Understanding Uzbekistan University EFL Teachers' Perceptions of ChatGPT: From Benefits to Ethical Challenges

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***Abstract*—Artificial intelligence-enhanced tools have entered all sectors of social life, including teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Even though AI in education has been investigated by many researchers, the current state of AI use in Uzbekistan's higher education remains under-researched. For this reason, the main goal of this article is to determine lecturers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) classes and explore the challenges that arose during the process. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative data from semi-structured interviews conducted among seven university EFL teachers. The interview data were processed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. In terms of validation, the research followed multiple stages, including careful participant selection based on experience with ChatGPT, cross-verification of transcripts, and coding to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The study's findings revealed that teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in EFL teaching were mainly positive, emphasizing its benefits such as providing students with real-time feedback, improving their autonomous learning skills, and features for checking grammar and spelling. However, participants also reported concerns such as over-reliance on AI assistance, a lack of students' ethical knowledge in using AI in learning, and the negative influence of ChatGPT on students' critical thinking skills. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge by offering insights into how lecturers perceive ChatGPT in higher education. This paper also highlights the main implications and limitations of the research.**

***Keywords*—ChatGPT, digital literacy, English as a foreign language, ethical guidelines, student assessment, teaching strategies**

I. Introduction

AI-enhanced chatbots refer to a range of online tools and web platforms that use artificial intelligence to assist humans in various aspects of social life. Language educators are currently utilizing AI-powered chatbots to optimize their time spent on creating teaching and assessment materials, generating ideas to organize effective classes, and enhancing the interactivity of their lessons [1]. In addition, Labadze [2] highlights three main learning opportunities for students who use AI-powered chatbots. According to Nagalatichmee *et al.* [3], AI chatbots have four primary characteristics: a) they have the ability to simulate human speech; b) they can engage in communication through both oral and written messages; c) they typically lack a physical presence; d) they do not utilize avatars in virtual networks.

The origin of AI-powered chatbots, specifically ChatGPT, can seem controversial among the public. Some people believe that generative chatbots emerged merely two years ago, more precisely on November 22nd [4–6], while others claim that their origins date back to the late 1960s [7, 8]. To clarify this argument, we analyzed a broader range of literature and found that AI-enhanced tools actually date back to the 1960s.

As documented by Labadze *et al.* [2], one of the earliest examples of AI-enhanced tools is ELIZA, created by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966. ELIZA was a program that simulated a conversation by using simple pattern-matching algorithms and the substitution of keywords. After the introduction of ELIZA, the next AI-powered tool, PARRY, came into use [9]. PARRY was distinguished from ELIZA by its comparatively more human-like text generation features.

When it comes to the second theory, which concerns the recent history of AI tools, ChatGPT and other more evolved forms of AI-enhanced tools were introduced in November 2022 [10]. After ChatGPT was created by OpenAI and became widespread across all spheres of social life, Google introduced its AI-enhanced chatbot, Bard, as an alternative.

ChatGPT is an OpenAI application designed to generate human-like responses using a vast amount of data. The current iteration of ChatGPT available to the public is GPT-3.5, which includes advanced features such as generating more human-like answers, providing feedback on students' written performances, and generating ideas [11]. On the other hand, the paid version, GPT-4, offers several improvements over GPT-3.5, including enhanced comprehension, improved precision, and more fluid creation of responses. ChatGPT has become popular among EFL teachers and learners.

Although many studies have explored teachers' perspectives on integrating ChatGPT in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes globally, a significant research gap remains in understanding how this technology is perceived and applied within the context of Uzbekistan's higher education. To the best of our knowledge, very few published studies [12–14] have specifically examined teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT in this setting. Uzbekistan's ongoing educational reforms and the growing integration of digital tools make this gap a critical issue. Without providing insights into how language educators perceive and utilize ChatGPT, there is a risk of underutilizing a powerful tool that could significantly enhance students' language learning outcomes. Therefore, it is paramount to understand language teachers' perceptions, their attitudes, and the challenges they face during the process of using ChatGPT in their classes.

In this regard, the following two research questions are

formulated:

1) What are Foreign Language (FL) educators' perceptions toward using ChatGPT in EFL classes in Uzbekistan?
2) What are some perceived challenges and concerns that EFL educators face in terms of using ChatGPT in their EFL classes?

The results of the research will be beneficial for several parties, including policymakers, syllabus designers, and language teachers in Uzbekistan. In the context of EFL institutions, understanding teachers' perceptions and the challenges they face while using ChatGPT can provide valuable information for creating support systems and training programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively integrate ChatGPT into EFL classes.

II. Literature Review

A. Introduction to ChatGPT in Language Education

In the last three years, studying the impact of artificial intelligence-based tools and chatbots has become one of the main interests of researchers. Based on bibliometric studies, it is evident that scientists from Asian countries have shown the most interest in this topic [15]. Studies have primarily focused on three specific areas: the main advantages of using ChatGPT in teaching [16, 17], the difficulties and disadvantages that can be encountered in this process [18–20], and teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of artificial intelligence in educational processes [21–24]. While these studies have significant importance in understanding the role of ChatGPT in education, there is a paramount need to learn the main risks and disadvantages of using ChatGPT in different geographical contexts, including Uzbekistan.

B. Perceived Advantages and Challenges of Using ChatGPT in EFL Teaching

Educators in different fields of education, including foreign language teaching, utilize ChatGPT. It has been argued that there are three potential benefits of using language generative tools, such as providing customized learning, generating constructive feedback and support, and obtaining fruitful language resources for students whenever and wherever they need them [23]. The author pointed out that students can utilize the benefits of ChatGPT in any context; however, the fact is that this generative tool is not available everywhere due to geographical, political, and technical restrictions. Other authors, such as Marzuki *et al.* [25], have stressed the benefit of using ChatGPT in improving students' creative writing skills. They have stated that students can enhance their creative writing skills, as they can generate different ideas by inserting keywords into the chatbot. However, it is important to note that this can lead to endangering students' imagination and critical thinking skills.

Huallpa *et al.* [26] identified two main challenges in incorporating ChatGPT into the lesson. Firstly, students fail to give credit to the author or ChatGPT, resulting in plagiarism issues. Secondly, as students pretend as if they produced the work by themselves, it has been a challenge for teachers to detect the originality of students' work. For this reason, it is important to enhance anti-plagiarism tools that can identify the students' authorship and the originality level of the work [27]. To protect students from such circumstances, it is recommended that higher education educators make their students aware of how to use ChatGPT properly by adding this to their course syllabuses. Another consideration is student dependency. Even though the majority of educators have enthusiasm for its power to transform traditional approaches to teaching by giving more liberty to higher education students, some authors advise approaching this issue with caution. If students abuse these state-of-the-art technologies, it can lead to several educational challenges such as over-dependency, endangering critical thinking skills, and other ethical problems [28, 29].

Understanding possible challenges globally plays a pivotal role in shaping the successful integration of AI chatbots into education. In this regard, context-specific considerations by stakeholders and an understanding of geographically unique challenges are important. With the same purpose, there have been a few investigations to learn the specific perceptions of educators from different regions. For example, Indonesian teachers' perspectives on integrating AI-enhanced chatbots into the language teaching process are positive, stressing its positive impact on improving students' writing skills [25]. European colleagues' perceptions on this trend are slightly different from Indonesians. University teachers from Sweden have pointed out their considerations on fairness, responsibility, and the lack of student knowledge on the ethical use of ChatGPT in the learning process [30]. Even though [31] acknowledged benefits such as promoting learning efficiency and improving communication, he also noted some controversial opinions of Chinese teachers regarding the risk of diminishing interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the way students employ ChatGPT may lead to academic dishonesty and cheating behavior.

C. Educators' Beliefs on the Issue

Research on teachers' beliefs indicates that teacher and student beliefs and emotions are typically investigated using various research methods, including interviews, diaries, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires. Understanding teachers' beliefs and emotions plays a crucial role in building effective instructional practices and achieving successful knowledge outcomes [32]. Although it is widely accepted that teachers' beliefs are part of a dynamic and intricate system, the study of this complexity and dynamism can be challenging due to methodological or contextual obstacles [33]. Despite these challenges, exploring teachers' beliefs remains essential for providing insights into how educators make instructional decisions, shape classroom environments, and respond to evolving educational technologies such as AI-based language models.

The present authors are aware of the pivotal works by Sedigheh [14], Malika [34], Rakhmonov [35], which examine using AI-enhanced chatbots in Uzbekistan higher education context. Sedigheh *et al.* [14] explored teachers' perceptions on using AI in tertiary education. Their research suggested that educators in tertiary education in Uzbekistan have mainly a positive attitude towards adopting and using AI in creating content, providing feedback, assessing, and conducting research. Malika [34] examined using artificial intelligence in teaching foreign languages and proposed a few advantages,

including improving critical thinking, teamwork, and proficient communication. Rakhmonov [35] aimed to investigate the importance of incorporating ChatGPT into the language learning environment, and her research results showed that ChatGPT can improve students' motivation to learn the target language with some alignment with the current pedagogical principles. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the advantages and challenges of using ChatGPT and other AI-based tools in educational contexts globally, there is a notable gap in research specific to certain geographical regions, including Uzbekistan. Despite the pivotal works of Sedigheh *et al.* [14], Malika [34], and Rakhmonov [35], which offer a foundation for understanding the use of AI in education in Uzbekistan context, there is still a scarcity of comprehensive studies exploring educators' perceptions and challenges faced in this context. More research is needed to enrich the existing literature and provide a deeper understanding of how ChatGPT can be effectively integrated into the educational systems of Uzbekistan. Addressing this gap is essential for developing strategies that cater to the specific needs and conditions of educators and students in Uzbekistan, initially enhancing the overall impact and efficacy of using ChatGPT in FLT in the higher education system of Uzbekistan.

D. Theoretical Basis of the Research

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains how learners can improve their current abilities to a higher level through social interaction and guided assistance [36]. ZPD emphasizes that when students receive support from more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, peers, or parents, they can make significant progress in their cognitive development. It is also crucial to note that ZPD highlights the importance of students encountering knowledge that extends beyond their current level of understanding, thus challenging them to advance [37]. Vygotsky further defined scaffolding as the support provided by more experienced individuals or resources to help learners accomplish tasks they cannot complete independently [36].

In this research context, ChatGPT can function as a scaffolding tool alongside language teachers. By offering personalized feedback, explanations, and practice opportunities, ChatGPT helps bridge the gap between a student's current language abilities and the improvement of their language skills, such as writing, reading, and speaking. The theoretical basis for this lies in its ability to enhance student motivation and perception of their learning capabilities. ChatGPT's interactive capabilities can positively influence students' self-perception and motivation by providing a safe environment for practice where students feel supported and encouraged to take risks in language learning. This aligns with ZPD's notion that students are more likely to succeed when they perceive that they are receiving effective support from a knowledgeable source, which in turn fosters greater engagement and achievement [38].

III. Method

A. Research Design

To achieve the target research objectives, a Quan-Qual mixed-method approach was employed, as it is particularly effective in exploring complex phenomena and providing an in-depth analysis of participants' viewpoints. Initially, we used a quantitative component to collect demographic data and to gain insights into how frequently participants use ChatGPT, the version predominantly employed, and their preferences. This quantitative data established a foundational understanding of participants' engagement with ChatGPT, allowing us to identify key characteristics across the sample.

Following this, the qualitative phase employed semi-structured interviews, offering a flexible framework to gather rich, detailed responses about participants' perceptions, experiences, and the specific challenges and advantages they encounter while integrating ChatGPT into EFL classes. This approach also allowed us to ask follow-up questions and explore unexpected themes, thus enhancing the depth of the data. This flexibility is particularly valuable for understanding the nuanced attitudes and challenges faced by educators, leading to a comprehensive grasp of the research topic.

B. Participants

The current research included seven EFL teachers from four different universities in Uzbekistan. One of these universities is private, and the other three are state universities. The reason for selecting six teachers from state universities and only one from a private university stems from the accessibility and availability of eligible participants with sufficient experience using ChatGPT in their teaching process. While both private and state universities in Uzbekistan have integrated ChatGPT into EFL classes, state universities typically have larger EFL programs and more teachers with the necessary background in technology-enhanced language learning, making them a primary focus for participant selection. Additionally, private universities in Uzbekistan are relatively smaller, and fewer EFL teachers met the criteria for inclusion in this study. Despite this, including one participant from a private university was crucial to provide a broader perspective on the differences in ChatGPT integration across different types of institutions.

The selected participants all teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), tailored to their students' academic disciplines. The subjects they teach vary depending on the needs of their students and the curriculum of their respective universities, which include general EFL courses and, in some cases, ESP subjects tailored to specific fields such as business or engineering. This aligns with the research findings, which explore the integration of ChatGPT in both general EFL teaching and subject-specific language instruction.

Participants were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, selected specifically for their experience with ChatGPT in the EFL teaching process. They were informed about the confidentiality of the research and willingly consented to participate. All participants have been working in the field for at least three years and have actively integrated ChatGPT into their EFL teaching for an average of one and a half years, with no participant having less than one year of experience. They have used ChatGPT and other AI-enhanced generative chatbots for various purposes, including assessing students' comprehension, creating educational materials, designing lesson plans, and improving students' language

skills. This demonstrates that the participants have the necessary expertise to contribute reliable data to the research. The following Table 1 displays the relevant information of the participants:

Table 1. Demographic overview of the research participants

Respondent label	Age/gender	Scientific degree	Teaching experience (year)	Experience in using ChatGPT (year)
TA	38/female	PhD	14	1
TB	42/female	PhD	16	2
TC	29/male	Master	6	1.5
TD	26/female	Master	5	2
TE	26/male	Master	7	2
TF	25/female	Master	5	1
TG	26/male	Master	3	1

The participants teach students with diverse educational backgrounds, with variations in age, gender, and language proficiency. The class sizes typically consist of approximately 20 students. This diversity in class size, academic discipline, and teaching methods enhances the validity of the research findings.

To protect their confidentiality, the participants are labeled with the letters A to G. We reached out to them via email to obtain their consent and provided them with detailed information about the research objectives, consent forms, and confidentiality measures. They were given the opportunity to review and sign consent forms in accordance with research ethics guidelines for participant selection.

C. Instrument

The interview was conducted in May 2024, approximately a year after AI generative tools became prevalent among stakeholders in higher education in Uzbekistan. A Quan-Qual mixed-method approach was employed to gain deeper insights into university teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in language classes. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' respective university campuses, which provided an in-person setting, allowing for more direct interaction. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accurate data collection and analysis, fifteen open-ended interview questions were carefully developed and categorized into three key areas: respondents' identity, teachers' experiences using AI generative tools, and teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in EFL classes. For example, participants were asked, "How long have you been using AI-enhanced models in your ESP classes?" to gather data about their experience with AI tools in education. Another key question asked was, "What do you think would be the positive results when using AI models to improve students' writing skills?" which helped to explore the perceived benefits of integrating AI tools like ChatGPT into teaching practices. These questions were designed to align with the research objectives and ensure comprehensive data collection. While creating the questions, Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used to ensure that the research questions were developed to capture the key factors influencing technology acceptance, in our research, focusing on the acceptance of ChatGPT in the FL teaching process [39].

Questions regarding respondents' identity covered details such as age, gender, academic degree, teaching experience, and experience with AI generative tools. Questions in this category were used to provide a demographic overview of the participants. The second category of questions explored teachers' experiences in using ChatGPT and other AI-enhanced tools in their EFL classes. Participants were asked about the duration of their use of these tools, the types of tasks they used AI for, and how they integrated these tools into their teaching practices.

The third category focused on teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT in EFL contexts. The questions in this section examined several aspects, including their overall experience using ChatGPT, perceived advantages and disadvantages of the tool, and its impact on student learning. For example, the participants were asked about the benefits of ChatGPT in supporting student autonomy in learning, the pros and cons of real-time feedback provided by the tool, and the potential challenges such as over-reliance on AI or the lack of human interaction. This categorization ensured that each aspect of the study—respondents' identity, experience with AI, and perceptions—was covered in detail, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' viewpoints.

The selection of interviewees followed a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that all participants had a relevant background in both AI tools and EFL teaching. The interviews were conducted in English to ensure clear communication and ensure consistency across responses. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and the responses were recorded with participants' consent for further analysis.

In line with research ethics and confidentiality standards, all participants were informed about how their responses would be utilized in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they were assured that their data would be anonymized.

D. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized for the qualitative interview data to identify key themes and patterns, while descriptive statistics were applied to the quantitative data to analyze the prevalence of specific perceptions and challenges. The integration of qualitative and quantitative results allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data [40]. In order to achieve comprehensive and analytic results, we divided our qualitative research analysis into the following steps. In the first step, we listened to the audio recordings of the interviews multiple times to familiarize ourselves with the content, then we transcribed the audio recordings using the Transcribe Speech to Text Android application. In order to ensure the accuracy of the machine-generated transcripts of the audio recording, we cross-verified them by reading and listening to the materials multiple times and made necessary corrections where we found inconsistencies. The collected data were coded and categorized into similar themes and patterns. Consequently, the findings were reported comprehensively, analyzing the themes and subthemes.

IV. Findings

A. Mode of ChatGPT: Free or Paid

Based on the results collected during the interviews, the following Table 2 was created to highlight the key features of participants' experiences using ChatGPT.

Table 2. Key features of participants' experience in using ChatGPT

Participant	The frequency of using ChatGPT in teaching	Mode of ChatGPT
TA	Often	ChatGPT 4
TB	Often	ChatGPT 3.5
TC	Always	ChatGPT 4
TD	From time to time	ChatGPT 3.5
TE	Always	ChatGPT 3.5
TF	Often	ChatGPT 4
TG	Always	ChatGPT 3.5

The quantitative results provide valuable insights into how lecturers in Uzbekistan's higher education system are utilizing ChatGPT in their teaching practices. As shown in the table, the majority of respondents (85.7%) use ChatGPT often or always, which reveals that the lecturers have gained sufficient experience using the AI model in their teaching practices. When we questioned the respondents about the mode of ChatGPT that they are utilizing, more than half of them (57.1%) reported using the basic/free model of ChatGPT 3.5, while other lecturers (43.9%) are subscribed to the evolved version of the model—ChatGPT 4. The split between those using the free version (57.1%) and those subscribed to the paid version (43.9%) of ChatGPT raises interesting points for further discussion. One potential explanation for the preference for the free version could be due to financial constraints or institutional policies that do not provide funding for educational technology subscriptions. Before asking about the platforms they use to access ChatGPT, we were interested in the advantages they gain by subscribing to the paid version of the language generative model.

B. Advantages of using ChatGPT 4

According to the responses from the lecturers who have experienced the Plus version of ChatGPT, improved memory, more comprehensive results, and real-time updates emerged as universal advantages across all three lecturers. Also, teacher A focused on the Plus model's smartness in answering complex questions, noting that the basic version of the model may experience some halts. TB added that ChatGPT 4 can generate answers to not only text-based questions but also image or audio-based questions. According to TF, the ChatGPT Plus version can communicate with its clients in more languages than its free alternative. He also added that, even though ChatGPT 3.5 can communicate in the same languages, it does not offer the same quality in certain languages. Based on the analysis of teachers' responses, it can be concluded that ChatGPT 4.0 or the Plus version has some advantages over ChatGPT 3.5, which is the free version. We can see this in the Table 3:

RQ 1: Teachers' perceptions on using ChatGPT in EFL classes

In this part of the article, we analyzed the research findings that emerged from our interview results with seven ESP teachers from different universities in Uzbekistan. The main part of the interview questions focused on studying teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in their teaching experience. In the next stage, we divided their responses into two major criteria: advantages and potential challenges that instructors may face while integrating ChatGPT into the learning process.

Table 3. Advantages of using ChatGPT 4 over ChatGPT 3.5

Respondent label	Advantages of using ChatGPT 4
TA	It has a more comprehensive memory, which lets the model answer the given questions based on the chat history. I can insert more comprehensive questions, which include hundreds of words. I have never felt that the responses from ChatGPT Plus need fact-checking as it is updated continuously.
TC	It has access to the current date. It renews its data to be up-to-date, while ChatGPT 3.5 was last updated in November 2022. It doesn't only respond to your text queries but also handles image and audio requests as well. Faster than the basic form and has richer memory.
TF	Systematically updated. More languages are included in the chatbot. More word-limit in both questions and responses. More comprehensive answers are available.

The interview results revealed a number of advantages of using ChatGPT in the English teaching process. Among them, improving learner autonomy, providing immediate feedback, and providing real-time conversation and grammar checking were considered the main advantages. At the same time, teachers mentioned some concerns, including overreliance on the tool, lack of human interaction, and reliability issues as challenges they are facing in the process.

Theme 1. Improving students' autonomy

According to the teachers who participated in the interview (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, TF, TE), there are several advantages of using ChatGPT in the language teaching process, and improving students' autonomous learning was highlighted. For example, TA highlighted the potential benefits of using ChatGPT in promoting students to work independently. According to the interviewee, students can evaluate their language skills, including grammatical skills, writing skills, reading skills, and speaking skills by using ChatGPT. This allows students to take control of their own language education more effectively.

TB also referred that using generative chatbots, including ChatGPT can facilitate an autonomous learning for students. The teacher responded as such:

In my view, ChatGPT can be a supporter for the students who is available 24/7. Students can reach ChatGPT with their questions in written, voice and picture format to get instant response. This tool allows students to be in charge of their own learning *by helping them to plan a good learning plan with written materials, clarify confusing topics, provide feedback with their written and spoken output. What is more interesting, students can learn the language at their own pace and with personalized guidance with the help of the*

generative tool.

From the interviewee's respond, it is identified that students can build a well-supported autonomous learning environment with the help of ChatGPT tool. TF has also recognized ChatGPT as a tool which can help language learners to create an independent learning atmosphere with the transcript in the following paragraph:

One of the good side of using ChatGPT by students, if used with ethical norms, is that it enhance students to take ownership of their language learning process, as they have opportunity to have meaningful conversations with the robot. Not surprisingly, students are showing more extrovert and reflective behavior towards communicating with ChatGPT. ChatGPT is providing students with personalized feedback, limited though, correction and clarification. With the mentioned benefits learners are being more self-confident and self-actualized which are main components of autonomous learning process.

Theme 2. Providing real time conversation and immediate feedback opportunities

In addition to improving student autonomy skills nearly all teachers mentioned about the benefit of supplying students with real time conversation and immediate feedback. According to TA ChatGPT and other alternative models which can make conversations with leaners in written and oral forms are becoming a main tool of improving students' mainly writing and partly speaking skills. She referred this as in the followings:

As a language teacher I can see that ChatGPT is assisting to improve my students' mainly writing and speaking skills. By getting real time feedback on written and spoken (if they have upgraded version) language and being engaged with real time conversation they are getting an invaluable help by the tool. Why I say invaluable, because I see, my students are practicing writing and speaking skills in a low-pressure environment which is good for beginner and intermediate levelers, as they won't have the fear of making mistakes or errors in front of others.

The response by TF and TD also revealed the advantage of ChatGPT as a tool, which can play a crucial role in building learner autonomy in language learning. She stated that ChatGPT is a great tool to help students identify their mistakes and errors and do a self-correction. She mentioned that even though there is a risk of over-reliance on the tools in finding mistakes, using ChatGPT in a balanced and ethical way can benefit language learners in a great deal.

Theme 3. Grammar checking

Another advantage of using ChatGPT obtained from the teachers' interviews is grammar checking function of the tool. As for this function interviewees referred their perspectives as in the following paragraphs:

TB: Another standout benefit of ChatGPT is providing students with instant correction and feedback on grammar. When my students type in to the chat bot and give a correct order, the tools provides a constructive feedback which spot the grammatical mistakes and errors. Main difference of ChatGPT from its alternative AI enhanced grammar checking tools is that it can play the role of private tutor. As we know, private tutor not only spots the mistake and correct it but also they suggest a clear guidance on how to avoid the mistake or errors next time. Similarly, by inserting the correct order, students are provided with the correction and the correct grammatical patterns and examples sentences to learn from,

TE: In addition to other benefits of using ChatGPT in teaching English is that it can encourage students improve their grammar knowledge by taking risks. This means, students can try various patterns of English grammar without fear of being judged. They write texts in the chat bot and ChatGPT provides them not only correct version of the part of the text, but it explain what is going wrong with grammatical pattern. By this learners learn the grammar and grow their grammatical and writing skills.

The grammar assisting feature of the tool is also criticized by TC acknowledging that students can only use it when there is no teacher assistance available.

TC: I can compare grammar checking process with ChatGPT with learning calculating with calculator. Definitely, we all have calculators in our fingertip today, but still all schools teach arithmetic to the learners. Why? Because, we, students should not rely on machine solely. If we let learners use ChatGPT every time they are not sure to use indefinite article before adjective+singular countable noun pattern, this can lead hindering the grammar learning process. Because students begin to shake their phones every time they have dilemma of what to say and how to say in English. Instead we, teachers should have them (students. Auth.) learn the grammar in a more communicative and practical way. Still, I acknowledge that ChatGPT can be an additional assistant to the learners in some cases where there is no peer and no teacher to ask or to collaborate.

Theme 4. Proof reading

Proof reading was selected as the next advantages of using ChatGPT in teaching English. Teachers were all agreed that the two features can be considered as real benefits of the generative tool and are not issued with ethical norms. This can be seen from the perspectives of TA and TD with the following interview answers:

TA: The two further benefits of using ChatGPT by language learners are doing a proof reading and idea generating. The reason that I am counting them together, there is no ethical or educational issues that the teachers or policy makers are supposed to be addressed. I mean, students can use ChatGPT to refine their writing by doing a proofreading where they are sending a message or submitting a written work. The generative tool can suggest punctuation, grammatical or spelling mistakes that the writer should refine.

RQ 2. Challenges of using ChatGPT in EFL classes

Theme 1. Overreliance on the technology

One major concern that participants revealed is that students might become overly dependent to ChatGPT, which can lead diminishing their critical thinking and problem solving skills. TC argued that

In my experience, ChatGPT is not supporting but hampering students' potential to learn autonomously. I have noticed that my students are becoming overly dependent, enjoying its various features. As a result, they are not engaging with the language material deeply. Instead of using their own knowledge, they tend to ask everything from the tool. This dependency gradually leads to limiting their critical thinking skills.

Theme 2. Lack of human interaction

TB and TF pointed out that while ChatGPT can provide students real time feedback and useful error correction techniques, it lacks emotions and understanding students' as human teachers.

TB: While ChatGPT is a great tool for providing students with real time feedback based on their requests, it has limited capacity to give emotional answers, which only human teachers can bring to the students. ChatGPT can never understand cues and emotional background of the question that students are giving. In my opinion, this is a real case of lack of human interaction and real scaffolding, which can be provided by human teachers.

TF also argued that ChatGPT can not replace the need for human interaction in language learning. He also argued that students should benefit form interacting with peer students and teachers who can understand them based on their unique needs and background information. Besides, they offer exclusive support instead of just answering to the questions.

Theme 3. Reliability issues

Concerns were also raised by TG about the reliability of the answers that ChatGPT generates based on students' request. She stated that AI bases generative tools can be unreliable in terms of grammar checking feature.

TG: while online AI based chat bots such as ChatGPT is being a fun way of learning grammar, this should be admitted that this bot can sometimes provide unreliable content in terms of checking grammar. It is because, ChatGPT learn most of its knowledge based on users' information provided in conversations. Imagine students are asking from ChatGPT to check the sentence for grammar or give an example sentence for grammatical rule, if the chat bot gives an incorrect answer, it may lead confusion, even incorrect usage of the grammar pattern. For this reason, I believe that student should better learn grammar from more reliable sources.

V. Discussion

The study aimed to explore language teachers' perceptions on using ChatGPT in EFL classes of higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan and understanding possible challenges that faculty members may face during the process. The qualitative data collected via interview revealed insightful findings in terms of perceived research questions. The responses from seven university teachers (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, TF, TG) were divided into two criteria: teachers' perceptions towards using ChatGPT in ESP classes and understanding challenges that lecturers facing during the usage of such tools.

Before addressing to the main research questions, we decided to understand key features about the respondents' use of ChatGPT in their professional career. The key information such as what version of the bot was being exploited by the teachers: paid or free version, how often they use it, how do they get access to the bot and what advantages of ChatGPT 4 are existed over ChatGPT 3.5. According to the results, a significant majority of the respondents (85.7%) frequently or consistently use ChatGPT. This indicates that the lecturers have acquired substantial experience in utilizing the AI model in their teaching classes. When we surveyed the participants regarding their usage of ChatGPT, a majority of them (57.1%) reported using the basic/free version of ChatGPT 3.5, while the remaining respondents (43.9%) stated that they are subscribed to the advanced version of the model—ChatGPT 4. This finding guarantee that the chosen lecturers have capability to participate in the interview, as they have developed experience in using ChatGPT in their teaching.

The findings from the interview showed that teachers' perceptions towards using ChatGPT are various regarding its implementation in EFL classes in higher education. They noted several advantages including improving learners' autonomy, providing real time conversation and feedback, grammar checking, proofreading. They also noted some concerns regarding overdependence and lack of human interaction. These findings of the research are consistent with Marzuki *et al.* [25]. They studied teachers' perceptions on using AI enhanced chatbots in improving foreign language skills and noted that FL teachers' perceptions are different in terms of advantages and disadvantages of using AI chatbots in EFL classes [25]. Similarly, Sedigeh *et al.* [14] studied the lecturers' perceptions of using AI in tertiary education sector in Uzbekistan. According to the research, teachers in tertiary education maintained different perspectives. Some teachers believed that tools like ChatGPT are valuable tools for generating creative content and assisting students in learning FLs, while others cautioned about its potential to replace human interaction and having biases in generated materials.

The findings from the interview revealed that using ChatGPT can foster students' autonomous learning skills. For example TA and TB emphasized that ChatGPT can be 24/7 supporter to evaluate their language skills and provide them an availability to learn at their own pace. This refers to students can control their own learning process with the help of the tool. However, TC referred a controversial idea. He argued that ChatGPT is limiting students' critical thinking skill, which is very essential in improving learners' autonomy skills. This part of the research findings are supported by Synekop [23] whose research found that students' use of ChatGPT is a real violation of academic integrity rules causing hampering students' critical thinking skills.

ChatGPT is also seen by nearly all participants of the interview as a tool to provide students with real time conversation and feedback provider. Lecturers noted that the tool can facilitate a written conversation based on students' level. By providing students with this kind of customized learning, ChatGPT has a good potential to cater students with personalized learning opportunities according to their needs. Teachers acknowledged that students feel more comfortable while using ChatGPT for feedback purposes, as there is less pressure.

The next point of the lecturers is proofreading and grammar checking features of ChatGPT. TB and TE pointed out students are improving the accuracy of their writing skills using ChatGPT as a grammar checker and proofreader tool. In this regard, the tool is taking the role of private tutor who checks students' written work for grammatical mistakes. Students are trying different patterns of grammar without fear of being judged. However, TC compared this to using calculator to calculate simple arithmetic. He focused on overreliance and endangering critical thinking skills. This finding was in line with Fuchs [19] who mentioned about students' overreliance on the systems such as ChatGPT and Google Bard could lead students becoming passive learners who tend to simply accept responses generated by the tools instead of using their analytical and critical thinking skills.

Regarding the advantages of using ChatGPT in EFL teaching, we can consider that it can be a great tool to facilitate students' independent learning experience. This aligns with Vygotsky's constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and guidance in the learning process [41]. ChatGPT can act as a valuable tool within the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), providing students with support and assistance that allows them to accomplish language tasks which they might not be able to accomplish on their own. While teachers' support in developing students' academic integrity norms remains crucial, ChatGPT's role as a dynamic and interactive learning tool can empower students to take ownership of their learning journey and develop their language skills in a more engaging and personalized manner.

In addition to the valuable research findings, the study presents some limitations. First, the relatively small sample size of EFL educators may limit the generalizability of the results. Second, while the qualitative approach enabled a nuanced exploration of teacher perceptions, it restricts the study's ability to identify trends that might emerge in a larger, quantitative investigation. Third, as this research focuses on Uzbekistan's unique educational context, the findings may not directly apply to other regions. Addressing these limitations in future studies, by incorporating larger samples, and cross-regional comparisons, could enhance the robustness and transferability of insights on AI's role in language education.

VI. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT in their EFL teaching in Uzbekistan higher education system. The findings of the study revealed that lecturers in Uzbek higher education have predominantly positive perceptions about ChatGPT recognizing its potential benefits such as enhancing learners' autonomy, providing real time feedback and communication and grammar checking. However, teachers also highlighted their concerns regarding overreliance on the tool, lack of human interaction and hampering students' analytic and critical skills. The findings went in line with the global researches in the field. Despite of these insights, there is a potential need for further researches of the case study employing longitude investigation using quantitative approach. This approach would shed lights in teachers' perceptions in a broad context. Furthermore, the comparative study of applications that can monitor and control the usage of the language model by students can provide insights to the future use of ChatGPT in education. The findings of this study serve as a valuable starting point for further researches and implementation efforts in Uzbek EFL education. Based on the study's findings, educators can utilize the benefits of ChatGPT to create more engaging and learner-centered environments by integrating the tool into instructional design. For example, ChatGPT can be used to foster autonomous learning by encouraging students to practice writing and receive real-time feedback outside of class. Policymakers and curriculum developers are encouraged to design training programs that equip teachers with the skills to effectively integrate AI tools like ChatGPT into their EFL curriculum. These training programs should include strategies for using ChatGPT not only as a supportive tool but also as a method for enhancing student interaction and critical engagement with the material. Furthermore, teachers could develop AI-enhanced lesson plans that incorporate ChatGPT into a variety of tasks such as collaborative writing projects, peer editing exercises, and autonomous learning activities. Students should be trained and provided constant support by the educators how to use the tool in their language-learning journey ethically and effectively.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

A. Mirzayev conducted the research and wrote the paper; M. Axundjanova analyzed the data; S. S. Lin proofread and finalized the article. All authors had agreed and approved the final version.

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