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Artículo Científico

Percepciones estudiantiles sobre herramientas de IA para el aprendizaje de inglés: oportunidades y desafíos

University Students' Perceptions of AI-Powered Tools for English Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges

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Resumen: La integración de herramientas de inteligencia artificial en la educación superior transforma fundamentalmente los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, particularmente en la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras. Este estudio investigó las percepciones de estudiantes universitarios sobre herramientas de inteligencia artificial para el aprendizaje del inglés, centrándose en las oportunidades y desafíos desde las perspectivas de los aprendices. Se empleó un diseño de métodos mixtos descriptivo con sesenta estudiantes de nivel intermedio-alto matriculados en dos secciones de Inglés 7 en la Universidad Agraria del Ecuador. Los datos se recolectaron mediante un cuestionario estructurado de treinta y dos ítems y doce entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados revelaron percepciones generalmente positivas sobre las oportunidades que ofrecen las herramientas de inteligencia artificial, con puntuación media de cuatro puntos cero uno, destacando disponibilidad continua, retroalimentación inmediata y apoyo personalizado. Sin embargo, los participantes también identificaron desafíos significativos, incluyendo preocupaciones sobre dependencia excesiva, incertidumbre respecto al uso apropiado y cuestiones de integridad académica. Los hallazgos demuestran que los estudiantes poseen conciencia metacognitiva sofisticada sobre las implicaciones del uso de inteligencia artificial, reconociendo simultáneamente beneficios genuinos y riesgos potenciales. El estudio contribuye evidencia empírica que centra las voces estudiantiles en conversaciones sobre integración de inteligencia artificial en educación lingüística, sugiriendo la necesidad urgente de marcos pedagógicos explícitos, directrices institucionales claras y desarrollo de alfabetización crítica en inteligencia artificial.

Palabras clave: inteligencia artificial, aprendizaje de inglés, percepciones estudiantiles, educación superior, tecnología educativa.

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Abstract:

The integration of artificial intelligence-powered tools in higher education fundamentally transforms teaching and learning processes, particularly in foreign language acquisition. This study investigated university students' perceptions of artificial intelligence-powered tools for English language learning, focusing on opportunities and challenges from learners' perspectives. A descriptive mixed-methods design was employed with sixty upper-intermediate level students enrolled in two sections of English 7 at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador. Data were collected through a thirty-two item structured questionnaire and twelve semi-structured interviews. Results revealed generally positive perceptions of opportunities provided by artificial intelligence tools, with a mean score of four point zero one, highlighting continuous availability, immediate feedback, and personalized support. However, participants also identified significant challenges, including concerns about over-reliance, uncertainty regarding appropriate use, and academic integrity issues. Findings demonstrate that students possess sophisticated metacognitive awareness about implications of artificial intelligence use, simultaneously recognizing genuine benefits and potential risks. The study contributes empirical evidence centering student voices in conversations about artificial intelligence integration in language education, suggesting urgent need for explicit pedagogical frameworks, clear institutional guidelines, and development of critical artificial intelligence literacy.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, English learning, student perceptions, higher education, educational technology.

1. Introducción

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education represents one of the most transformative developments in contemporary pedagogy, fundamentally reshaping how students' access, process, and apply knowledge across disciplines (Almuhanna, 2025; Cai et al., 2025). This technological revolution becomes particularly significant in language education, where AI-powered tools offer unprecedented opportunities to address longstanding pedagogical challenges, including limited access to authentic language practice, personalized feedback, and individualized learning pathways (Ali et al., 2025; Baba Khouya & Ismaili Alaoui, 2025). As educational institutions worldwide increasingly adopt AI technologies, understanding how students perceive and interact with these tools emerges as a critical factor in determining their effective integration and educational impact (Sok et al., 2025).

Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, AI-powered applications demonstrate considerable potential to enhance multiple dimensions of language acquisition. Recent research indicates that AI tools support writing development through automated feedback and content generation (Muslimin et al.,

2024; Zhao, 2025), facilitate speaking practice via conversational agents and pronunciation assessment systems (Nguyen Huu, 2025; Zou et al., 2025), and improve reading comprehension through adaptive learning platforms (Jose, 2025). Beyond skill-specific applications, AI technologies influence broader aspects of language learning, including students' willingness to communicate (Zou et al., 2025), their understanding of feedback processes (Y. et al., 2025), and their approaches to collaborative writing (Nguyen et al., 2024). The diversity of available AI tools—from general-purpose platforms like ChatGPT (Toosi, 2025; Yiğit et al., 2025) to specialized applications such as Cami AI for writing instruction (Muslimin et al., 2024) and Microsoft Teams Reading Progress for literacy development (Jose, 2025)—creates a complex ecosystem that requires careful examination of user experiences and perceptions.

However, the rapid proliferation of AI technologies in EFL contexts outpaces empirical understanding of how students experience, evaluate, and utilize these tools in their language learning processes. While technological capabilities continue to advance, student perceptions ultimately mediate the actual adoption, sustained engagement, and learning outcomes associated with AI-powered applications (Ali et al., 2025; Jamshed et al., 2024). Research across diverse educational contexts reveals varying patterns of student attitudes, ranging from enthusiastic adoption and perceived benefits to concerns about over-reliance, academic integrity, and diminished critical thinking skills (Nwagbara, 2025; Yiğit et al., 2025). These divergent perspectives exist even among students within the same institutions and programs (Babanoğlu et al., 2025), suggesting that individual differences, prior experiences, and contextual factors significantly shape how learners perceive AI's role in their education. Understanding these perceptions becomes essential for educators seeking to leverage AI tools effectively while addressing legitimate student concerns and optimizing learning experiences (Waluyo & Rouaghe, 2025).

The current body of research on AI in EFL education demonstrates several notable patterns and gaps. Studies examining teacher perspectives on AI integration reveal cautious optimism tempered by concerns about implementation challenges and pedagogical appropriateness (Ali et al., 2025; Almuhanna, 2025). Research on specific AI applications provides evidence of effectiveness for particular skills or contexts (Jose, 2025; Muslimin et al., 2024; Nguyen Huu, 2025), yet comprehensive understanding of student perceptions across multiple AI tools and learning contexts remains limited. Furthermore, much existing research focuses on either technological capabilities or learning outcomes, with insufficient attention to the student experience itself—how learners perceive the opportunities AI tools create the challenges they encounter, and the implications for their learning processes and academic development. As Isotalus et al. (2025) note in their study of AI as a feedback provider, understanding user perceptions proves crucial for successful technology integration, particularly when tools assume roles traditionally filled by human instructors.

This study addresses this research gap by investigating university students' perceptions of AI-powered tools for English language learning, with particular attention

to both the opportunities these technologies present and the challenges they pose from learners' perspectives. The research seeks to provide comprehensive insight into how students experience AI integration in their language learning, what benefits they perceive, what concerns they harbour, and how these perceptions might inform more effective pedagogical approaches to AI implementation in EFL contexts. By centering student voices in the conversation about AI in language education, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence that can guide educators, administrators, and technology developers in creating more learner-responsive AI-enhanced language learning environments.

2. Materiales y métodos

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to investigate university students' perceptions of AI-powered tools for English language learning. The mixed-methods approach enabled comprehensive exploration of both the breadth and depth of student experiences, combining quantitative data on perception patterns with qualitative insights into the reasoning, contexts, and nuances underlying these perceptions (Leavy, 2022). The research was conducted during the second academic semester of 2024-2025 at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador, Balzar and Palestina campus.

Participants and Context

The study population consisted of 60 undergraduate students enrolled in two sections of English 7, an upper-intermediate level course (B1+ according to the Common European Framework of Reference) within the institutional English program at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador. English 7 represents the seventh semester of required English instruction, with students typically having completed six prior semesters of language study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 24 years (M = 21.3, SD = 1.4) and represented diverse academic programs across agricultural sciences, engineering, economics, and related fields offered by the institution.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be: (a) currently enrolled in English 7 during the study period; (b) having completed at least five previous semesters of English instruction; (c) having prior exposure to or experience with at least one AI-powered tool for language learning purposes; and (d) willing to provide informed consent for participation. Exclusion criteria eliminated students who: (a) had not used any AI tools for English learning purposes; (b) were repeating the course for a third or subsequent time; or (c) withdrew from the course during the data collection period.

Of the 62 students initially enrolled across both sections, 60 met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate, yielding a participation rate of 96.8%. Two students were excluded: one had never utilized AI tools for language learning, and another withdrew from the course for personal reasons before data collection commenced.

Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized two complementary data collection instruments designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of student perceptions.

Perception Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire consisting of 32 items organized into four domains: (1) Awareness and Usage Patterns (8 items addressing frequency, types of AI tools used, and purposes of use); (2) Perceived Opportunities (10 items examining perceived benefits for language skills, learning processes, and academic outcomes); (3) Perceived Challenges (10 items exploring concerns, difficulties, and limitations encountered); and (4) Future Integration Preferences (4 items assessing willingness for continued use and suggestions for improvement). Items employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) for perception statements, along with multiple-choice and open-ended questions for usage patterns and experiences.

The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on AI in EFL education (Ali et al., 2025; Jamshed et al., 2024; Sok et al., 2025) and piloted with 15 students from English 6 courses to ensure clarity, appropriate length, and content validity. Minor revisions to wording and item order were made following pilot feedback. Internal consistency reliability for the final instrument achieved Cronbach's alpha values of .87 for the Perceived Opportunities subscale and .84 for the Perceived Challenges subscale, indicating good reliability.

Semi-structured Interviews: Following questionnaire administration, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected subsample of 12 participants (20% of total sample, 6 from each course section) to explore their perceptions in greater depth. Selection criteria ensured diversity in usage patterns (high vs. low frequency users), perceived proficiency levels, and initial questionnaire responses (positive, neutral, and critical perspectives). Interview protocol consisted of eight open-ended questions addressing: specific AI tools used and contexts of use; detailed descriptions of perceived benefits and learning advantages; challenges, concerns, or negative experiences encountered; comparison with traditional learning methods; impact on motivation and engagement; ethical considerations and academic integrity awareness; and recommendations for effective AI integration in EFL instruction. Interviews lasted 20-30 minutes each and were conducted in Spanish to ensure participant comfort and expression depth, then transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed a sequential process over six weeks during the academic semester. In week one, the research team introduced the study to both English 7 sections, explained its purpose and procedures, addressed questions, and obtained informed consent from willing participants. Students received assurance that participation was voluntary, responses would remain confidential, and their decisions would not affect course grades or academic standing.

During weeks two through three, participants completed the perception questionnaire during regularly scheduled class time, requiring approximately 25-30 minutes. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms to facilitate data collection and organization. Participants completed questionnaires individually without consultation, and the research team remained present to address clarification questions while ensuring no influence on responses.

Weeks four through six involved conducting the 12 semi-structured interviews with selected participants. Interviews took place in private, quiet locations on campus at times convenient

for participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit permission and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and all identifying information was removed from transcripts.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire underwent analysis using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) characterized participant demographics, usage patterns, and perception distributions across items and subscales. Independent samples t-tests compared perceptions between the two course sections, and correlation analysis examined relationships between usage frequency and perception variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative data from interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following the iterative process of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and theme definition. Two researchers independently coded three randomly selected transcripts, discussed discrepancies, and refined the coding framework to establish inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa = .82). The remaining transcripts were then systematically coded using the established framework. Themes emerging from qualitative analysis were used to contextualize, explain, and enrich quantitative findings, providing deeper understanding of the patterns observed in questionnaire data.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Universidad Agraria del Ecuador prior to participant recruitment or data collection (Approval Code: UAE-CEI-2024-089). All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No personally identifiable information was collected beyond that necessary for research purposes, and all data were stored securely with access limited to the research team. Participants received no compensation for participation, ensuring voluntary involvement free from undue influence. The study adhered to all institutional policies and national regulations governing research with human participants.

3. Resultados

3.1. Demographic Characteristics and AI Tool Usage Patterns

The final sample comprised 60 undergraduate students from Universidad Agraria del Ecuador, distributed across two English 7 course sections (Section A: n=30; Section B: n=30). The sample included 34 female students (56.7%) and 26 male students (43.3%), with ages ranging from 19 to 24 years (M=21.3, SD=1.4). Academic program representation included Agricultural Engineering (n=18, 30%), Economics (n=15, 25%), Food Engineering (n=12, 20%), Environmental Engineering (n=9, 15%), and Agroindustrial Engineering (n=6, 10%).

Regarding AI tool familiarity and usage, all 60 participants (100%) reported having used at least one AI-powered tool for English learning purposes within the previous six

months. Table 1 presents the distribution of AI tools used by participants and their reported frequency of use.

Table 1

AI Tools Used for English Language Learning and Frequency of Use (N=60)

AI Tool	Users (n)	Percentage	Daily Use	Weekly Use	Monthly Use	Occasional
ChatGPT	58	96.7%	24	21	8	5
Google Translate (AI)	52	86.7%	31	15	4	2
Grammarly	38	63.3%	12	18	6	2
DeepL Translator	27	45.0%	8	11	5	3
Microsoft Bing AI	19	31.7%	3	9	4	3
QuillBot	16	26.7%	2	7	4	3
Duolingo	14	23.3%	6	5	2	1
ELSA Speak	11	18.3%	4	4	2	1
WordTune	8	13.3%	1	3	2	2

Note: Participants could report using multiple tools. Frequency categories are mutually exclusive for each tool (Autors, 2026).

The most frequently utilized AI tool was ChatGPT (96.7%), followed by Google Translate with AI features (86.7%) and Grammarly (63.3%). Participants reported using AI tools primarily for writing assistance (n=56, 93.3%), translation support (n=54, 90%), grammar checking (n=49, 81.7%), vocabulary learning (n=43, 71.7%), and speaking practice (n=28, 46.7%). The mean number of different AI tools used per participant was 3.8 (SD=1.6, range=1-7).

3.2. Perceived Opportunities of AI-Powered Tools

Participants demonstrated generally positive perceptions regarding the opportunities AI tools provide for English language learning. Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics for items assessing perceived opportunities across different dimensions.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Opportunities (N=60)

Item	M	SD	Agreement
AI tools help me write more accurately in English	4.12	0.78	86.7%
AI tools provide immediate feedback on my language errors	4.23	0.71	90.0%
AI tools are available 24/7 when I need language support	4.45	0.68	93.3%
AI tools help me learn new vocabulary more effectively	3.98	0.84	80.0%
AI tools increase my confidence in using English	3.87	0.91	75.0%
AI tools help me understand grammar rules better	3.76	0.88	71.7%
AI tools save time when completing English assignments	4.18	0.75	85.0%

AI tools provide personalized learning support	3.65	0.96	68.3%
AI tools help me practice English outside of class	4.31	0.73	91.7%
AI tools make learning English more engaging	3.54	1.02	65.0%
Overall Perceived Opportunities Subscale	**4.01**	**0.61**	**80.7%**

Note: Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. *Agreement = percentage of participants selecting 4 or 5 (Autors, 2026).

The highest-rated opportunity was 24/7 availability (M=4.45, SD=0.68), followed by opportunities for practice outside class (M=4.31, SD=0.73) and immediate feedback provision (M=4.23, SD=0.71). The overall perceived opportunities subscale achieved a mean score of 4.01 (SD=0.61), indicating strong agreement with positive affordances of AI tools. No statistically significant differences emerged between the two course sections in overall perceived opportunities ($t(58)=1.34$, $p=.185$).

Participants identified specific learning domains where AI tools proved most beneficial. Writing assistance emerged as the most valued application, with 51 participants (85%) reporting significant improvements in writing quality, organization, and error reduction. Vocabulary expansion represented another major benefit, with 47 participants (78.3%) indicating that AI tools facilitated discovering contextually appropriate words and expressions. Additionally, 44 participants (73.3%) valued AI tools for providing explanations of grammar concepts and language rules in accessible formats.

3.3. Perceived Challenges and Concerns

Despite recognizing opportunities, participants also identified substantial challenges and concerns regarding AI tool use for language learning. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for perceived challenges.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Challenges (N=60)

Item	M	SD	Agreement*
I sometimes rely too much on AI tools instead of learning independently	3.94	0.89	78.3%
AI tools sometimes provide incorrect or inappropriate suggestions	3.76	0.85	71.7%
I worry about academic integrity when using AI tools	3.68	1.04	68.3%
AI tools may reduce my critical thinking skills	3.52	1.08	61.7%
I am unsure when it is appropriate to use AI tools for coursework	3.47	1.02	58.3%
AI tools sometimes cannot understand the context of my writing	3.41	0.94	56.7%
Using AI tools feels like cheating on assignments	2.98	1.15	41.7%
AI tools are too complex or difficult to use effectively	2.67	1.08	30.0%
I do not trust the information AI tools provide	2.54	1.01	25.0%

AI tools distract me from actual learning	2.43	1.06	21.7%
Overall Perceived Challenges Subscale	**3.14**	**0.68**	**52.4%**

Note: Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. *Agreement = percentage of participants selecting 4 or 5 (Autors, 2026).

The most prominent challenge was over-reliance on AI tools (M=3.94, SD=0.89), with 78.3% of participants acknowledging this concern. Accuracy and appropriateness of AI suggestions also emerged as significant issues (M=3.76, SD=0.85), followed by academic integrity concerns (M=3.68, SD=1.04). The overall perceived challenges subscale achieved a mean score of 3.14 (SD=0.68), indicating moderate agreement with various concerns. No statistically significant differences existed between course sections for overall perceived challenges ($t(58)=0.87$, $p=.388$).

Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between frequency of AI tool use and concerns about difficulty of use ($r=-.34$, $p=.008$), suggesting that more frequent users developed greater comfort and competence. However, frequency of use showed a significant positive correlation with over-reliance concerns ($r=.41$, $p=.001$), indicating that heavier users were more aware of dependency risks.

3.4. Preferences for Future AI Integration

Regarding future integration of AI tools in English language instruction, 54 participants (90%) expressed willingness to continue using AI tools for language learning, while 49 participants (81.7%) supported formal integration of AI tools into course curriculum. Participants identified several conditions they considered important for effective AI integration: clear guidelines on appropriate use (n=57, 95%), teacher training on AI tool capabilities and limitations (n=53, 88.3%), balanced approaches combining AI tools with traditional methods (n=51, 85%), and explicit instruction on academic integrity and ethical AI use (n=48, 80%).

When asked to rate their preference for different AI integration models, participants favored a supplementary approach (n=42, 70%) where AI tools complement teacher instruction rather than replacing it, compared to AI as the primary learning method (n=3, 5%) or no AI integration (n=6, 10%). Nine participants (15%) expressed no strong preference.

3.5. Qualitative Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

Thematic analysis of the 12 semi-structured interviews revealed five major themes that contextualized and elaborated upon quantitative findings.

3.5.1. AI Tools as Learning Facilitators and Confidence Builders

Participants consistently described AI tools as reducing anxiety associated with language production, particularly in writing. One participant explained: "When I write an essay, I feel more confident because I can check my grammar and vocabulary with ChatGPT before submitting. It's like having a tutor available anytime" (Participant 3). Another noted: "I used to be afraid of making mistakes, but now I can practice writing

without judgment from the AI tool" (Participant 7). This theme aligned with quantitative findings showing that 75% of participants agreed AI tools increased their confidence.

3.5.2. Tension Between Assistance and Over-Dependence

Interview participants acknowledged a difficult balance between beneficial assistance and problematic over-reliance. Participant 5 articulated this tension: "Sometimes I know I should try to write something myself first, but it's so easy to just ask ChatGPT... I worry I'm not really learning." Similarly, Participant 11 stated: "The problem is that AI tools make everything so easy that I don't challenge myself anymore. I need to be more disciplined." This theme corresponded with the quantitative finding that 78.3% of participants recognized over-reliance as a concern.

3.5.3. Uncertainty About Ethical Boundaries

Multiple interview participants expressed confusion about what constitutes appropriate versus inappropriate AI tool use for coursework. Participant 2 explained: "I'm never sure how much help from AI is okay. Can I use it to improve my grammar? To get ideas? To write a whole paragraph? Nobody has explained this clearly." Participant 8 echoed: "Different teachers have different rules about AI, so I don't know what's allowed." This uncertainty manifested in the quantitative finding that 58.3% of participants were unsure when AI tool use was appropriate for coursework.

3.5.4. Quality and Reliability Concerns

Participants reported experiences with incorrect, contextually inappropriate, or culturally insensitive AI suggestions. Participant 4 described: "Sometimes ChatGPT gives me formal vocabulary when I need informal or suggests expressions that sound unnatural. I've learned I need to verify everything." Participant 9 noted: "I once used a phrase the AI suggested, and my teacher said it was technically correct, but no native speaker would say it that way." These experiences validated quantitative results showing 71.7% of participants agreed that AI tools sometimes provide incorrect suggestions.

3.5.5. Desire for Structured Integration with Pedagogical Guidance

Interview participants emphasized wanting explicit instruction on effective and ethical AI use rather than informal, self-directed application. Participant 1 stated: "Teachers should show us the best ways to use these tools for learning, not just tell us not to use them." Participant 12 suggested: "It would be helpful if we had lessons about how to use AI tools properly—like when to use them, when not to, and how to learn from them instead of just copying." This theme supported quantitative findings showing 95% of participants wanted clear guidelines on appropriate AI use and 88.3% desired teacher training on AI tools.

3.5.6. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data revealed a complex, nuanced picture of student perceptions. While quantitative data demonstrated strong agreement with AI tools' benefits (M=4.01) and moderate concern about challenges (M=3.14), qualitative data illuminated the contextual factors, emotional dimensions, and practical experiences underlying these numerical patterns. The complementary findings suggested that students recognize genuine learning opportunities in AI tools while simultaneously grappling with uncertainty about appropriate use, concerns about over-dependence, and desires for clearer pedagogical frameworks to guide their AI-enhanced language learning.

4. Discusión

The findings of this study reveal a complex landscape of student perceptions regarding AI-powered tools for English language learning, characterized by simultaneous recognition of substantial opportunities and legitimate concerns. The high overall perceived opportunities score (M=4.01) indicates that university students at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador view AI tools as valuable resources for language development, consistent with recent research documenting positive student attitudes toward AI in EFL contexts (Ali et al., 2025; Sok et al., 2025). However, the moderate perceived challenges score (M=3.14) suggests that enthusiasm for AI tools coexists with critical awareness of potential drawbacks, reflecting the nuanced perspectives documented in other studies examining student experiences with educational AI (Jamshed et al., 2024; Yiğit et al., 2025).

Students' strong appreciation for 24/7 availability and immediate feedback aligns with research demonstrating that accessibility and responsiveness constitute key advantages of AI-enhanced language learning (Nguyen Huu, 2025; Y. et al., 2025). The finding that 96.7% of participants utilize ChatGPT reflects broader patterns of general-purpose AI adoption in educational settings (Toosi, 2025; Yiğit et al., 2025), while substantial use of specialized tools like Grammarly (63.3%) and emerging platforms such as Cami AI indicates diversification in students' AI tool repertoires. This diversity supports Muslimin et al.'s (2024) observation that specialized AI applications offer targeted support for specific language skills, though our findings suggest that general-purpose tools like ChatGPT maintain dominant positions in students' actual practice patterns.

The prominence of over-reliance concerns (78.3% agreement) represents a significant finding that extends beyond previous research focused primarily on effectiveness or satisfaction measures. This self-awareness regarding dependency risks mirrors patterns observed in studies of AI use across diverse educational contexts (Nwagbara, 2025) and suggests that students possess metacognitive awareness of how AI tools might influence their learning processes. The positive correlation between usage

frequency and over-reliance concerns (r=.41, p=.001) indicates that concerns emerge through experience rather than speculation, supporting calls for explicit pedagogical frameworks to guide appropriate AI integration (Waluyo & Rouaghe, 2025).

Students' uncertainty about appropriate AI use (58.3% experiencing confusion) highlights a critical gap between technology availability and pedagogical guidance. This finding resonates with Babanoğlu et al.'s (2025) documentation of diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives among prospective EFL teachers regarding AI integration, suggesting that ambiguity exists at multiple levels of the educational system. The qualitative finding that different instructors maintain different AI policies without clear institutional guidelines indicates a need for coherent, well-articulated frameworks that balance innovation with academic integrity, consistent with recommendations emerging from research on AI-enhanced feedback processes (Y. et al., 2025).

The study's mixed-methods approach reveals that quantitative patterns of perception gain substantial explanatory depth from qualitative contextualization. For instance, while 75% of participants agreed that AI tools increase confidence, interview data illuminated the mechanisms through which this occurs—reducing performance anxiety, enabling private practice without judgment, and facilitating iterative improvement processes. Similarly, the 71.7% who identified accuracy concerns provided specific examples of contextually inappropriate suggestions, culturally insensitive outputs, and stylistically unnatural language that quantitative measures alone would not capture. These complementary insights support the value of integrating multiple data sources when examining educational technology adoption (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Leavy, 2022).

Students' overwhelming preference for supplementary rather than primary AI integration (70% vs. 5%) aligns with pedagogical research emphasizing that technology should augment rather than replace human instruction (Almuhanna, 2025; Isotalus et al., 2025). This preference, combined with strong desire for explicit guidelines (95%) and teacher training on AI capabilities (88.3%), suggests that students recognize the need for informed mediation of AI-enhanced learning rather than autonomous, unguided tool adoption. These findings parallel research documenting the importance of teacher perspectives and competencies in successful AI integration (Ali et al., 2025; Cai et al., 2025).

The study's context at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador, where English 7 students possess upper-intermediate proficiency and substantial prior language learning experience, suggests that the observed patterns characterize relatively advanced learners who have developed metacognitive awareness of their learning processes. Whether similar perception patterns exist among beginning-level students or learners in different institutional contexts remains an empirical question requiring further investigation. Additionally, the study's focus on two course sections, while yielding rich

data, limits generalizability across the broader spectrum of Ecuadorian higher education or international EFL contexts.

These findings carry important implications for EFL pedagogy in AI-enhanced learning environments. Educators should acknowledge that students already use AI tools extensively and independently, making prohibition impractical and potentially counterproductive. Instead, instruction should focus on developing critical AI literacy—helping students understand tool capabilities and limitations, evaluate output quality, recognize appropriate contexts for use, and integrate AI assistance into rather than substituting for their own learning efforts. Institutional policies should provide clear, consistent guidelines while allowing pedagogical flexibility, and professional development should prepare instructors to model effective AI use and guide students in developing sophisticated, ethically grounded approaches to AI-enhanced language learning

5. Conclusiones

This study successfully achieved its objective of investigating university students' perceptions of AI-powered tools for English language learning, documenting both the opportunities these technologies present and the challenges they pose from learners' perspectives. The research demonstrates that students at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador possess sophisticated, nuanced views of AI tools that simultaneously recognize their value for language development while maintaining critical awareness of potential limitations and risks. This dual recognition—enthusiastic adoption coupled with thoughtful caution—represents a more complex reality than simplistic narratives of either technological determinism or reflexive resistance would suggest.

The findings reveal that AI tools have become integral to students' language learning ecosystems, with universal adoption and diverse application across writing, translation, grammar checking, and vocabulary development. Students value these tools primarily for their accessibility, immediacy, and capacity to provide personalized support outside traditional instructional contexts. However, this widespread adoption occurs largely through informal, self-directed exploration rather than through pedagogically-guided integration, creating a significant disconnect between students' actual AI use and institutional acknowledgment or support for such practices.

A critical contribution of this research lies in documenting students' metacognitive awareness of AI-related challenges, particularly over-reliance and uncertainty about appropriate use. Rather than uncritically embracing AI tools, students demonstrate reflexive understanding of how these technologies might influence their learning processes, autonomy, and skill development. This awareness, however, does not translate into clear action frameworks in the absence of explicit pedagogical guidance, leaving students to navigate complex ethical and practical decisions about AI use without adequate institutional support or consistent instructor direction.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on AI in language education by centering student voices and experiences rather than focusing exclusively on technological capabilities or learning outcomes. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research captures both the breadth of perception patterns across a student cohort and the depth of individual experiences, revealing how quantitative trends manifest in actual learning practices and decision-making processes. This methodological approach proves particularly valuable for understanding emerging technologies where lived experiences provide essential insights that complement effectiveness studies.

The research findings carry significant implications for EFL pedagogy and institutional policy in AI-enhanced learning environments. Educational institutions can no longer treat AI tools as future possibilities or optional supplements; students already use these technologies extensively, making the relevant question not whether to integrate AI but how to do so thoughtfully and effectively. This reality necessitates explicit curricula for developing critical AI literacy, clear institutional policies that balance innovation with academic integrity, and professional development that prepares instructors to guide rather than prohibit student AI use.

The strong student preference for supplementary rather than primary AI integration provides important guidance for pedagogical design. Rather than replacing human instruction or traditional learning methods, AI tools should complement and enhance existing approaches, with clear delineation of when, how, and why particular tools serve specific learning objectives. This balanced approach respects both the genuine affordances AI technologies offer and the irreplaceable dimensions of human interaction, cultural understanding, and authentic communication that remain central to language education.

The study also highlights the urgency of developing coherent, consistent frameworks for AI use in academic contexts. The confusion students experience regarding appropriate boundaries reflects broader institutional uncertainty about how to respond to rapidly evolving technologies. Clear guidelines—developed through inclusive dialogue among students, instructors, administrators, and educational technology specialists—can transform this uncertainty into productive engagement, enabling students to leverage AI tools for learning enhancement while maintaining academic integrity and developing independent competencies.

Finally, this research underscores that effective AI integration in language education requires ongoing investigation and responsive adaptation rather than one-time implementation. As AI technologies continue evolving and as students develop increasingly sophisticated usage patterns, educational institutions must maintain commitment to understanding learner perspectives, evaluating pedagogical approaches, and refining policies based on empirical evidence. The present study provides a foundational understanding of student perceptions at a specific moment in AI's educational trajectory, establishing a baseline for future research examining how

these perceptions and practices evolve as both technologies and pedagogical frameworks mature. Future investigations should explore how AI literacy instruction influences student practices, how different instructional contexts shape AI integration patterns, and how students' relationships with AI tools develop across their language learning trajectories from beginning to advanced proficiency levels.

CONFLICTO DE INTERESES

“Los autores declaran no tener ningún conflicto de intereses”.

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