toward institutional policies. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns.

3.5 Data collection

Participants were invited via email to complete the anonymous survey hosted on the secure *Qualtrics* platform. The invitation outlined the study's aims, assured confidentiality and anonymity, and stated that data would be used solely for research purposes. Participants provided informed consent before proceeding and could withdraw at any time. The estimated completion time was 5-7 minutes.

3.6 Data analyses

Quantitative data from Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions were analysed via *Qualtrics*. Analyses extended beyond descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to include inferential tests, including associations between categorical variables. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns and themes related to student experiences and concerns.

The participant pool represented a diverse range of languages and self-reported proficiency levels, from beginner (A1) to advanced (C1), as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The big majority was studying Spanish (37%) followed by other languages such as French (23%), German (13%), Japanese (12 %), Arabic (11 %), Russian (4 %), Chinese (3%), Italian (2 %), Polish (2 %), Turkish (2 %), Persian (1 %), Korean (1 %), English (1 %) and Urdu (1 %).

In question 3 we asked the students in what year of their Modern Languages degree they were at and what level of the language they were studying. There was a good representation of the four years of study (Year 1, 10 %, Year 2, 9%, Year 3, 2 % and year 4, 7%), and also in relation to the various

Common European Framework levels studied (A1= 17, 18% %, A2= 20, 21 %, B1=12, 13%, B2=10, 10 %, C1=9, 9%).

The majority of the students considered themselves to be definitely (40%) or probably (24%) familiar with generative AI, with 17 % undecided. Only 13% considered themselves probably not familiar, and 6% definitely not familiar with generative AI.

Almost in exact correlation appear the results in relation to the question whether the students used generative AI tools for language learning purposes. The majority were either definitely not using it (32 %), probably not using it (21%) or in doubt (15%), whereas a minority said that they were probably (20 %) or definitely (13%) using generative AI in their language learning.

Regarding frequency of use, the great majority never used generative AI for their language learning purposes (42%) or used it either only once a week (25%) or two or three times a week (23%), whereas only seven students (10%) confessed to use it every day.

Regarding the generative AI tools that the students used for their language learning, by far the majority used ChatGPT (70%) or GPT 4 (9%). Others reported using both *ChatGPT* and *Gemini* (0.9%), *Replika* (0.9%), *Perplexity* (0.9%), *Duolingo* (0.9%), or none (5%).

The next question was *In what ways do you use generative AI for language learning.* Students could tick all the uses they thought would apply. The results of this question are illustrated in table 1. The big majority used it as a translation aid (24=53%) followed by obtaining grammatical and cultural explanations (21=47%). It is interesting to observe that 15 students (33%) used generative AI as a comprehension aid, presumably to understand texts at initial levels. Fourteen students (31%) liked the idea of using generative AI to brainstorm ideas, and thirteen (29%) used it as a conversation partner to practice oral skills or to get prepared for their oral exams. The next favourite use, as noted by eleven students (24%) was using generative AI as a written production aid. This is rather surprising because, as teachers, we tend to think that written production is the main idea in mind for the students when using these tools. Both “written production aid” and “drafting aid” can comprise translation and writing tasks. Feedback (24%) was as much valued by students as written production aid, which indicates that there is a link between these two parameters, that text-based interactions are still dominating and that these elements are very much valued by language students to enhance independent language learning. The next favourite use is vocabulary development, as noted by 10 students (22%). Eight students thought these tools make a useful research aid (18%) or useful to mind map concepts, as pointed out by 5 students (11%). In last place came the use of these tools as pronunciation aids, as noted by three students (7%) knowledgeable of the TTS and STT functions of some of these systems.

Table 1.

Students’ uses of generative AI for language learning purposes

In what ways do you use generative AI for language learning?	Percentage	Count
Translation aid	53%	24
Grammar and culture explanations	47%	21
Comprehension aid	33%	15
Brainstorming ideas	31%	14
Conversation partner	29%	13

Written production aid	24%	11
Feedback tutor	24%	11
Vocabulary development	22%	10
Research aid	18%	8
Mind mapping concepts	11%	5
Drafting aid	9%	4
Pronunciation aid	7%	3

In the following question we asked the students to upload a screenshot with an example of prompt and generative AI output that they found useful for language learning, or for connecting language learning with content/culture knowledge. For example a student of German used ChatGPT 4 to learn the difference in use between the interrogative pronoun *wohin* and the preposition *am*. ChatGPT provided a practical explanation with some examples of how to use them in questions and answers, which is presumably what the student was practising in class.

In question 10 students were asked what they thought were the advantages of using generative AI for language learning. They were prompted with various advantages so that they could tick all that they thought would apply, and they were also given the opportunity to express other views.

As illustrated in table 2 below, receiving immediate feedback on their language performance with 79% is what the students considered as the main advantage of using generative AI tools for language learning. This is also linked to the personalised learning experience these tools provide in a more general sense, with 63%. Interactive and engaging language practice, with 56%, comes third. Knowledge creation (46%) correlates with comments pointed out by the students such as how question generation constitutes a good form of enhancing concept understanding and language practice or acknowledging how quickly and effectively one of them managed to expand his/her knowledge and context-specific vocabulary by interacting with these tools.

Table 2.

Students' views regarding the advantages of using generative AI for language learning

What advantages do you see in using generative AI for language learning?	**Percentage**	**Count**
Immediate feedback	79%	45
Personalized learning	63%	36
Interactive and engaging language practice	56%	32
Knowledge creation	46%	26
Other	5%	3

In question 11, students were asked what they thought were the disadvantages of using generative AI for language learning. They were prompted with various disadvantages so that they could tick all that they thought would apply and express other views.

As illustrated below in table 3, hallucination with 81% is the students' disadvantage in using generative AI for language learning. Misuse concerns (53%) and potential biases (48%) come next, followed by other causes (16%) mentioned by the students such as the fact that these tools not always provide them with the answer they need, or concerns regarding copyright and creative ownership.

Table 3.

Students' views regarding the disadvantages of using generative AI for language learning

What disadvantages do you see in using generative AI for language learning?	Percentage	Count
Hallucination, i.e. generation of nonsensical or inaccurate content	81%	52
Misuse concerns	53%	34
Potential biases	48%	31
Other	16%	10

In question 12 students were asked whether they had been shown how to use or how not to use generative AI in class, and to provide an example. The vast majority (95%) had not been shown how to use generative AI for language learning purposes in class. However, a few students (5%) mentioned that they had been shown an example of the potential of these tools, shown how to effectively use them to brainstorm ideas for speaking topics, shown model texts, or shown how to use generative AI to find new adjectives and generate potential answers for open-ended questions asked in class.

In question 13 students were asked what kind of support they would like to receive to use generative AI for language learning and why. Interestingly, some students preferred to learn in the traditional way, or said they would be against it if it was introduced. One of them said that a basic explanation of what this technology actually is would be appreciated, to begin with, and how it works, because h/she is not sure h/she understands this. Some others expressed an interest in being taught how to use generative AI for language learning (including tips, tools, prompts and examples), but. not as a replacement of learning. One student said that a demonstration of its use, together with a discussion of others' use and experience of generative AI would be beneficial for the student community. Another student suggested it would be useful to be taught what is actually allowed and not allowed to do with these technologies, since s/he considers there is a lack of clarity in this regard. In connection with this, one student suggested that it would be useful to be taught how to use these technologies correctly. Last but not least, two students thought it would be good to be shown examples of how to use this technology for personalised language learning and for revision e.g. generating exam questions and how to answer them.

Regarding the functions of generative AI tools that they found useful, one student said he valued *feedback on vocabulary and grammar mistakes but also ways to sound more fluent and/or natural in the target language*. H/she also noted some generative AI deficiencies, for example that *it could be trained on more colloquial data to understand the differences between formal and spoken contexts*.

In question 14 students were asked whether they thought generative AI could be used in exam preparation and, if so, how and why. This was the question that sparked more discussion for the students. As a consequence, various uses of generative AI for language exam preparation at university level were suggested by the students and can be summarised as follows:

- As a revision/study aid, to generate possible exam questions of various types (fill-in-the-blank grammar, text with comprehension questions or writing prompt plus model answer) given past papers
- To provide detailed feedback on grammar, translation, writing and comprehension questions
- As a conversation practice partner to practice for the oral exam
- As a way of incorporating more language practice into your life

- To quickly explain difficult terms or concepts in a simple manner to help to better understand the content.
- To create vocabulary lists
- To brainstorm ideas or structures for oral and/or written production

In the last question, students were asked whether they were aware of the policy of The University of Manchester regarding adequate use of AI tools. Students were divided on this, and only a 33% probably (21%) or definitely (12%) were aware of the university policy on effective use of AI, whereas the majority probably (29%) or definitely (23%) are not aware of it, and 15% of the students are neutral.

Together with descriptive statistics, we also carried out inferential statistics analysis on the correlation between language proficiency levels and usage, perceived advantages and disadvantages of using generative AI for language learning purposes.

The analysis of the correlation between language proficiency levels (A1 to C1) and the ways students use generative AI for language learning reveals several key patterns. Translation aid is the most frequently cited use across all levels, particularly among A1 learners (88.9%), indicating its role as a foundational tool for beginners. As proficiency increases, usage diversifies: C1 learners show strong engagement as a conversation partner (57.1%) and for grammar/culture explanations (57.1%), reflecting a shift toward interactive and nuanced language practice. Conversely, beginners (A1, A2) rely heavily on AI for translation and comprehension, while intermediate learners (B1, B2) exhibit varied use, including brainstorming and feedback. Notably, pronunciation aid is almost exclusively used by A1 learners (22.2%), underscoring its focus on basic skills. Overall, AI usage evolves from transactional support (translation, pronunciation) at lower levels to conversational and explanatory functions at higher proficiency levels, aligning with the developmental needs of language learners.

The analysis of the correlation between language proficiency levels (A1 to C1) and the perceived advantages of using generative AI for language learning reveals a strong, consistent preference for *immediate feedback* across all levels, with particularly high recognition among A2 (90%), B2 (100%), and C1 (87.5%) learners. This suggests that regardless of proficiency, users highly value the AI's capacity for real-time correction and guidance. The advantage of *personalized learning* is also widely acknowledged, especially by beginners (A1: 83.3%, A2: 80%), indicating that AI is seen as a crucial tool for tailoring content to individual needs from the outset. As proficiency increases, the appreciation for *interactive and engaging practice* grows significantly, peaking among C1 learners (87.5%), which aligns with higher-level learners' need for dynamic conversation and nuanced engagement. Conversely, *knowledge creation* is valued more by intermediate learners (B1: 60%, B2: 71.4%) than by beginners or advanced users, suggesting it is most advantageous during the transitional phase of language acquisition. Overall, the data indicates that while the core advantage of immediate feedback is universal, beginners prioritize personalization, and advanced learners increasingly value interactivity, reflecting their evolving learning objectives.

The perception of disadvantages in using generative AI for language learning shows both a universal concern and a clear correlation with proficiency level. The risk of *hallucination* is the dominant drawback across all levels, cited by 100% of Year 2 students, 87.5% of B2 learners, and 71.4% of C1 users, highlighting its status as a fundamental flaw. However, beginners (A1) show a pronounced concern for *misuse* (85.7%), significantly higher than their worry about biases (57.1%), indicating anxiety over ethical application. This peaks at the B1 level, where learners are 100% concerned with hallucination and 85.7% with misuse, representing a phase of maximum skepticism reflecting a transition phase where learners have enough proficiency to consistently identify AI’s errors and biases but may not yet feel confident enough to easily correcy them without aid. In contrast, advanced (C1) learners, while still wary

of hallucination (71.4%), report the lowest fear of misuse (55.6%), suggesting their proficiency grants them greater confidence to use the tool appropriately and focus on its inherent unreliability.

Finally, we also analysed the correlation between students' familiarity with generative AI and usage. The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between a student's familiarity with generative AI and the sophistication of its application in language learning. Students with low familiarity ("Probably not") primarily use AI for basic, transactional tasks like *translation* (40%) and *vocabulary development* (40%). In stark contrast, highly familiar users ("Definitely yes") leverage the technology for a significantly broader and more advanced range of interactive and productive functions, exhibiting much higher usage rates as a *conversation partner* (37.5% vs. 10% for "Probably yes"), a *feedback tutor* (33.3%), and for *in-depth grammar and culture explanations* (50%). This group also dominates the use of AI for complex tasks like *research aid* (25%) and *brainstorming ideas* (29.2%), demonstrating that greater familiarity enables users to transition from treating AI as a simple dictionary to utilizing it as a multifaceted personal tutor and creative assistant.

4. Discussion and recommendations

This study provides a nuanced exploration of generative AI adoption among language learners, revealing that usage patterns, perceived advantages, and concerns are strongly stratified by language proficiency and user familiarity. These findings critically extend the theoretical discourse on technology acceptance by demonstrating that the "perceived usefulness" central to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is not monolithic but evolves significantly with a learner's capability and experience.

This study also illuminates the complex landscape of generative AI adoption among language students, revealing a critical disconnect between awareness and informed, pedagogically integrated use. Our findings must be interpreted within the context of the existing literature, which posits generative AI as a transformative yet challenging force in education (Law, 2024; Ogunleye et al., 2024).

The primary applications of AI as a translation aid, grammar explainer, and conversational partner suggest students are leveraging it for receptive skill development and foundational practice rather than for sophisticated written production. This usage pattern indicates a pragmatic, often supplementary, approach to tool adoption.

The significant advantages cited by students, such as immediate feedback and personalised learning, corroborate the benefits hypothesised in the literature (e.g., Guo et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023). However, our findings critically advance this discourse by highlighting that students are acutely aware of the concomitant risks. The paramount concern regarding AI hallucinations (81%) has profound pedagogical implications. The risk of encountering and unknowingly internalising inaccurate information is arguably greater for beginner learners (A1-A2), who lack the linguistic proficiency to detect errors, compared to advanced learners (C1), who can better critically evaluate outputs. This necessitates a differentiated approach to AI literacy training based on proficiency level.

The correlation data reveals a clear developmental trajectory in AI usage. Beginners (A1-A2) rely heavily on AI for transactional, compensatory functions like translation (88.9% of A1 users) and pronunciation, treating it as a survival tool. This aligns with their high valuation of personalized learning (83.3%), as they seek to build foundational knowledge. In contrast, advanced learners (C1) leverage AI as an interactive partner for conversation (57.1%) and cultural exploration, reflecting a shift towards nuanced practice and fluency maintenance. This progression from basic to sophisticated application is further evidenced by the strong positive correlation between user familiarity and functional diversity; highly familiar students use

AI for advanced tasks like feedback tutoring (33.3%) and research (25%), while less familiar peers remain confined to basic translation.

The universal concern over AI hallucinations is, however, critically moderated by proficiency. The risk is most acute for beginners, who lack the linguistic metaknowledge to detect fabrications. This is compounded by their high anxiety about misuse (85.7% of A1 learners), suggesting a fear of unintentional transgression due to a lack of guidance. Advanced learners, while still wary of inaccuracies (71.4%), report lower concern about misuse (55.6%), indicating their proficiency grants them greater confidence to navigate ethical dilemmas and focus on the technology's inherent unreliability.

The near-total lack of institutional guidance (95%) exacerbates these stratified risks and represents a fundamental failure to support pedagogically sound adoption. Without clear policies, beginners are left vulnerable to misinformation, while all students operate in an assessment grey zone that compromises academic integrity. The absence of clear policies directly influences assessment integrity, as students operate in a grey area regarding acceptable use. This can lead to both unintentional misuse and challenges for educators in upholding academic standards, underscoring the urgent need for the ethical frameworks called for by Creely (2024).

The findings of this study point to several critical areas for action. To bridge the gap between student awareness and effective, ethical usage, the following integrated recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Integration: Develop a Tiered AI Literacy Curriculum
Move beyond generic warnings or ad-hoc advice. A structured curriculum for critical AI evaluation could be formally integrated into language syllabi across all year groups and proficiency levels. This integration should be differentiated:

For Beginners (A1-B1 CEFR): Focus curriculum modules on identifying obvious inaccuracies and hallucinations, understanding basic ethical use (e.g., when translation is appropriate), and using AI for vocabulary building and simple comprehension checks.
For Intermediate & Advanced Learners (B2-C2 CEFR): Develop advanced modules that focus on critiquing style, tone, and cultural nuance in AI-generated text; using AI as a conversation partner for fluency; and leveraging it for complex tasks like brainstorming and refining ideas within clearly defined ethical boundaries.

2. Pedagogical Approaches: Leverage AI for Differentiated Learning and Critical Engagement
Educators should adopt pedagogical strategies that harness the strengths of AI while mitigating its risks. This involves:

Designing AI-Enhanced, Proficiency-Specific Tasks: Create assignments where beginners use AI for enhancing comprehension, while advanced learners use it to simulate debates or enhance critical analysis. This aligns with the finding that usage needs evolve from transactional to interactive.
Scaffolding Prompt Crafting and Output Evaluation: Directly teach students how to formulate effective prompts and, crucially, how to critically evaluate the outputs they receive. This transforms the tool from a black box into a resource for developing critical digital literacy skills.

3. Policy Development: Implement Transparent, Pedagogically-Grounded Policies
Institutions must develop clear, accessible policies that distinguish between authorised and unauthorised use of AI. These policies must be proactively communicated to all students and staff

and be explicitly embedded within all course and assessment guidelines to ensure consistency and fairness.

4. Educator Readiness: Invest in Comprehensive Professional Development
Mandatory training is essential to equip educators with the skills to implement the above recommendations. Training should focus on using AI tools, designing AI-enhanced syllabi, understanding the proficiency-based usage patterns identified in this study, and leading discussions on digital ethics.

5. Assessment Reform: Redesign Language Assessments for the AI Age
Embrace a fundamental shift in assessment design to ensure academic integrity and measure true language proficiency. This includes:

Emphasizing Process and Metacognition: Develop assessments like reflective portfolios or annotated drafts where students must document and justify their use of AI throughout the learning and drafting process, thereby reducing the incentive for misuse and encouraging transparent engagement.
Incorporating Authentic and AI-Resistant Tasks: Prioritise in-class performances, oral presentations, viva voce (oral) exams, and assessments based on specific course materials, discussions, or recent events that AI cannot easily replicate.
Focusing on Higher-Order Skills: Design tasks that require critical analysis, synthesis of multiple sources, personal reflection, and creative application of knowledge—skills that AI can assist with but cannot wholly generate with genuine understanding.

While generative AI tools show promise for enhancing language learning experiences in HE, their effective integration requires a thoughtful approach that balances technological innovation with pedagogical soundness and ethical considerations. The gap between student awareness and actual usage, coupled with the lack of institutional guidance, highlights the need for proactive engagement with these technologies in the language education landscape.

5. Conclusion, limitations and suggestions for further research

The findings of this study highlight a nuanced engagement with generative AI tools in HE language learning, revealing both opportunities and challenges. While many students recognise the benefits of such technologies (including immediate feedback, tailored learning experiences and practical support with tasks like translation, grammar and conversation practice) adoption remains inconsistent with a substantial number yet to incorporate AI effectively into their academic routines. Moreover, students voiced significant concerns about misinformation, ethical issues and bias within AI-generated content, underscoring the educational importance of fostering digital literacy and critical awareness. This is compounded by a reported lack of institutional guidance, pointing to an urgent need for universities to implement supportive measures such as orientation modules and ethical frameworks to empower students in using AI responsibly and effectively.

While this study highlights the growing role of generative AI in language learning, several limitations must be acknowledged. The rapid evolution of AI technologies means that findings may quickly become outdated as new tools and updates emerge as we speak. A key limitation of this study is its single-institution, convenience sample, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Future research should pursue multi-institutional studies to capture a wider diversity of contexts and student demographics. To build upon these findings, longitudinal studies are crucial to track how student

perceptions and usage patterns evolve as the technology and institutional policies mature. Furthermore, experimental research comparing language acquisition outcomes between cohorts using AI with structured guidance and those without would provide invaluable evidence for effective integration strategies. Crucially, experimental studies are needed to measure the causal impact of *differentiated* AI training (e.g., A1 vs. C1 curricula) on specific language acquisition outcomes.

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Appendix: Generative AI Knowledge and Use among University Language Students Survey

1. Are you studying languages: as part of your Modern Languages and Cultures degree/ in the University-Wide Language Experience for All Programme
2. What languages are you currently studying? Select all that apply: Arabic/ Chinese /English/ French/ German /Italian /Japanese /Korean /Persian /Polish /Russian /Spanish / Urdu
3. In what Year of study and at what level?
   Year 1/ Year 2/ Year 3 / Year 4
   A1 / A2 / B1/ B2 / C1
4. Are you familiar with generative AI? Definitely not / Probably not / Neutral/ Probably yes / Definitely yes
5. Do you use generative AI to learn languages? Definitely not / Probably not / Neutral/ Probably yes / Definitely yes
6. How frequently do you use it? Everyday / 2 or 3 times a week / Once a week / Never
7. Which generative AI tools (e.g. CoPilot, ChatGPT, Bing, Gemini, etc.) do you use? Microsoft CoPilot / ChatGPT / GPT 4/ Google's Gemini / Bing / Other
8. In what ways do you use generative AI for language learning? Check all the options that apply: Comprehension aid / Written production aid/ Translation aid / Conversation partner / Feedback tutor / Grammar and culture explanations / Vocabulary development / Brainstorming ideas / Mind mapping concepts / Research aid / Drafting aid / pronunciation aid
9. Can you upload a screenshot example of prompt and generative AI output that you found useful for language learning, or for connecting language learning with content/culture knowledge?
10. What advantages do you see in using generative AI for language learning? Select all that apply: Personalized learning / Interactive and engaging practice / Immediate feedback / Knowledge creation / Other
11. What disadvantages do you see in using generative AI for language learning? Select all that apply: Hallucination i.e. generation of nonsensical or inaccurate content / Potential biases / Misuse concerns / Other
12. Have you been shown how to use or how not to use generative AI in class? Give an example.
13. What kind of support would you like to receive to use generative AI for language learning and why?
14. Do you think generative AI could be used for exam preparation? How and why?
15. Are you aware of the University policy on the use of AI? Definitely not / Probably not / Neutral/ Probably yes / Definitely yes