

Exploring Students' Perceptions towards the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on their Reading Skills: The Case of S6 Students at the English Language Department

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Abstract

Reading is about the process of interpreting and understanding written language. It is a complex process that has attracted a lot of attention from educators, psychologists, and linguists for decades. It presents many difficulties and challenges that might be closely linked to the text or the reader. The rapid development of AI has significantly supported university students' reading skills. Therefore, the main purpose of the current research is to explore participants' perceptions of using AI in reading skills. A WhatsApp group consisting of S6 students studying English at the Department of English Studies at Ibn Tofail University participated in the study. They were given an online qualitative questionnaire to fill out. The findings denote that the participants have positive attitudes toward the AI because it helps them become more proficient readers who can access and understand texts that are getting harder to understand. This study suggests that teachers should integrate AI into their teaching process and encourage students to use it. It also proposes that the AI detector should be used to encourage students to read instead of cheating while conducting research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of teaching reading is to promote students' knowledge and provide them with reading strategies to understand written texts. Teaching reading contributes to attaining different learning goals, such as reading different texts in English, enhancing knowledge of the English language, and adapting the reading style in relation to reading purposes. The act of reading requires students to invest much effort to understand the text, emphasizing sounds and sentence structures before attacking the meaning of words. This implies the ability to interpret language characteristics and pave the way for comprehension. By the same token, the appearance of artificial intelligence (henceforth, AI) technology has made reading an easy task because it can not only explain difficult or technical terms but also their context. It can also enhance students' capacity to learn and comprehend information, analyze issues, and solve problems in English learning, particularly when reading (Chea & Xiao, 2024). However, while AI tools like ChatGPT have been widely studied in international contexts, there is a lack of research on their impact in the Moroccan educational setting, particularly on reading skills (Ouahani, 2025). Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to minimize such a gap

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by exploring S6 students' perceptions of the impact of AI on their reading skills to find out the extent to which it develops their critical reading. Based on the objective of this research, the following research questions are addressed:

- a) What are university students' perceptions about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on their reading skill?
- b) To what extent does artificial intelligence (AI) develop students' critical reading skill?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is one of the language-receptive skills that is often defined as the process of getting meaning from text. Its goal is to get a broad grasp of the text's content rather than deducing meaning from single words or sentences (Woolley, 2011). Reading is considered an important part of English teaching and plays a dominant role among the four language skills (Yang, 2023). According to Lenz (2005), reading comprehension is the process of deducing meaning from a text. He indicates that the reader's ability to draw connections between their prior knowledge and the purpose of reading with the meanings of the text is part of the reading comprehension process. Grellet (1981) states that reading is a process of understanding written texts. If readers understand the written texts, it becomes easier for them to select the relevant information and reject the irrelevant ones. To comprehend written texts, it is essential to take the following elements into consideration: the first one is what it is read. To explain, there are common text types a person can read, like novels, short stories, poetry, literary writings, newspapers, magazines, etc. The second one is the reason for reading. Besides, Goodman (1988) views reading as a receptive language process, and he asserts that it is a "psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning that the reader constructs" (p. 12). Moreover, Carrel & Eisterhold (1983) confirm that understanding a text is a collaborative effort between the reader's prior knowledge and the text. The ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge is required for effective comprehension. This suggests that the reader's prior knowledge plays an important role in comprehension. In other words, the background knowledge helps EFL learners construct meaning before, during, and after they read.

2.1. Reading Subskills

There are different types of reading subskills that help learners solve their reading problems and enhance their language competence. Four major categories of strategies can be used to develop students' reading comprehension, which include "skimming, scanning, oreducting, intensive reading" (Harmer, 2007, p.110).

2.1.1. Skimming

The term skimming means identifying the main ideas of a text. Students need to be able to skim a text to get a general idea about its content, such as reading a report quickly to understand what it is about. At this stage of reading activity, if students focus on all the details in the text, they may be overwhelmed by information and may not be able to get the general idea of the text they read (Harmer, 2007). According to Manya and Leeuw (1965), skimming is when you read only the sections that interest you and skip to the next one. Focus on the main points and block out details.

2.1.2. Scanning

Scanning is a reading technique used to determine specific information without following the linearity of the written text. In other words, students should have the ability to scan the text to look for some specific detailed information, such as searching quickly through an article to find a particular word or a name, which means that students do not have to read

every word and line while reading a text, as this prevents students from scanning the text successfully (Harmer, 2007).

2.1.3. Predicting

One of the crucial principles of reading is prediction. Students can get an idea about the text content before they start reading. They can have hints about the text through pictures or book covers before coming across the text. Sometimes, paragraphs or headlines can lead learners to know about the articles. As they have hints about the content, students start activating the process of reading, and their brains start predicting what the text is about (Harmer, 2007).

2.1.4. Intensive Reading

Unlike skimming and scanning, intensive reading is a detailed comprehension that involves looking for detailed information or picking out particular examples of language use. Harmer (2007) suggests that teachers provide students with a combination of materials and activities that enable them to practice using these skills through English texts.

2.2. Levels of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension can be classified into four competence levels. These categories/levels include literal comprehension, critical reading, and creative reading (Burn, 1987).

2.2.1. Literal Comprehension

Literal reading refers to the straightforward expression of ideas and facts on printed pages. Literal comprehension is the ability to understand a word's major direct literal meaning, ideas, or sentences in context. The fundamentals of literal comprehension are understanding stated main ideas, details, effects, and sequences. As a reader must first understand what the author says before reading or making a judgment, this degree of comprehension is crucial to all reading skills at any level. Briefly, literal comprehension is the ability to deduce the principal literal meaning of a word, idea, or sentence from its context .

2.2.2. Critical Reading

This type of reading refers to the process of analyzing a written material by comparing the concepts found in it to known standards and generating opinions about their accuracy, appropriateness, and timeliness. Critical reading compares prior experiences to new material aspects, such as substance, style, expression, information, and the author's ideals or values. At this level, the reader must be an active reader, looking for facts and deferring judgments (Burn, 1987).

2.2.3. Creative Reading

Creative reading can be defined as the process of going through the content supplied by the author. Creative reading, like critical reading, necessitates the reader's thinking while reading, and it also necessitates the reader's imagination. Readers often attempt to offer new alternatives to those written by the author (Liu, 2010).

2.3. The Importance of Teaching Reading

The importance of teaching reading is to promote the knowledge of students and build their abilities to understand reading texts. Teaching reading contributes to the attainment of different learning goals, such as reading different texts in English, enhancing knowledge of the English language, adapting the reading style with relation to reading purposes, activating students' prior knowledge of a topic to understand a text, and promoting awareness in terms of the structure of written texts in English (Rochman, 2018). Therefore, students should be able to perceive, retain, and recall information to improve their reading skills.

2.4. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

People should be able to trust digital technology as it becomes an increasingly important element of their lives. Its adoption also depends on its credibility, given the fact that its strong commitment to morals and the rule of law, as well as its demonstrated ability to produce safe, dependable, and advanced goods and services ranging from energy to automotive, medical, and aerospace technology. The rapid development in technology led to the appearance of artificial intelligence (AI). The latter is a branch of computer science that makes computers imitate human behavior and intelligence to solve problems. AI is a group of technologies that integrate computing power, data, and algorithms. Therefore, the current rise in AI is mostly driven by advancements in computing and the growing availability of data (European Commission, 2020). With its practical influence on every aspect of human endeavor, artificial intelligence has emerged as one of the most significant technologies in the world. Its contribution to the advancement and equipment of the human generation across time has been substantial. One may say that its wide range of applications has expanded from "the soil to the space." The development of artificial intelligence has benefited from the advent of the Internet's round-the-clock accessibility, cloud computing, big data, sensors, and other technical innovations. AI hasn't entirely supplanted humans yet, though. AI is now widely used in a variety of fields, including business, education, entertainment, medicine, defense, and space technology, where it has significant and positive impacts. It has a significant influence on the medical field, aiding in patient diagnosis and bridging the gap between technology and medicine. Accurate and secure data is necessary, as is the patients' faith in the system. Robots doing surgery or helping with diagnosis are just two of the many incredible uses for robotics. In essence, AI uses vast amounts of data to produce the desired outcomes, and as a result, its algorithms are made to minimize errors and produce precise results (Ghosh & Arunachalam, 2021).

Both the individual and societal perspectives should be taken into account when evaluating the effects of AI systems. The application of AI systems can play a big part in supporting social rights, democracy, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is necessary that public administrations, hospitals, utility and transport services, financial supervisors, schools, and other areas of public interest immediately begin to deploy goods and services that rely on AI in their activities since AI is a great support (European Commission, 2020). The explicit objectives of AI are to replicate human intellect, solve knowledge-intensive tasks, make computers that can carry out jobs that call for human intelligence, and develop some sort of self-learning system. People have created many things for the benefit of humans, among which we find computers. The latter play a very important role in reducing the workload of humans and solving many complex problems (Ghosh & Arunachalam, 2021).

2.5. AI in Education

AI could make it possible to accomplish educational goals more effectively at a large scale. It may increase the adaptability of learning resources to cater for students' needs and skills, and addressing the variety of incomplete learning that pupils have as a result of the pandemic is a policy issue. Enhancing teaching positions is a top objective, and AI could help teachers more by enabling automated assistants or other tools. When teachers run out of time, AI might also allow them to continue providing support to specific students. Creating materials that are sensitive to the experiences and knowledge that students bring to their education their cultural and community assets is a top concern, and artificial intelligence (AI) may make it possible for curriculum materials to be more locally tailored (Russel & Norvig, 2010). Two main viewpoints on AI in education emerge as it is introduced into classrooms: (1) AI to enhance student learning and (2) support for education on AI and associated technologies. Thus, AI helps students learn and become proficient in disciplines like writing and mathematics. However, it's equally crucial that students study artificial intelligence (AI), analyze its use in society and education, and assess its worth and function in their own lives

and careers. This means that AI is present in every aspect of students' lives (European Commission, 2020).

In a nutshell, reading comprehension is a complex process of matching printed letters to phonological sounds that have meanings. Some readers adopt the bottom-up view, and others adopt the top-down approach in reading comprehension. In other words, reading is a matter of decoding graphic symbols to form meaning of the text or a matter of involving broad knowledge about the context to understand the decoded form of the text. However, the appearance of the artificial intelligence technology made reading an easy task because it can not only explain difficult or technical terms but also their context. It can also enhance students' capacity to learn and comprehend information, analyze issues, and solve problems in English, particularly when reading.

2.6. Related Studies

The artificial intelligence has penetrated the world of education because it is believed to help learners learn better and achieve educational goals more effectively. Different studies have been conducted to find out the extent to which it impacts students' learning. For example, Fitria (2021) conducted a study to investigate the role of artificial intelligence in education, especially in the teaching and learning processes. The findings indicate that AI provides many benefits for both teachers and students. To explain, education can be done at any time and anywhere. It develops the four language skills. It also presents learning materials, conducts assessments, and provides feedback. Wang et al (2024) conducted a systematic review of the importance of AI in education. In his article, he concludes that artificial intelligence has a significant role in delivering personalized learning support and intelligent feedback across various subjects. He also concludes that AI-powered learning management systems support teaching and learning activities, such as intelligent content creation, administrative task automation, and personalized learning. Another comprehensive review of selected empirical studies on artificial intelligence in education was done by Zhang and Aslan (2021). They found that AI facilitates interaction, develops learner engagement, generates adaptive learning materials, offers metacognitive prompts, provides enriched learning environments, and improves students' speaking and reading. Besides, Ouahani (2025) has recently conducted a systematic review of the ChatGPT application in ELT: the international context, the Moroccan context, and future prospects. The findings of his study show that a great number of international studies have been conducted, affirming the importance of using ChatGPT to develop language skills. However, Ouahani (2025) confirms that within the Moroccan context, no article was published on the application of ChatGPT to teach the four skills, vocabulary, or grammar. Therefore, the impetus behind the current study is to minimize such a gap by exploring S6 students' perceptions towards the impact of AI on their reading skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is about the strategies and techniques a researcher relies on to identify, select, process, and analyze data about a certain problem (Kothari, 1990). The present study is based on the qualitative research method to explore university students' perceptions about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on their reading skills.

3.1. Participants

A WhatsApp group consisting of thirty-six S6 students studying English at the Department of English Studies in Ibn Tofail University participated in the current study.

3.2. Data Collection Tool

The research tool used in the present research was an online questionnaire. It contained questions and statements about students' perceptions about the impact of the artificial intelligence on their reading skills.

3.3.Data Collection Procedure

The researcher joined the S6 group and informed the members about the reason behind conducting the research about the artificial intelligence (AI) and reading skills. Most of them expressed their desire to participate in filling out the questionnaire. Out of thirty-six, twenty students filled out the questionnaire.

3.4.The Questionnaire Questions

The online questionnaire contained six questions that S6 students of the English department had to answer. They all targeted participants' perceptions toward using artificial intelligence in reading skills. The following questions were covered in the questionnaire:

- a. Are you familiar with AI?
- b. What do you think about it?
- c. Do you think AI helps you improve your reading skills? If yes, how?
- d. Do you think AI encourages critical thinking while reading?
- e. While conducting a research, do you read any references? If no, why?
- f. Do you think AI tools should be restricted in any way to students? If yes, why?

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As has been mentioned above, the online questionnaire contained six questions. All of them range around the participants' views and opinions about the impact of artificial intelligence on reading skills. Each question's findings are described below.

- a. Are you familiar with AI?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) state that they are familiar with artificial intelligence tools. Some of them confirm that the illiterate, nowadays, is not the one who does not know how to read or write. The illiterate is the one who does not have any idea about what the AI is or how to use it.

- b. What do you think about it?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) exhibit a positive attitude towards the artificial intelligence. They declare that AI is a powerful and transformative technology with immense potential that provides solutions to societies. They add that it helps them find any knowledge easily without making any effort. Some of them state that AI is a help provider because it helps people even with their daily life problems. One of the participants is a facebook influencers. He announces that artificial intelligence has emerged as one of the most significant technologies in the world, enumerating that it contains some creative tools on which he relies to create entertaining video content without making a lot of effort.

- c. Do you think AI helps you improve your reading skill? If yes, how?

All the participants (N = 20, 100%) divulge that artificial intelligence (AI) plays a very important role in developing their reading skills. They substantiate that by incorporating AI into reading instruction, there is an exceptional opportunity to assist students become more proficient readers who can access and understand books that are getting harder to understand, do better academically, and expand their intellectual horizons. Most of them mentioned two platforms they rely on while reading which are ChatGPT and Lexia Core5 Reading. These two

tools, based on their answers, help them analyze a text, summarize it, and explain any difficult words in context.

d. Do you think AI encourages critical thinking while reading?

Most of the participants (N = 18, 80%) admit that artificial intelligence revives their prior knowledge and encourages them to think critically. They assert that AI plays the role of a help provider. In other words, it helps them get ideas or proposed solutions. They analyze, synthesize, and evaluate them depending on their prior knowledge to come up with actionable plans.

e. While conducting a research, do you read any references? If no, why?

When asked about whether they read any references while conducting research, twelve participants (N = 10, 50%) disclose that they rarely look for any reference to read. They claim that artificial intelligence made it very easy to get ready-made research with references in less than one minute. They just make some minor amendments and hand it to their teachers.

f. Do you think AI tools should be restricted in any way to students? If yes, why?

Half of the participants (N = 10, 50%) express that artificial intelligence is one of the most significant technologies in the world because it helps students in their learning process. However, based on their answers, the majority of university students, instead of using AI positively, use it for cheating, especially when conducting research. They get ready-made research without reading any references. Therefore, the participants suggest that the university administration should do something to stop this type of cheating.

Reading comprehension is often defined as the process of getting meaning from text. The ultimate goal of reading is to obtain a broad grasp of the text's content rather than deduce meaning from single words or sentences. It is considered an important part of English teaching and plays a dominant role among the four skills used in the learning of the English Language. This is because the act of reading requires students to make a great effort to comprehend the text by concentrating on the sounds and sentence structure before attacking the meaning of the words. The rapid development in technology led to the appearance of Artificial intelligence (AI), a branch of computer science that makes computers imitate human behavior and intelligence to solve problems. It is widely used in different fields, such as business, education, entertainment, medicine, defense, and space technology, where it has significant and positive impacts. The main objectives of artificial intelligence are to replicate human intellect, solve knowledge-intensive tasks, make computers carry out jobs that call for human intelligence, and develop some sort of self-learning system. Integrating AI into education can make the learning process more effective by providing support to students, enhancing learning, and raising students' critical thinking. The purpose of the present study is to explore students' perceptions of the impact of AI on their reading skills. The findings indicate that all the participants are familiar with using the AI. They asseverate positive feelings and attitudes towards this new technology because it helps them find any kind of knowledge easily without making any effort. Based on the participants' answers, AI plays a remarkable role in improving and supporting their reading skills. It assists them become more proficient readers who can access and understand books that are difficult to understand, do better academically, and expand their intellectual horizons. It also aids them analyze a text, summarize it, and explain any enigmatic words in context, which was a very challenging endeavour to do before the appearance of the AI. Besides, it develops students' critical thinking while reading through reviving their prior knowledge and using it to think critically. This is confirmed by the participants expounding that AI bolsters them get different ideas or proposed solutions. They analyze, synthesize, and evaluate them depending on their prior knowledge to come up with their actionable plans. The

findings of the present study endorse the studies conducted by (Dawely & Mahyoub, 2024), and (Hidayat, 2024) about the impact of AI on students' reading skills. They found out that using artificial intelligence for teaching reading supports students reach a deep understanding of a text and evolves their critical reading.

However, despite all these advantages, artificial intelligence (AI) has some drawbacks. In the online questionnaire, the researcher includes two questions purposefully, which are questions (e) and (f). The main purpose behind these two questions is to know whether university students follow the regular procedures for conducting research and use AI for help or just rely on the copy-and-paste strategy. In answering the question (e,) half of the participants acknowledge that they rarely look for any reference to read while conducting research about a topic because artificial intelligence made it very easy for them to get ready-made research with references in less than one minute. They just make some minor amendments and hand it to their teachers. Concerning the question (f), half of the participants claim that the majority of university students, instead of using AI in a positive way, use it for cheating, especially when engaging in research through getting ready-made research without reading a single reference. The present research sounds the alarm about this dangerous phenomenon because it discourages students from developing their critical reading. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should provide all Moroccan universities with AI detectors to reduce cheating and punish those using the AI negatively.

To conclude, the reading skill is one of the four language skills that are the foundation for learning and using a language effectively. It is a matter of decoding graphic symbols to form the meaning of the text or a matter of involving broad knowledge about the context to understand the decoded form of the text. The appearance of artificial intelligence (AI) technology made reading an easy task because it can not only explain difficult or technical terms but also their context. It can also enhance students' capacity to learn and comprehend information, analyze issues, and solve problems in English, particularly when reading. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that teachers integrate AI into their teaching process, especially while teaching reading because it helps analyze a text critically, summarize it, and explain any difficult words in context. This study also suggests that the AI detector should be used to encourage students to read instead of cheating while conducting research

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