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Human Thinking Meets Artificial Intelligence: A Pedagogical Approach to EFL Instruction

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Abstract

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have created new opportunities for language education, though concerns remain about preserving student engagement and academic integrity. This study explores how ChatGPT can be meaningfully integrated into EFL teaching to enhance learning while maintaining critical thinking and originality. Drawing on classroom practices at Batna 2 University (Algeria), it examines three courses: *Written Expression*, *Reading and Text Analysis*, and *Thesis Writing* where AI-assisted tasks encouraged students to interact with ChatGPT for idea generation, writing revision, and language analysis. Students compared AI outputs with their own work, selected preferred options, and justified their choices. Findings showed that learners developed stronger language awareness, improved judgment of textual quality, and greater discernment regarding AI reliability. They valued AI's support in brainstorming and rephrasing but recognized its limits. The study concludes that guided, reflective use of AI can promote "AI literacy," fostering creativity, responsibility, and critical thinking in EFL learning.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved from a distant technological possibility into a defining feature of contemporary society, permeating nearly every aspect of daily life (Dos, 2025; Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). Among the many domains AI influences, education stands out as a field where its impact is both immediate and transformative (Dos, 2025; Sok & Heng, 2024). From personalized learning environments and adaptive assessment systems to intelligent tutoring programs and language-learning applications, AI is redefining not only how knowledge is delivered but also how it is accessed, processed, and applied by learners (Jara & Ochoa, 2021; Jo, 2024; Sok & Heng, 2024). In recent years, a new generation of AI tools, ranging from adaptive learning platforms to advanced conversational systems such as ChatGPT, Google's Gemini 2.5, Anthropic's Claude, and xAI's Grok, has begun reshaping the very ways in which teaching and learning are conceptualized and implemented. Within the field of language education, these technologies offer unique opportunities to support vocabulary development (Chen & Choi, 2021; Chingakham & Tamuk, 2024; Thorburn, 2024), scaffold writing (Guo, Wang & Chu, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2022), and facilitate reading comprehension (Hidayat, 2024; Çelik, Yangın & Arslanbay, 2024; Srinivasan & Murthy, 2021). However, the increasing presence of AI in the classroom also brings a new set of pedagogical and ethical challenges, particularly in maintaining a balance between embracing innovation and safeguarding academic integrity.

One of the most pressing concerns in the integration of AI in language education is its potential to replace, rather than enhance, student effort. While AI can provide valuable support in generating ideas, refining language, and offering instant feedback, it also carries the risk of encouraging over-reliance if used without guidance or critical engagement, shifting the learner from an active constructor of knowledge to a passive recipient of machine-generated solutions (Porayska-Pomsta, Holmes, & Nemorin, 2023). The pedagogical challenge for educators, therefore, lies not in banning these powerful tools, but in guiding students toward using them responsibly and ethically through cultivating a new form of digital literacy where students learn to use AI as a collaborator, not a substitute for their own critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Baskara, 2023).

The present study seeks to explore practical, classroom-tested strategies for integrating AI into EFL instruction in ways that promote learner engagement, critical thinking, and skill development. The focus is not on eliminating AI from the learning process, but on designing instructional practices that encourage students to use it as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for independent work.

Accordingly, the study addresses three guiding questions:

1. How can AI be used to enhance, not replace, learning in EFL contexts?
2. What instructional strategies can prevent overreliance on AI tools?

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3. What impact do these strategies have on student motivation and learning outcomes?

I Literature Review

I.1. AI in Education: Opportunities and Concerns

Current research on AI-assisted learning shows that artificial intelligence has emerged as a significant force in education, demonstrating its potential to enhance both student learning and teaching methods (Baalsrud Hauge & Jeong, 2024; Ballen et al., 2024; Hopfenbeck et al., 2023; Oliver et al., 2024). A key area of focus is adaptive learning systems and intelligent tutoring systems. These technologies are able to modify lesson content in real time based on a student's individual progress. Rather than following a rigid curriculum, these systems generate flexible learning pathways that cater to specific student requirements. The development of large language models such as GPT-4 has taken this even further, enabling interactive question-answer dialogues, tailored explanations, and custom practice activities that adapt instantly to the learner's level. Research from universities and large-scale pilots (e.g., De Simone et al., 2024; DigitalDefynd, 2025; Kulik & Fletcher, 2017) shows that when used thoughtfully, these tools can lead to higher achievement, greater engagement, and stronger motivation across a range of subjects, from STEM to language learning.

Personalization is one of the strongest benefits of AI-assisted learning. AI technologies can evaluate a student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning speed to modify educational content and their learning trajectory (Luckin et al., 2016). For instance, a student encountering difficulties with a particular topic can receive supplementary explanations and exercises, while a more proficient learner can progress to more advanced material without being restricted by a standardized curriculum. This personalization also influences the selection of learning resources. AI can suggest materials that align with a student's interests, learning preferences, and current proficiency (Holmes et al., 2019). This adaptability creates a more pertinent, engaging, and effective educational experience compared to conventional teaching methods.

Immediate feedback is another powerful advantage offered by AI (Luckin et al., 2016). Instead of waiting for a teacher to grade an assignment or return a test, students can receive instant responses to their work. This real-time feedback helps students correct errors immediately, reinforcing correct understanding and preventing them from repeatedly making the same mistakes. It also promotes a more active role in their education, as students can test out ideas, confirm their knowledge, and adjust their methods on the fly. For educators, AI-generated feedback saves time and offers detailed data on both individual and class-wide performance, which simplifies the process of planning specific support.

AI tools have significantly improved language practice. For those learning a second or a foreign language, AI can provide customized vocabulary lists, grammar exercises, and pronunciation help. Tools powered by large language models can even simulate real conversations, responding naturally to questions and adjusting the difficulty to match the learner's skill level. This creates a safe environment for practice, which helps reduce anxiety and builds confidence. Research shows that these AI tools not only improve technical skills like grammar and vocabulary but also help learners become more fluent and develop better communication strategies.

Despite its many benefits, the widespread adoption of AI in education introduces several key challenges. One major concern is plagiarism, as students may be tempted to submit AI-generated text as their own, which undermines academic integrity and makes it difficult for teachers to accurately assess a student's true skills (O'Neil, 2016). This raises important ethical

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questions about originality and ownership, leading institutions to develop detection tools and update policies to promote responsible AI use. Another risk is overdependence on AI for writing, problem-solving, or idea generation, which can hinder the development of essential skills, weaken resilience when facing challenges, and limit learners' ability to work independently (Facione, 2020). This makes it crucial to use AI as a supportive tool that enhances learning rather than as a substitute for personal effort and critical engagement. The final challenge is the potential for diminished critical thinking. When AI provides immediate, complete answers, students may not engage deeply with the material, which can hinder their ability to question, analyze, and make connections on their own. To counter this, some educators are exploring "Socratic AI" methods that use questions to guide students toward solutions rather than simply providing them.

I. 2. AI in EFL Instruction

AI tools have become valuable resources in EFL instruction, helping students to develop key language skills. For writing, AI-powered tools such as Grammarly, QuillBot and ChatGPT provide grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, style suggestions, and organization feedback, enabling learners to produce more coherent and accurate texts. By providing immediate feedback and suggestions, these tools help students correct mistakes as they happen and refine their writing, which can lead to increased confidence and improved proficiency (Marzuki, Widiati, Rusdin, Darwin, & Indrawati, 2023). In reading, AI-based applications, such as: Newsela, LingQ, or Quillionz AI , can adapt texts to a learner's proficiency level, offer instant definitions or translations, and generate comprehension questions that reinforce understanding. For research skills, AI-powered search engines like Semantic Scholar, Elicit, Scholarcy, and SciSpace can assist students in finding relevant sources, summarizing information, and organizing ideas for academic tasks. This allows learners to work more independently and efficiently, while also providing them with exposure to authentic language use in varied contexts.

The expanding role of AI in EFL learning highlights the evolving responsibilities of teachers, shifting from "primary content providers to becoming facilitators of language learning" (Amin, 2023, p. 10). This shift requires guiding students to use AI as a supportive learning tool rather than a shortcut that undermines critical thinking (Holmes et al., 2019). Teachers also play a key role in designing AI-enhanced content to ensure it is accurate, relevant, and aligned with learning objectives (Lee & Zhai, 2024b). Integrating AI with traditional teaching methods can create a balanced learning experience that draws on the strengths of both approaches. In addition, teachers should foster critical engagement with AI-generated content, encouraging students to question and evaluate it to strengthen analytical skills. To fulfil this role effectively, teachers need training on AI-related ethical issues such as plagiarism and bias, and they must monitor student work to ensure AI use enhances rather than diminishes learning outcomes (Kulik & Fletcher, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2024).

I.3. Bridging to Practice

While AI can personalize learning, provide instant feedback, and create new opportunities for language practice, much of the research on this topic focuses on the tools themselves rather than the teaching strategies needed for their effective use (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2022). Specifically, there is a lack of studies exploring the teacher's role in guiding AI-assisted learning in EFL classrooms. Yet, scholars increasingly argue that the successful integration of AI depends as much on the pedagogical vision of educators as it does on the technology's capabilities (Luckin et al., 2016; Selwyn, 2019).

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Several key questions remain unanswered: How can teachers design activities that use AI's strengths without undermining students' critical thinking? What is the best way to encourage students to use AI responsibly and ethically? And how can educators ensure students maintain ownership of their learning when AI can produce highly polished language? To answer these questions, we need to move beyond simply describing AI tools and start examining concrete, classroom-based practices (Holmes et al., 2019).

Furthermore, while some case studies exist on AI integration in language classrooms, they often focus on short-term interventions or controlled settings (Aldossari, 2024; Marzuki et al., 2023). There is a shortage of long-term, teacher-led accounts that demonstrate how AI can be sustainably woven into everyday instruction without compromising learning integrity. This type of research is essential for bridging the gap between theoretical promise and practical application (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

To address this gap, the following section presents a teacher's perspective on integrating AI into EFL instruction. Drawing on my own classroom experiences, it outlines practical strategies for using AI as a supportive tool; one that enriches learning while preserving the essential human elements of language teaching and learning

II- AI Integration in EFL Classrooms: A Practice-Based Approach

Building on the conceptual discussion in the first part of this article, this section offers a practice-based account of how AI has been integrated into my EFL teaching at Batna 2 university. I focus on three courses: *Written Expression, Thesis Writing, and Reading and Text Analysis* to illustrate how AI can be used as a scaffold for language development, critical thinking, and academic integrity. Each example highlights the approach adopted, the learning activities designed, and the outcomes observed.

II.1. Comprehension and Written Expression Course

This first-year course introduces EFL students to the foundational skills of academic writing within the Algerian university context. The content is designed to progress systematically from the sentence level to the paragraph level. Students begin by mastering sentence construction: exploring types, structures, essential elements, and common sentence errors. They then move on to sentence combination techniques, learning how to connect ideas logically and cohesively. The course concludes in an introduction to paragraph writing, where students explore different paragraph types and learn how to structure them effectively.

At the sentence level, one particularly effective activity implemented was called ***One Idea, Three Ways***. The objective of this activity was to help students understand that a single idea can be expressed in different grammatical forms, thereby enhancing their flexibility and control over sentence construction.

The activity was carried out in several stages. First, students were given a simple, familiar prompt, such as *"Describe what you do after class."* They were then required to express the same idea in three sentence forms:

A. A **simple** sentence (*I go home.*)
B. A **compound** sentence (*I go home, and I listen to music.*)
C. A **complex** sentence (*I go home because I need to rest.*)

Once students completed their sentences, they were instructed to consult ChatGPT to generate alternative versions. The AI was prompted with a request such as: "*Suggest different ways to write each sentence while keeping the same meaning.*" ChatGPT typically produced a range of alternatives. For example, for the simple sentence "I go home", it might suggest: "Every afternoon, I head straight home to relax" or "I return home after class so I can recharge for the next day." The researcher then guided the class through a comparative analysis of student-

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produced sentences and ChatGPT-generated suggestions. This involved projecting selected examples on the board and discussing key differences in vocabulary choices, connectors, grammatical complexity, and tone. Students were encouraged to identify which ChatGPT suggestions improved clarity, flow, or expressiveness, and to incorporate those into their revised sentences while maintaining ownership of the final product.

At the sentence development stage, one particularly effective activity implemented was called ***Many Roads to One Sentence***. The objective of this activity was to help students practise combining shorter, choppier sentences into more varied and fluid structures, thereby improving cohesion and style. This addressed a common issue in first-year EFL writing at Batna 2 University, where students often produce a series of disconnected simple sentences that lack flow.

The activity was carried out in several stages. First, students were given sets of short, related sentences, for example:

A. *The sun set behind the mountains. The sky turned red. It was beautiful.*
B. *She studied all night. She was tired in the morning. She passed the test.*

Students were asked to combine each set into a single, coherent sentence or two, using appropriate conjunctions, relative clauses, or participial phrases. Sample student responses included:

A. *The sun set behind the mountains, painting the sky a beautiful red.*
B. *Although she was tired in the morning after studying all night, she passed the test.*

Once students had completed their combinations, they were instructed to consult **ChatGPT** with a prompt such as: *"Combine these sentences into one or two fluent sentences while keeping the same meaning, and explain your choices."* ChatGPT provided a range of alternatives and explanations for its sentence structuring. For example:

- *The sun set behind the mountains, and the sky turned a beautiful shade of red.* (Explanation: Coordinating conjunction links two related actions; descriptive vocabulary enhances imagery.)
- *After studying all night, she was tired in the morning but still passed the test.* (Explanation: Subordinating conjunction emphasises cause-effect relationship.)

The researcher then led a comparative analysis of student-produced combinations and ChatGPT-generated versions, projecting selected examples for whole-class discussion. Students were encouraged to identify the linking devices and structural choices used, and to reflect on which combinations achieved the smoothest flow or best emphasis.

At the paragraph level, one particularly effective activity implemented was called ***Idea Expansion with AI Support.*** The objective of this activity was to train students to develop a topic sentence into a coherent paragraph supported by well-developed ideas, thereby fostering cohesion and depth in their writing.

The activity was carried out in several stages. First, students were given a clear topic sentence, such as: *Reading books improves your life.*

Students were asked to brainstorm three supporting ideas without using AI. Typical responses included:

A. Improves vocabulary
B. Reduces stress
C. Develops imagination

Using these ideas, students drafted a complete paragraph, ensuring that each supporting point was expanded with explanations or examples. Once the initial paragraph was complete, students

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consulted **ChatGPT** with a request such as: *"Suggest three more reasons why reading books improves your life."* The AI typically generated additional ideas, for example:

- Strengthens focus and concentration
- Increases knowledge about different cultures
- Encourages lifelong learning

Students then evaluated these suggestions, selecting only those they found relevant and rephrasing them in their own words before integrating them into their paragraph. This ensured that the AI was used as an idea generator rather than a content provider.

The researcher then guided students to compare their *before-AI* and *after-AI* versions, reflecting on how their paragraphs had gained richness, variety, and persuasiveness through the integration of additional ideas.

The value of these activities came from their focus on active, critical thinking rather than simply copying. ChatGPT served as a helpful tool, offering students different sentence examples, alternative wording, and new ideas. However, students still had to analyze, adapt, and explain their final choices. This turned abstract writing skills into clear, practical ones: they could see how to vary sentences, make deliberate choices when combining them, and develop paragraphs in a planned, thoughtful way. They also realized that ChatGPT's suggestions were not always better than their own; sometimes their own writing was clearer, more accurate, or more suitable for the context. This helped them see AI as a useful but imperfect partner; one that could expand their thinking while keeping the main responsibility for the work in their own hands.

II.2. Reading and Text Analysis Course

This second course, *Reading and Text Analysis*, introduces first-year EFL students at Batna 2 University to strategies for effective reading comprehension and text interpretation. The content is designed to progress systematically from foundational reading skills to higher-order analysis. Students begin by learning practical reading strategies, such as skimming for gist, scanning for specific details, and identifying main ideas. They then work on developing vocabulary through context clues and making inferences from implicit information. The course concludes with the analysis of different types of texts, including descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative forms, where students examine structure, tone, and purpose.

At the strategy-building stage, one effective activity implemented was called ***The Clue Hunt***. The objective was to train students to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words from surrounding context. Students were given short passages containing several unfamiliar words highlighted in bold. For example:

"The city was **engulfed** in darkness after the sudden power cut, yet the residents remained calm and orderly."

Working individually, students first guessed the meaning of the bold words by identifying nearby clues, in this example, "darkness" and "power cut" suggested that "engulfed" meant "completely covered or surrounded." After making their guesses, students consulted **ChatGPT** using a prompt such as: *"Explain the meaning of 'engulfed' based on this sentence and describe the context clues that help identify it."* ChatGPT responded:

Meaning: In this sentence, *engulfed* means *completely covered, surrounded, or overtaken*.

Reasoning based on context clues: The phrase *"engulfed in darkness"* suggests that darkness spread everywhere so that nothing could be seen. The nearby words *"after the sudden power cut"* indicate that the city lost its lights, making it entirely dark. The sequence of events — power cut → darkness — supports the interpretation that *engulfed* describes something being fully surrounded or consumed by darkness.

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This response not only conveyed the correct meaning but also demonstrated a clear, step-by-step reasoning process. By explicitly linking the target word to the contextual clues in the surrounding text, it enabled students to verify or adjust their own interpretations while internalizing a systematic method for deriving meaning from context.

Following this, the researcher facilitated a whole-class discussion, projecting both student interpretations and ChatGPT's explanations to compare and contrast reasoning strategies. The focus was placed on ***how*** the meaning was deduced rather than merely confirming it against a dictionary definition. This reflective process reinforced the transferability of the strategy, equipping students to apply it independently to new reading situations while avoiding over-reliance on AI support.

At the inferencing stage, an activity called ***Between the Lines*** was used to develop students' ability to interpret implied meaning. Students read short narrative extracts with missing or unstated details, for example:

"Sarah slammed the door and threw her keys onto the table without saying a word."

Students were asked to infer what might have happened before this moment, using textual evidence to justify their answers. They then consulted ChatGPT with a prompt such as: *"Based on this sentence, what can we infer about Sarah's mood or situation, and why?"* The AI suggested possibilities (e.g., Sarah was upset or frustrated) and identified textual clues (slammed door, threw keys, silence). The researcher facilitated a comparison between AI's inferences and students' own, reinforcing that multiple interpretations may be valid if supported by evidence from the text.

At the text-analysis stage, an activity called ***Dissect the Text*** was implemented to strengthen students' ability to apply analytical frameworks to a variety of genres. Students were given short texts of different types, for example, a vivid descriptive travel passage and a concise argumentative opinion piece. Working individually or in pairs, they conducted an initial analysis, identifying key features such as the text's purpose, intended audience, tone, and organizational structure.

Once they had completed their own analysis, students consulted **ChatGPT** with a prompt such as: *"Analyse this text in terms of structure, tone, and purpose."* ChatGPT's breakdown typically provided a clear, structured response, for example:

Structure: Introduction describing the location → body paragraphs highlighting key attractions → closing paragraph summarizing the experience.
Tone: Warm, inviting, and enthusiastic.
Purpose: To encourage readers to visit the destination and convey its appeal.

This AI-generated analysis served as a valuable second perspective, enabling students to compare their own findings with an alternative interpretation. In cases where their analysis aligned with ChatGPT's, students gained confidence in their ability to read texts critically and accurately. Where discrepancies emerged, they were prompted to revisit the text, re-examine their reasoning, and refine their interpretations.

The effectiveness of this activity lay in the "*dual-analysis process"*: students first relied on their own analytical skills, then used ChatGPT not as an answer-giver but as a comparative lens. This approach deepened their understanding of genre-specific features, encouraged critical evaluation of multiple perspectives, and reinforced the importance of textual evidence in supporting analytical claims. Over time, students became more adept at transferring these analytical skills across different text types, demonstrating greater precision and independence in their reading and interpretation.

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The pedagogical value of integrating ChatGPT in this course lay in its ability to model explicit reasoning processes for reading and analysis. By engaging students in strategy use before consulting AI, the activities ensured that ChatGPT functioned as a scaffold and confirmation tool, not a substitute for comprehension. The reflective discussions after each task reinforced metacognitive awareness; students not only practiced reading strategies but also learned to think about *how* they read, interpret, and evaluate texts. This practice-based approach positioned AI as a strategic partner in the reading process while maintaining the central role of active, independent reading skills in EFL learning.

II.3. Thesis Writing Course

This course, designed for Master 1 EFL students at Batna 2 University, aims to familiarize learners with the structure, language, and conventions of Master's thesis writing. The content covers the standard thesis components (introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion) alongside instruction in academic style, critical synthesis of sources, and discipline-specific research language. Students also receive guidance on avoiding plagiarism, integrating citations effectively, and maintaining coherence across extended academic texts.

At the planning stage, one particularly effective activity implemented was called ***Outline to Section*****.** Students were given a thesis topic and a brief description of the research focus, for example:

Title: *The Role of Authentic Materials in Enhancing EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension*

Focus: Introduction chapter

Task: Plan the logical sequence of ideas to introduce the study effectively.

Without AI, students drafted a paragraph-by-paragraph outline, deciding which elements to include, for example:

1. General background on listening comprehension in EFL contexts.
2. Challenges faced by EFL learners in developing listening skills.
3. Rationale for using authentic materials.
4. Gap in the literature and statement of the research problem.

They then asked **ChatGPT**:

"Generate an outline for an introduction chapter for a thesis on 'The Role of Authentic Materials in Enhancing EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension'."

ChatGPT's output often expanded the plan with additional details, such as:

- Including a section on the pedagogical significance of listening skills.
- Adding references to specific types of authentic materials (e.g., podcasts, news broadcasts).
- Suggesting an explicit link between authentic materials and communicative competence.

Students compared their outlines with ChatGPT's, evaluating which ideas enriched their plan and which were unnecessary or too general. The researcher guided a class discussion on how to adapt useful AI suggestions while maintaining a coherent, purposeful structure tailored to their own research. This helped students see AI as a source of possible directions, not a ready-made blueprint.

At the writing stage, an activity called ***Refining the Academic Voice*** was used to help students develop formal, concise, and precise thesis prose. Students drafted a short section (e.g., the statement of the research problem) in their own words. They then asked ChatGPT:

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"Suggest a more formal and academic version of this paragraph, without changing its meaning."
For example:
Student draft: "Many students find it hard to speak English in class because they don't have enough practice."
ChatGPT suggestion: "A significant number of EFL learners encounter difficulties in oral participation due to limited opportunities for communicative practice within classroom settings."
Students compared the two, identifying shifts in vocabulary, sentence complexity, and academic tone. The researcher encouraged them to adapt certain elements (e.g., terminology, precision) without simply copying the AI text, thus preserving their authorial voice.
At the revision stage, an activity called ***Section Diagnosis*** targeted coherence and cohesion in extended writing. Students uploaded a draft section (e.g., part of the methodology) to ChatGPT and prompted:
"Identify any parts of this section that may be unclear, repetitive, or inconsistent in tense, and suggest improvements."
ChatGPT's feedback often highlighted issues students had overlooked, for example, shifting between past and present tense, overuse of vague terms such as *some researchers*, or lack of explicit links between subsections. Students evaluated each suggestion, revising where appropriate and justifying their choices. In some cases, their own solution proved better than the AI's, reinforcing the idea that the AI output should be critically assessed rather than uncritically adopted.
The pedagogical value of integrating ChatGPT in *Thesis Writing* lay in its ability to model academic register, generate structural possibilities, and draw attention to areas needing improvement. However, the constant emphasis on evaluation ensured that students viewed AI as a *supporting resource* rather than a *replacement* for the intellectual and creative demands of scholarly writing. The comparative and reflective stages embedded in each activity helped students sharpen both their academic writing skills and their judgement as emerging researchers.

The integration of ChatGPT across the three courses revealed consistent patterns in how students engaged with AI-mediated learning. While the tool initially attracted curiosity and enthusiasm, its pedagogical value became clear only when it was embedded within structured, reflective tasks. Students demonstrated noticeable gains in linguistic awareness, analytical thinking, and metacognitive control as they compared their own outputs with AI-generated alternatives. This comparison process helped them articulate why certain structures, ideas, or formulations were more effective, transforming AI use from passive assistance into an active learning dialogue. Moreover, the guided discussions following each activity strengthened students' critical judgment and sense of authorship, supporting both academic integrity and learner autonomy. Importantly, the teacher's mediation remained central: without explicit instruction and reflection, students risked over-relying on AI outputs. Thus, effective AI integration required a balance between technological exploration and human guidance; a synergy that transformed AI from a source of answers into a catalyst for deeper learning.

Conclusion

This paper has shared the practical experiences of an EFL teacher at Batna 2 University in integrating AI into everyday classroom teaching. The ideas and activities described grew out of real teaching situations, with their challenges, opportunities, and unexpected moments. The aim

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was not to present AI as a perfect solution, but to show how it can support language learning, critical thinking, and academic integrity when used in a thoughtful and guided way.

In the three courses discussed (*Written Expression, Reading and Text Analysis, and Thesis Writing*) ChatGPT was used as a tool for exploring alternative wording, improving structure, and offering new perspectives. However, the real learning happened when students compared the AI's suggestions with their own, decided what worked best, and explained their choices. This process kept them actively involved and ensured that AI was a help, not a replacement, for their own thinking.

Over time, students also discovered AI's limitations. They saw that ChatGPT could produce clear and fluent text, but that it could also be vague, repetitive, or too general. Sometimes their own sentences were more accurate or better suited to the context. This helped them stop seeing AI as always correct and start viewing it as a partner whose work needs to be checked and adapted.

For both teacher and students, these experiences built what can be called "AI literacy": knowing how to use AI effectively, think critically about its output, and keep control over the final work. This is not only about technical skills, but also about ethics, judgement, and the confidence to trust one's own ideas. In this way, AI was not just a language-learning tool; it was a way to prepare students for working in a world where AI will be part of their academic and professional lives.

In the end, these shared classroom experiences show that the question is not whether AI should be used in language learning, but HOW. Without guidance, AI can make students passive and dependent. With the right approach, it can expand their learning, improve their skills, and help them understand both the strengths and the limits of new technology. In this case, letting AI in did not take learning out, it strengthened the human abilities of curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity that remain essential in education.

Conflict of interest

None.

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