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Leveraging ChatGPT to enhance EFL reading skills for 10–12 year-old students

Neeti Tripathi, Bangladesh

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School context

The international school in question caters to students aged 3–18 and operates as an English-medium institution, placing a high priority on developing strong English proficiency. Despite this focus, traditional teaching methods have not significantly improved students' English reading skills or their engagement, particularly in the elementary school grades. The school leadership is open to exploring innovative pedagogical approaches and integrating technology to enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading instruction for students in their transition years, specifically those aged 10–12 years. Furthermore, teachers at the school are highly enthusiastic about professional development opportunities that would enhance their skills and enable them to provide more personalised learning experiences to their students.

About the author

Neeti Tripathi is an educator from India with 18 years of experience teaching diverse curricula, including IB, Cambridge and Indian syllabi. Currently Principal of Junior School at an international school in Bangladesh, Neeti is professionally trained and skilled in core pedagogical approaches and leadership strategies. She is also an accredited Cambridge Programme Leader and certified British Council Trainer for Core Skills and Leadership in Bangladesh. Her breadth of knowledge and hands-on expertise make Neeti well-poised to investigate innovative solutions for improving EFL education.



Key learnings

This research aimed to improve EFL reading instruction using ChatGPT.

- Students viewed ChatGPT positively for enhancing English reading skills while parents were concerned about reduced creativity, increased screen time, academic integrity, and the need for clear policies.
- EFL teachers recognised ChatGPT's benefits for reading skills and student engagement but expressed concerns over originality, ethical issues, and potential parental disapproval.
- Developing and implementing an AI policy with the input of all stakeholders is necessary to address concerns and integrate AI tools effectively into the school's EFL curriculum.
- The action plan includes regularly monitoring and evaluating ChatGPT's educational impact.
- Strategies involve gradual curriculum integration, continuous improvement research, and a yearly review of the AI policy.



Background to action research

To address the challenges of teaching EFL reading skills, the researcher proposed leveraging ChatGPT's capabilities as a generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool to provide personalised and adaptive instructions catered to each learner's needs and interests.

With AI tools like ChatGPT becoming increasingly prevalent, understanding student attitudes, parental perceptions, and teacher insights is crucial. ChatGPT's potential to collaborate with teachers in developing engaging reading activities also makes it a valuable professional development tool.

The school leadership welcomed investigating ChatGPT's possibilities as an innovative solution aligned with the institution's focus on preparing students and teachers for 21st-century education and the importance of aligning AI usage with the values and expectations of students, parents and educators in specific educational settings.

Action research rationale

This research aims to improve EFL reading instruction using ChatGPT, addressing critical pedagogical needs by facilitating personalised reading support and activities. ChatGPT's capabilities enable the provision of tailored instructions, feedback and content recommendations according to each student's proficiency level, significantly enhancing motivation and reading outcomes. Teachers benefit immensely from this technological integration, as ChatGPT offers new insights into pedagogy and efficient EFL teaching methodologies. It is a collaborative tool for designing engaging, customised reading lesson plans and materials, expanding teachers' professional skills and enriching their pedagogical knowledge. Using ChatGPT in lesson planning allows for the incorporation of advanced strategies in teaching EFL reading competencies.

The research also seeks to clarify the roles of ChatGPT in the educational ecosystem, explicitly addressing how it will be incorporated into the school's EFL curriculum. This integration is guided by the school's educational technology policy, which supports the use of innovative tools in teaching to enhance learning outcomes. The study will examine how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT align with these policies and contribute to the school's educational strategic goals. The intention is to establish ChatGPT as a versatile resource that supports educators in delivering high-quality, personalised instruction for supplementary learning to enhance students' reading abilities.


By investigating parents' views and expectations, the research ensures that the integration of ChatGPT aligns with familial expectations and gathers essential parental support for its successful implementation. This dual approach underscores the potential of generative AI to enhance EFL reading instruction and foster a collaborative educational environment involving teachers, students and parents.

Expected outcomes

This action research has significant potential to:

- enhance students' English reading skills and engagement through personalised instructions and feedback with the help of ChatGPT-created lesson plans and resources
- empower teachers with a collaborative technology partner for material design and pedagogical improvements
- promote technology integration and innovation in EFL classrooms
- prepare students, parents and teachers for next-generation AI-powered education
- yield insights to guide effective implementation of ChatGPT for EFL education.

The intention is to establish ChatGPT as a versatile resource that supports educators in delivering high-quality, personalised instruction for supplementary learning to enhance students' reading abilities.



‘We have already learned all the academic skills in our schools, and we know how to use them; students must learn them before trying them with ChatGPT.’

A parent during the focus groups

Exploratory research questions

1. What opinions and attitudes do EFL students aged 10 to 12 at CIDER International School have towards using ChatGPT to sharpen their reading abilities?
2. What are parents’ attitudes, perceptions and expectations towards using ChatGPT to improve EFL reading abilities in their children aged 10 to 12 years?
3. How do teachers perceive the pedagogical utility of ChatGPT in enhancing students’ EFL reading skills and facilitating their professional development?

Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach to fully comprehend the topic, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies. The researcher obtained comprehensive insights regarding the effects of ChatGPT on EFL reading skills and triangulated data.

Data collection methods

Quantitative data collection

Questionnaire: A paper-based questionnaire was administered to approximately 100 students aged 10 to 12 years. This questionnaire encompassed various aspects, including reading skills, engagement levels, and the perceived impact of ChatGPT. The quantitative data helped the researcher gauge the statistical significance of any observed effects.

Qualitative data collection

Parents’ focus groups: Four focus groups were held, each with 8 to 10 parents. This qualitative method provided insightful information about how parents view, feel about, and anticipate the use of ChatGPT in their children’s EFL instruction. The combined experience of the parents enabled the researcher to understand the social and cultural aspects of the technology’s application on a deeper level.

Solo and group interviews for teachers:

The researcher conducted both solo and group interviews with eight teachers who taught EFL classes to students aged 10–12. This qualitative approach

aimed to explore teachers’ experiences, challenges and opinions regarding ChatGPT’s effect on students’ EFL reading skills and professional development opportunities. These interviews provided rich data on individual experiences and the group dynamics related to the technology’s usage.

Participant selection

Students: One hundred (100) students were approached to participate in the study, and the students were selected after their parents or guardians gave their mandatory consent.

Teachers: The study included eight teachers from CIDER International School. These teachers were directly involved in implementing the EFL curriculum for 10–12 year-old students.

Parents: Four focus groups, each composed of 8–10 parents, participated in the research. These parents were selected based on their consent to participate and represented a diverse range of backgrounds, including proficiency levels in English. This diversity helped us capture a wide array of parental perspectives.

Ethical considerations

All participants were notified of the research objectives and their rights, and parents or guardians provided consent for student participation. Students were also informed about the research. This consent was explicitly documented to ensure the ethical participation of minors in the study. All acquired data was kept strictly confidential. Codes were used to anonymise participant identities, protecting their privacy. Data was also stored securely to avoid unauthorised access.

One of the students wrote in the questionnaire: ‘I use ChatGPT because it is like a friend and does not judge me if I ask any question.’

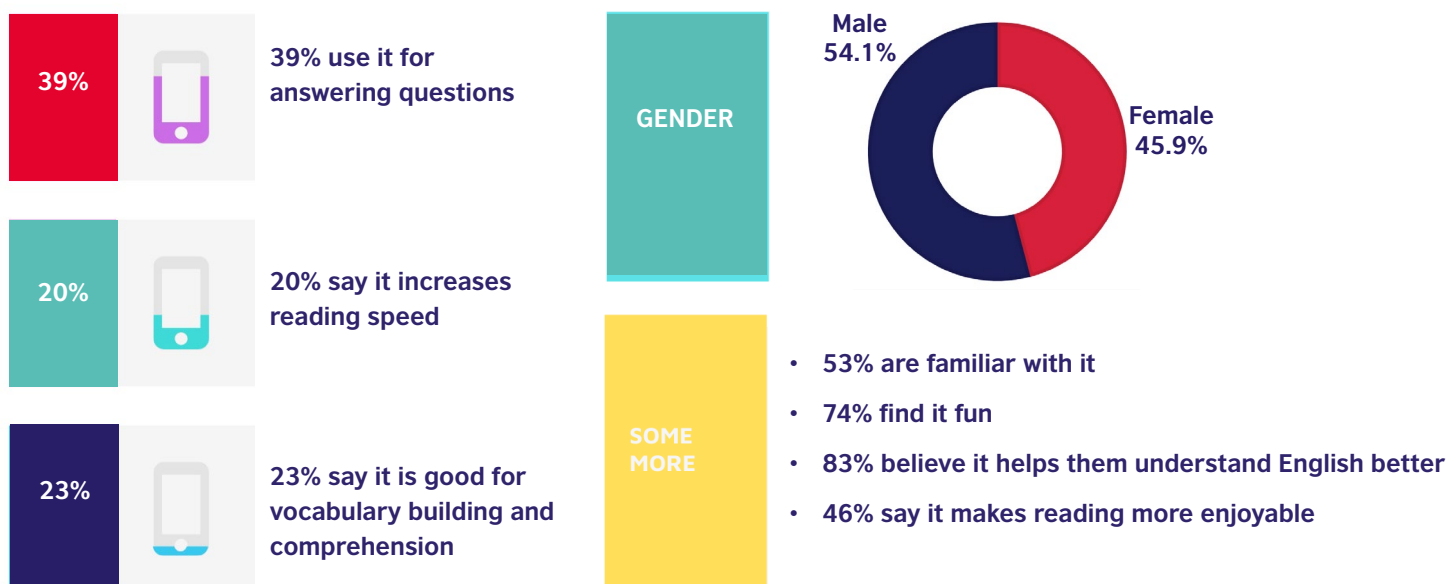


Figure 1: Students on ChatGPT usage

Key findings from exploration

Students generally view ChatGPT positively as a means of improving their English reading skills. They find it enjoyable and effective, particularly for answering questions and practising grammar. However, opinions vary regarding its influence on reading enjoyment. Enhancements such as adding voice and video features and using more straightforward language are suggested. Students see ChatGPT as a valuable addition to the EFL curriculum without concerns about creativity loss or over-dependence.

Parents express concerns about ChatGPT's impact on their children's creativity, increased screen time, academic integrity and school readiness. They emphasise the need for a proper introduction to ChatGPT, clear AI policies, transparent communication, and comprehensive information before its integration into the EFL curriculum.

Most EFL teachers are familiar with, and use, ChatGPT in their teaching, valuing its positive impact on reading skills and student engagement. They also use it for professional development. However, there are reservations about fully incorporating it into the curriculum due to concerns about originality, excessive digital usage, ethical issues, and potential parental dissatisfaction. Teachers suggest a balanced approach to ChatGPT's use, including thorough induction, an AI policy, and limited, supervised application.

Action plan

After analysing the findings, we formulated an action plan to address the identified needs.

- Interactive student training and activities with ChatGPT.
- Parental involvement through induction sessions and guidelines.
- Gradual implementation of ChatGPT into the curriculum.
- Teacher development includes training with a balanced approach to using ChatGPT and other resources, emphasising ethics, creativity and originality.
- Generate and establish clear AI policies and guidelines for ChatGPT use in school EFL curricula with the help of EFL teachers, students, and parents, which will be reviewed yearly.
- Emphasis on ethics, creativity and originality in ChatGPT applications.
- Regularly monitor and evaluate ChatGPT's educational impact.
- Promotion of research for ChatGPT improvements.

The action plan includes regularly monitoring and evaluating ChatGPT's educational impact, emphasising ethical use, creativity, and the importance of original work.

Action plan implementation

A comprehensive strategy was developed to establish clear AI policies for integrating AI tools into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) syllabus, guided by relevant research questions. EFL teachers, student representatives, parents and administrative members were involved in the policy development process. The process began with an in-depth review phase, where existing policies were examined and stakeholders were interviewed.

Based on these findings, a preliminary policy will be carefully crafted, considering ethical, educational and logistical aspects to ensure that technology integration aligns with the pedagogical needs and the ethos of the academic community. This policy will undergo a thorough review, inviting feedback from the wider educational community to ensure it meets expectations and addresses any concerns.

After refining the policy, it will be implemented through a structured plan that includes teacher development sessions and informative workshops for parents and students, ensuring everyone understands and aligns with the school's educational goals. This initiative will represent a progressive approach to adopting AI in education, informed by international examples and tailored to the unique environment of CIDER International School in Bangladesh.

Data collection procedure

A comprehensive data collection process centred around the three key research questions addressed the challenges and opportunities of implementing an AI policy at an educational institution. First, reflective journals explored the obstacles and potential benefits of formulating such a policy. Stakeholders, including teachers, students and administrators, documented their experiences, observations, and evolving perspectives on AI integration within the educational framework over a set period. This method provided deep, reflective insights into the proposed policy's personal and collective implications.

Second, the views on developing and applying an AI policy within the school context were gathered through focus groups. Separate sessions were organised for parents, students, EFL teachers and school administrators, facilitating a structured yet open dialogue that allowed each group to voice their specific concerns, expectations and recommendations.

This approach ensured that the diverse viewpoints and experiences informed the policy development of the entire school community.

A literature review was conducted to benchmark against global practices, focusing on how educational institutions worldwide have navigated the ethical, pedagogical and practical considerations of integrating AI into their academic programmes. This extensive review identified best practices, highlighted potential pitfalls, and uncovered innovative strategies that could inform the institution's policy formulation process.

Together, these data collection methods provided a rich and broader understanding of the implications of introducing an AI policy, ensuring that the development was grounded in both the local context and global best practices.

Key findings

- Students view ChatGPT positively for enhancing English reading skills, appreciating its help with grammar and question-answering.
- Parental concerns focus on the potential for reduced creativity, increased screen time, academic integrity, and the need for clear AI policies and transparent communication.
- EFL teachers recognise ChatGPT's benefits for reading skills and student engagement but express concerns over originality, ethical issues, and potential parental disapproval.
- Teachers advocate for a balanced ChatGPT usage approach, underlining ethics, creativity and originality.
- Developing and implementing an AI policy with the help of all stakeholders is necessary to address concerns and integrate AI tools effectively in the school's EFL curriculum.
- The action plan includes regularly monitoring and evaluating ChatGPT's educational impact, emphasising ethical use, creativity, and the importance of original work.
- Strategies involve gradual curriculum integration, continuous improvement research, and a yearly review of the AI policy to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

