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Assessing English Performance of Students in the Context of AI: A Case Study in Hanoi

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on English language performance among students in Hanoi, Vietnam. Conducted in the second half of 2024, the research employed a mixed-methods approach. The results show that AI-assisted learning helped students enhance their vocabulary more effectively than traditional methods. AI tools were particularly effective in introducing new words and reinforcing their usage, and achieved a more consistent performance among students in the experimental group. The students generally viewed AI as an effective and engaging tool for language learning. Insights from this research can contribute to understanding AI's role in enhancing English language proficiency and suggest strategies for integrating technology into educational practices. While some students found AI interactions engaging, they did not fully equate them to real-life social situations. The interaction and content engagement highlights AI's potential to create an enjoyable learning experience in the context that human interaction remains a key component in language learning, whilst AI may not fully replace traditional classroom or peer-based learning environments.

Keywords: AI, assessment, foreign language learning, vocabulary, retention.

Subject classification: Linguistics.

1. Introduction

The advent of AI has significantly transformed education, particularly in the field of language learning. In Vietnam, the integration of AI tools such as language apps, chatbots, and adaptive learning platforms has become increasingly prominent in teaching English. "English is undoubtedly the most popular foreign language in Vietnam due to the increasing international economic integration of the country"; however, "Vietnamese EFL learners generally have limited knowledge of both

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single words and formulaic language" (Vu & Peters, 2021).

English is considered a critical skill; vocabulary plays a very important role in English language study in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2023), and it serves as a gateway to international opportunities and economic growth. "Vocabulary might receive some attention in the English curriculum in Vietnamese schools, but mostly to facilitate reading and grammar exercises" (Vu & Peters, 2021). The demand for innovative methods to enhance English proficiency has led to the adoption of various technological tools. AI, with its capabilities for personalization and interactivity, has emerged as a key player in this transformation. Numerous predicaments associated with English language aptitude hinder individuals from fully engaging in English communication and maintaining it at the requisite level on the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR) scale commensurate with their course of study (Kemelbekova, et al., 2024).

The emergence of AI has assumed a pivotal role in the realm of education, including in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (Kemelbekova, et al., 2024). And "AI-enabled peer feedback evaluation tools have demonstrated the ability to provide valid assessments of student reviews of their peers' feedback" (Guo, et al., 2024). Therefore, "it is crucial to examine the impact of integrating AI technology in the teaching and learning processes from the teachers' perspectives since they are key stakeholders in curriculum implementation at university level" (Kemelbekova, et al., 2024). And "Artificial Intelligence can develop educational plans, thereby alleviating the burden on educators regarding material and assessment preparation" (Kemelbekova, et al., 2024).

However, "Vietnamese EFL learners generally have limited vocabulary knowledge, i.e., understanding the meaning of English words and formulaic sequences (e.g., collocations, idioms) and knowing their form" (Vu & Peters, 2021). The application of AI may be beneficial to vocabulary learning, however it is suggested that "not all scientists approve of the use of AI in teaching English, believing that such an approach replaces human interaction and does not consider students' individual characteristics. They also point out that AI cannot completely replace the role of the teacher in developing communication skills and adapting to different situations". (Kemelbekova, et al., 2024). Looking into the application of AI in foreign language learning, "Despite the students' disagreements with the social influence of Chatbots on their behavioral intentions, Chatbots are still considered beneficial enough to serve as an interlocutor for English language learning". (Annamalai, et al., 2023).

2. Literature review

2.1. The importance of vocabulary and assessment in language learning

It is believed that "understanding the students' experiences and challenges is crucial so recommendations can be suggested to further improve the use of Chatbots in English language learning" (Annamalai, et al., 2023). Hence, "it is important for Vietnamese students to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) and for teachers to understand the conditions necessary to improve vocabulary learning and teaching", because "the importance of English in Vietnam is also evidenced by the increase in the number of English language schools and private English centers across the nation" and "vocabulary should have its own section in the Vietnamese-English curriculum" (Nguyen, 2023).

According to Nguyen (2023), "in many EFL courses in Vietnam, vocabulary teaching follows a standard format" and "before the start of the lesson a Vietnamese EFL teacher may write a list of new English words on the board that will be discussed, together with the Vietnamese translations". She goes on to address that "some students may be asked by the teacher to test their memorization of words that were covered in the previous lesson", and "despite being urged to learn new words by heart, they rarely get the chance to use them in class because the focus is typically on reading and grammar". Nguyen (2023) stated "it should be noted that Vietnamese EFL instructors rarely evaluate their students' vocabulary proficiency before and after an English course to determine their level of improvement. Instead, they often tend to prioritize grammar knowledge" and "different facets of vocabulary knowledge may not be appropriately addressed in textbooks, one of the primary input sources for second language (L2) learners". According this author, "Many students may find it too difficult and, in some cases, demotivating to take a language test with a vocabulary that is too extensive", therefore "Vietnamese EFL students and teachers should understand the conditions necessary to improve vocabulary learning and teaching".

Assessment plays a crucial role in language learning as it helps both learners and educators measure progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and guide future learning. Assessment is important in language learning for a number of reasons, namely: a) *Measuring progress*: assessment provides a clear picture of a learner's development over time, showing improvement in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills; b) *Identifying strengths and weaknesses*: regular assessment helps learners and teachers understand which areas need more attention, allowing for targeted practice and improvement; c) *Motivating learners*: when learners can see their progress through assessments, they feel more motivated to continue learning and improve their language skills; d) *Providing feedback*: assessment offers constructive feedback that helps learners refine their skills, correct mistakes, and gain confidence; e) *Guiding teaching methods*: teachers can use assessment results to adjust their teaching strategies, ensuring they meet the needs of different learners effectively; f) *Enhancing communication skills*: speaking and writing assessments encourage learners to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, improving their overall communication skills; g) *Preparing for real-life situations*: language assessments simulate real-life scenarios, such as conversations,

writing tasks, and comprehension exercises, making learners more prepared for practical use of the language; h) *Ensuring standardized learning outcomes*: standardized assessments help maintain consistency in language learning objectives across different learners and educational institutions.

2.2. Aspects of language assessment

Language assessment covers various aspects of language proficiency to ensure a well-rounded evaluation of a learner's skill set. According to Nation (2001), the key aspects of language assessment include: a) *Vocabulary assessment* evaluates a learner's knowledge and use of words, including their meaning, usage, and collocations through word recognition tests, multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and productive tasks like writing and speaking; b) *Phonetic assessment* measures the learner's ability to produce and recognize correct sounds, stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm; c) *Grammar assessment* reviews knowledge and application of grammatical rules, such as sentence structure, verb tense usage, and syntax in the form of error correction exercises, sentence completion, transformation exercises, and free writing/speaking tasks, etc.; d) *Reading comprehension assessment* evaluates the ability to understand and interpret written texts in multiple-choice questions, true/false statements, summarization tasks, and inference-based questions; e) *Listening comprehension assessment* tests a learner's ability to understand spoken language in different contexts, for example dictation, multiple-choice listening tests, note-taking exercises, and open-ended comprehension questions; f) *Writing assessment* measures a learner's ability to express ideas coherently, accurately, and fluently in written form such as essays, reports, summarization, storytelling, and grammar/spelling checks; g) *Speaking assessment* assesses oral proficiency, including fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and interactional skills in the form of interviews, role-plays, presentations, debates, and storytelling; h) *Pragmatic and discourse assessment* evaluates the ability to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts; and k) *Fluency and accuracy assessment* evaluates how naturally and smoothly a learner can communicate and measures grammatical correctness and lexical precision.

Assessment may take the form of appraising proficiency to measure overall language ability regardless of prior learning or instruction. *Diagnostic assessment* identifies a learner's strengths and weaknesses before instruction; *Formative (Progressive) assessment* is conducted during the learning process to monitor progress; *Summative* a*ssessment* is conducted at the end of a learning period to evaluate achievement; *Placement assessment* determines a learner's appropriate level in a language program; *Performance-based assessment* assesses the practical application of language skills in real-world contexts; *Self-assessment* and *peer assessment* encourages learners to evaluate their own or their peers' progress; *Authentic assessment* evaluates language use in real-life situations; and *Portfolio assessment* collects a learner's work over a period of time to demonstrate

development.

Some common forms of assessment

Surveys collect opinions, attitudes, and self-perceived abilities in language learning. They are often used to gather feedback about language courses, teaching methods, or personal language goals.

Questionnaires are similar to surveys but more structured, focusing on specific aspects of learning. It can be used to assess learners' preferences, learning styles, or self-evaluations of proficiency.

Observation is used to evaluate learners' language skills in natural or classroom settings. It is useful for assessing speaking, listening, interaction, and participation.

Application of AI in language learning

AI has transformed language learning by making it more personalized, efficient, and interactive. Some forms are Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), i.e., AI-powered platforms that provide personalized lessons based on a learner's progress. These provide adaptive learning paths, real-time feedback, and customized exercises; AI-Powered Language Assessment can help to evaluate writing, pronunciation, and speaking skills instantly to increase automated grading, speech recognition for pronunciation assessment, and grammar correction; Chatbots and Virtual Assistants simulate real-life conversations, helping learners practice speaking and writing by giving instant feedback, unlimited practice, and interactive language learning; Speech Recognition and Pronunciation Training analyzes pronunciation and helps learners improve their accent and fluency in order to correct mispronunciations and enhance spoken fluency; Machine Translation and Real-Time Language Assistance helps learners understand foreign texts and communicate in different languages with instant translation, voice and text input support, real-time transcription; AI-Based Writing Assistants help learners improve their writing by suggesting grammar corrections, sentence restructuring, and vocabulary enhancement; Personalized Learning and Adaptive Content analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of learners to help create customized lessons with tailored exercises, adaptive difficulty levels, and focused skill improvement; AI in Language Assessment and Exams automates assessment processes, ensuring fairness and efficiency; while AI for Cultural and Contextual Learning helps learners understand cultural nuances through context-aware translations and simulated interactions.

Previous research

A number of studies "found it hard to identify the boundaries of expressions and occasionally failed to find the dictionary (sub-)entries that matched them" (Bui, & Boers, 2019: 221–252), while "online activities in particular had a positive effect on their vocabulary knowledge in English" (Peters, et al., 2019). The results of some studies reveal that AI "produced a significantly larger amount of feedback than teachers did, and that compared with teacher feedback - which mainly focused

on content-related and language-related issues" - and "ChatGPT, teachers displayed tendencies towards using different feedback types when evaluating different aspects of students' writing" to "suggest that teachers collaborate with ChatGPT" (Guo, et al., 2024). Febriani (2024) conducted a study and stated that "AI enables students to rapidly fix their errors and continually improve their language skills through personalized lessons and instant feedback".

In 2024, Guo and his colleagues carried out research using AI-supported peer reviews and stated: "The results indicate that the integration of AI supervision improved the quality of students' peer reviews". The authors showed "benefits of AI-supported peer review systems in empowering students to provide more valuable feedback on their peers' written work". Kemelbekova, et al. (2024) conducted the research "AI in teaching English as a foreign language: Effectiveness and prospects in Kazakh higher education", in which the authors presented the prospects of AI in a developing country, with a great future. Annamalai, et al. (2023) published the paper "Using chatbots for English language learning in higher education" to reveal a large part of utilizing AI in learning a foreign language.

Language Learning AI applications have introduced innovations in language education, including giving real-time feedback, personalized learning, and interactive tools. AI's potential to enhance student engagement and improve proficiency has been studied previously. Key features such as adaptive algorithms and natural language processing enable AI tools to cater to individual learning needs.

Research also emphasizes the role of AI in creating immersive learning environments. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), powered by AI, provide opportunities for learners to practice language skills in simulated real-world settings. Chatbots and conversational agents further support spoken language practice, enabling students to improve their fluency and pronunciation.

Additional studies have explored how AI supports differentiated instruction. For example, adaptive learning platforms can analyze student progress and tailor lessons to their specific needs. This capability is particularly valuable in multilingual classrooms, where students may have varying levels of English proficiency.

English education in Vietnam has traditionally been rooted in grammar-focused and teacher-centered approaches. Recent reforms aim to promote communicative competence; yet, challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources persist. The integration of technology, particularly AI, has the potential to address these issues by providing scalable and cost-effective solutions.

Vu & Peters (2021) stated that "students in rural areas had significantly poorer vocabulary knowledge than those in urban areas, which might be the result of differences in their exposure to English, parental guidance, goal setting, motivation, and available resources. Additionally, male students had more limited vocabulary knowledge compared to female students", and "over 90% of Vietnamese non-English majored university students in a General English program

could not master the most frequent 2,000 words after 10 years of formal English instruction".

Despite these advancements, the adoption of AI in Vietnamese classrooms is still in its nascent stages. Research indicates that while students are enthusiastic about using AI tools, teachers often lack the training and confidence to effectively integrate these technologies into their teaching practices. This gap highlights the need for targeted professional development programs and policy support.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory framework to explore the effects of AI on language learning, specifically vocabulary learning. The sociocultural perspective emphasizes the role of interaction and tools in learning, suggesting that AI can serve as a mediator in the learning process. The paper tries to look into understanding the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge, ensuring that AI tools are used effectively to achieve educational objectives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative insights from interviews. This design ensures a comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on English performance. By integrating these methods, the study captures both broad trends and nuanced individual experiences.

3.2. Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The sample included 100 students in Hanoi, half of them used AI tools for English learning during 2024. Only students in the experimental group received instructions of how to use AI in learning, while the control group did not receive such advice. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how different student demographics interact with AI tools and the resulting variations in learning outcomes.

3.3. Data collection process

Pre- and post-tests were distributed to students to measure their English vocabulary proficiency. Semi-structured interviews provided in-depth insight into their experiences and challenges.

The interview questions were designed to explore students' motivations for using AI, their experiences with specific tools, and the perceived impact on their language skills. Observational data was also collected during classroom sessions where AI tools were actively used, offering additional context to the findings.

3.4. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS, focusing on descriptive and inferential statistics. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data, identifying recurring themes and patterns. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Triangulation was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

4. Results

Frequency of usage varied, with 45% using these tools daily. Students valued features like personalized feedback and gamified learning.

Table 1: Pre-test

Group	Mean Score	Median Score	Standard Deviation
Control Group	15.08	15.0	1.86
Experimental Group	15.68	16.0	1.56

The Control Group achieved an average pre-test score of 15.08, while the Experimental Group scored an average 15.68, indicating that both groups have similar initial proficiency levels.

The standard deviation of the Experimental Group (1.56) is slightly lower than that of the Control Group (1.86), meaning that the former's scores are slightly more consistent.

The median scores (15.0 for Control and 16.0 for Experimental) further confirm that both groups started at a similar level before intervention took place (Table 1).

Table 2: Post-test Results

Group	Mean Score	Median Score	Standard Deviation
Control Group	15.94	16.0	2.04
Experimental Group	18.02	18.0	1.38

The Experimental Group improved significantly, with a higher mean score (18.02) compared to the Control Group (15.94).

The median score (18.0 vs. 16.0) confirms that the Experimental Group

performed better overall.

The Experimental Group's standard deviation (1.38) is lower, meaning their scores are more consistent, while the Control Group's performance varied more.

The two groups of students were assessed on their vocabulary proficiency before and after a learning period. The Control Group followed a traditional learning approach, while the Experimental Group received AI-assisted language learning support. Before the learning intervention, both groups displayed similar proficiency levels in vocabulary.

The standard deviation of the Control Group was 1.86, marginally higher than that of the Experimental Group (1.56). This suggests that the Control Group had slightly more variability in student performance, while the Experimental Group's scores were more consistent. However, the difference was minor, reinforcing the idea that both groups had comparable abilities before the intervention.

After the learning period, a noticeable difference emerged between the two groups. The Control Group, which followed a traditional learning approach, showed only a slight improvement. Their mean score increased from 15.08 to 15.94, and the median score remained at 16.0. The standard deviation was 2.04, indicating that the variability in scores remained similar.

In contrast, the Experimental Group, which used AI-assisted learning, showed significant improvement. The group's mean post-test score rose from 15.68 to 18.02, and the median score increased from 16.0 to 18.0. This shift suggests that AI-assisted learning helped students enhance their vocabulary more effectively than traditional methods. Additionally, the standard deviation decreased from 1.56 to 1.38, indicating more consistent performance among students in the AI-assisted group.

The Control Group's modest improvement suggests that traditional learning methods provided some benefits but did not lead to significant vocabulary growth. Their increase of 0.86 points in the mean score is relatively small, and the fact that their median score remained unchanged suggests that many students did not experience noticeable gains. The slight increase in standard deviation implies that some students improved while others stagnated, leading to a wider performance gap within the group.

On the other hand, the Experimental Group showed greater progress in every metric. Their mean score increased by 2.34 points, a much greater improvement compared to the Control Group. Their median score also rose by two points, indicating a consistent upward trend in performance. Additionally, the decrease in standard deviation suggests that AI-assisted learning helped more students reach a similar level of proficiency, making their progress more uniform.

These results suggest that AI-assisted learning provided a more effective and consistent approach to vocabulary acquisition than traditional methods. The higher mean and median gains of the Experimental Group indicate better overall performance,

while the reduced standard deviation suggests that AI tools helped standardize learning progress among students. The Control Group, in contrast, showed only minor improvements with greater performance variability, suggesting that traditional methods may not be as effective in achieving consistent vocabulary gains.

Perception of AI Assistance in Language Learning

In addition to measuring vocabulary proficiency through pre- and post-test assessments, students' perceptions of AI-assisted learning were also evaluated using a Likert scale (1-5). The scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing students to express their opinions on AI's impact on their learning experience. The responses indicate a generally positive perception of AI assistance in language learning.

Table 3: Perceived Impact of AI on Learning Aspects

Statement	Mean Score	Median Score	Standard Deviation
AI affects my reading skills	4.1	4	0.8
AI affects my writing skills	3.9	4	0.9
AI affects my listening skills	4.2	4	0.7
AI helps in enlarging vocabulary	4.5	5	0.6

Students rated AI's effect on their vocabulary expansion the highest (Mean: 4.5, Median: 5), suggesting that AI tools were particularly effective in introducing new words and reinforcing their usage. AI's impact on reading and listening skills was also perceived positively, with mean scores above 4.0. However, the writing skill rating was slightly lower (Mean: 3.9), indicating that while AI was still helpful, its role in writing development may not have been as strong as in other areas (Table 3).

Table 4: General Perceptions of AI in Language Learning

Statement	Mean Score	Median Score	Standard Deviation
I think that AI is helpful in learning English.	4.6	5	0.5
I think AI is easy to interact with.	4.3	4	0.7
I think AI makes the content more interesting.	4.4	4	0.6
I see learning with AI similar to a social meeting.	3.8	4	0.9

The statement "AI is helpful in learning English" received the highest agreement, with a mean of 4.6 and a median of 5, reinforcing the idea that most students found AI to be a valuable learning tool. Ease of interaction (4.3) and AI

making content more interesting (4.4) were also rated highly, suggesting that it enhances engagement in the learning process.

However, the perception of AI-assisted learning being similar to a social meeting received a lower rating (Mean: 3.8), indicating that while some students found AI interactions engaging, they did not fully equate them to real-life social interactions. The higher standard deviation (0.9) for this statement suggests more variation in responses, meaning students had diverse opinions on how socially engaging AI-based learning felt (Table 4).

The results show that students generally view AI as an effective and engaging tool for language learning. AI's ability to expand vocabulary received the highest rating, which aligns with the post-test results showing significant vocabulary improvement within the Experimental Group. The positive ratings for reading and listening skills suggest that AI can serve as a useful supplement to traditional learning.

The lower rating for writing skills may indicate that students found AI less effective in providing personalized feedback on their writing compared to vocabulary acquisition. This suggests that AI-assisted learning may be more beneficial for receptive skills (reading, listening) than productive skills (writing, speaking).

The high ratings for ease of interaction and content engagement highlight AI's potential to create an enjoyable learning experience. However, the lower score for AI as a "social" learning tool suggests that human interaction remains a key component in language learning, and AI may not fully replace traditional classroom or peer-based learning environments.

5. Discussion

5.1. Role of AI in enhancing English learning

The findings align with global research, confirming AI's potential to enhance language proficiency. Personalized learning and interactive features cater to diverse student needs, making AI tools particularly effective in a multilingual environment such as in Hanoi. Vietnamese EFL teachers can guide their students to include morphology (e.g., prefixes and suffixes), working out the meaning of words from the context, using dictionaries and flashcards effectively (Vu & Peters, 2021). "Vietnamese EFL teachers should evaluate the frequency of the lexical elements they want to offer their students rather than just relying on their hunches or glossaries in textbooks and reference books when choosing vocabulary" (Nguyen, 2023).

AI tools have demonstrated the ability to bridge gaps in traditional teaching methods, particularly in providing individualized support. Considering the large number of words for students to learn, it is vital that Vietnamese EFL students can

become autonomous in their own vocabulary learning (Vu & Peters, 2021). However, the findings also highlight the need for a balanced approach that combines AI tools with human instruction to ensure comprehensive skills development.

5.2. Broader implications

Accessibility remains a significant barrier, particularly for students from low-income families. Educators and policymakers must address these shortcomings by providing resources and training. Vietnamese EFL teachers are recommended to encourage their students to use English outside the classroom (Vu & Peters, 2021). Furthermore, integrating AI into curricula requires careful planning to balance technology and traditional pedagogical approaches. Professional development programs for teachers are essential for ensuring effective AI integration. These programs should focus on enhancing their technical skills and understanding how to use AI tools to complement traditional teaching methods.

This study underscores the importance of a supportive ecosystem for effective AI adoption. Collaboration among educators, developers, and policymakers is essential for maximizing AI's benefits while mitigating potential drawbacks. The findings also have implications for the design of AI tools. Developers should prioritize user-friendly interfaces and culturally relevant content to enhance accessibility and engagement. Policymakers should consider the long-term sustainability of AI integration, including investment in infrastructure and training. Vietnamese EFL teachers can encourage their students to find ways to interact with English outside the classroom. In addition, "Vietnamese EFL teachers can play an important role in that process" (Vu & Peters, 2021).

6. Conclusion

AI has emerged as a transformative tool in English language education in Hanoi, offering significant benefits in enhancing student performance. However, challenges such as accessibility, over-reliance, and the need for teacher training must be addressed. Future research is needed to explore longitudinal impacts and the scalability of AI interventions across diverse educational contexts. Therefore, one should "look into the lexical component of high-stakes English tests in Vietnam, calling for more attention to the lexical profiles and lexical coverage of those tests" (Vu & Peters, 2021). The integration of AI in teaching and learning foreign language may contribute to the language performance of students.

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