

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON AI UTILIZATION IN ESL LEARNING

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In an era of digital transformation in education, comprehending students' perspectives on artificial intelligence (AI) in language acquisition is crucial for informed pedagogical strategies. The objective of this study is to investigate 3rd-year Arts undergraduates' awareness and attitudes towards AI implementation in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning at the University of Jaffna, aiming to disseminate efficacious AI employment practices among students. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaires and informal discussions after obtaining informed consent from the samples. A total of 116 responses were collected from the administered questionnaire, while informal discussions engaged 90 students from various departments. The findings from both the questionnaire and discussions present a contradictory narrative: while AI is a prevalent topic, over half of the students lacked understanding of the term "AI," often using tools like Google Translate unknowingly. Similarly, although the students used ChatGPT, they often struggled with effective usage. Limited guidance from educators, who themselves are not proficient in AI, further exacerbates this gap. Nonetheless, students exhibit enthusiasm for AI integration in learning contexts. Consequently, the study recommends providing educators with training on AI integration to empower them to guide students towards self-directed and lifelong learning, thereby bridging the knowledge gap and fostering autonomous learning environments conducive to ESL education.

Keywords: AI integration, awareness, digital environment, ESL learning, perceptions