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Investigating EFL Female Saudi Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Use of ChatGPT in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of ChatGPT has revolutionized foreign language education, offering various benefits. However, limited research exists on the practical advantages and challenges of employing ChatGPT in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study explores the perceptions of EFL Saudi teachers regarding the integration of ChatGPT into English language teaching within the Saudi context. Using an interpretive qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 female EFL teachers at Al-Manar University. The findings indicate that participants generally held positive views of ChatGPT, appreciating its utility in lesson planning, designing activities, and creating assessments. Teachers emphasized that ChatGPT enhances efficiency, engagement, and interactivity in the classroom. However, concerns were raised regarding its credibility and the potential for students to become overly dependent on it, leading to diminished skills and abilities in critical thinking, independent learning, and emotional intelligence. These limitations highlight the need for a balanced approach to integrating ChatGPT into teaching practices. This study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on the unique cultural and educational perspectives of Saudi EFL teachers, offering insights into how Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can be tailored to specific educational contexts. The findings underscore the importance of professional development for teachers to promote responsible AI use and encourage student-centered learning. Implications for practice and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: ChatGPT; Computer-Assisted Language Teaching; EFL Teachers; Saudi Context

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1. Introduction

Technology plays a critical role in reshaping aspects of the educational landscape, especially in learning and teaching[1]. A significant recent technological advancement is Artificial intelligence (AI), which has had an explosive impact on education, particularly with programs such as ChatGPT[2] which is a 'generative, text-based artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot'[3]. In the education domain, this intelligent technology may assist teachers, researchers, and students by increasing learner engagement, improving the academic environment, assessing academic data, and achieving anticipated results for teaching and learning methods[4]. By utilizing natural language processing (NLP), ChatGPT can analyze the input from its users (either learners or teachers) and then respond to the questions in a human-style manner[5], thereby 'giving the impression that you are talking to a real person rather than a machine'[6].

A review of the literature demonstrates that ChatGPT has already performed a significant role in teaching and learning in areas such as interpreting languages, increasing student engagement, and crafting written assignments[7, 8]. In the same vein, ChatGPT can help students to acquire 'dictionary definitions and examples'[9], which allows them to comprehend a word's meaning, and also enhance their capability to answer or participate in any questions during the class discussion. Furthermore, ChatGPT can supply students and teachers with links to educational tools such as videos[10] and electronic books[11].

ChatGPT can act as a double-edged sword[12], as it provides the potential for a huge advancement in education, but it also presents challenges. A significant number of previous studies have raised concerns regarding ChatGPT's integration in education and its adoption in the teaching and learning process[13, 14]. For example, some educators have highlighted concerns regarding unreliable citations, the generation of biased information[15], the possibility of cheating in online exams, and the possibility its frequent use may hinder or prevent the improvement of students' critical thinking skills[16]. Thus, it has been advised that education institutions should adopt a cautious approach toward using ChatGPT and responsible practices should be considered when using it for academic purposes[17].

From 2022 to the present, many publications have appeared about the adoption of ChatGPT in education, with some researchers using surveys and interviews as methods to collect their data based on teachers' perspectives[18, 19], and others using only the interview process[7] or the survey as a single research method[15, 20]. To our best knowledge, little is still known about the application of ChatGPT by English teachers in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. Although a significant number of research studies focus on the role and function of AI in education (and the role of ChatGPT in particular), the majority of them investigate global contexts, particularly in Western countries, with different cultural, educational, and technological environments from Saudi Arabia, where this study was conducted. In the Saudi context, there is a noticeable lack of research exploring how AI tools like ChatGPT can support EFL teaching. Most of the existing research either generalizes AI's impact on education without considering subject-specific needs or focuses solely on technological aspects without examining the cultural or ethical implications of AI adoption. For these reasons, the current study adds to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by constructing insights around ELT practices in a Saudi context and from a qualitative research perspective.

To obtain a more profound understanding of the challenges and benefits surrounding ChatGPT in ELT, this paper explores the perceptions of Saudi female EFL teachers toward how ChatGPT can be used and integrated into ELT. Studying Saudi female EFL teachers is important because they offer unique insights regarding the intersection of technology, education, and culture. This group plays a crucial role in Saudi Arabia's education system, where cultural and gender-specific factors influence teaching methods and learning environments. By examining their perspectives, we can gain a valuable understanding of how AI tools, including ChatGPT, can be customized to address teachers' specific needs. These teachers can shed light on the benefits and challenges of implementing AI in teaching, including ethical and cultural considerations, and provide insights on their willingness to embrace new technologies and the types of support they require for successful implementation. Furthermore, the current study aims to expand awareness of the possible benefits and challenges of ChatGPT use in ELT and provide an effective scientific contribution to the current discourse about the potential role of generative AI in the field of education.

2. Literature Review

Technology has become crucial in education worldwide, reshaping and transforming teaching and providing innovative tools to improve learning outcomes, especially in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL contexts [21–25]. Technology offers resources and inspires students [26], while the expansion of digital tools enables teachers to meet varied learning needs more effectively [27]. Thus, incorporating technology into the classroom is essential for education today [28]. In the same vein, the twenty-first century is marked by the swift proliferation of AI technologies, bringing about profound transformations in our daily lives, a theme that has been explored in numerous studies [29–31]. Among these profound changes, the most revolutionary impact has arguably been experienced by the educational sector [31].

The integration of AI-based applications in language learning holds the potential to improve learning outcomes [32]. Technological progress has resulted in pedagogical advancements, exerting an influential impact on the potential trajectory of numerous academic fields. AI has introduced innovative applications in education, proving particularly effective for teachers in language instruction. AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT revolutionize ELT by offering customized feedback, interactive dialogue, and simulated conversations, fostering effective language practice [33, 34]. These tools also help to streamline lesson planning, student assessment, and instructional delivery, while reducing teachers' administrative burdens and offering dynamic resources that enable innovative teaching approaches [35, 36]. For instance, Papadakis et al. [37] highlight the integration of cloud technologies and augmented reality to create innovative learning environments, showcasing the potential for combining AI with other advanced technologies. Recent studies have demonstrated how AI and related technologies are transforming educational practices across various contexts. For instance, the combination of cloud technologies and augmented reality has shown the potential in creating dynamic and engaging learning environments, offering practical applications for modern pedagogy [37]. Similarly, the adoption of computer simulations alongside smart cloud-based technologies has been pivotal in enhancing open learning systems and making education more accessible [37]. In the context of primary education, AI-based approaches have been systematically reviewed to identify their impact on engagement and teaching methodologies,

revealing promising outcomes for both educators and students [38]. Furthermore, the integration of AI applications in higher education is influenced by various factors, including students' academic goals and the usability of these technologies, which underscores the need for tailored frameworks to support their adoption [39].

Furthermore, technology promotes teachers' professional development by providing access to professional development resources and networking platforms [40]. In a recent study, Kartal [33] found the potential of human–computer co-creation of content via ChatGPT in increasing student teachers' creativity. According to Dehghani and Mashhadi [41], who drew on the technology acceptance model, EFL teachers' adoption of ChatGPT was due to a complicated network of factors, including behavioral intention to utilize AI in their teaching repertoire, ease of use, system quality, sense of enjoyment, and usefulness. Similarly, Lavidas et al. [39] conducted a systematic review of AI adoption in primary school settings, revealing diverse factors that influence teacher attitudes toward technology integration. In another study on EFL teachers' utilization of ChatGPT, Tram and Tran-Thanh [42] indicated the crucial role of a supportive work environment in shaping the adoption of ChatGPT for various purposes in language learning and teaching.

English language teachers have diverse attitudes toward incorporating AI tools in their classrooms, with some welcoming these innovations for their potential to improve teaching effectiveness and others voicing concerns regarding the potential downsides. For example, a study by Gomez and Al-Rahman [43] highlights that while AI tools provide substantial assistance in English instruction, teachers occasionally feel concerned about the potential decline in authentic teacher–student interactions. Similarly, in another study, a positive perception of ChatGPT was reported among the EFL faculty located at Northern Border University, Saudi Arabia. This study considered ChatGPT's role in supporting students' English language learning. Faculty members acknowledged ChatGPT's effectiveness in providing rapid, accurate responses, considering it as a beneficial tool to supplement traditional teaching. Nevertheless, some expressed concerns about potential impacts on students' critical thinking and research abilities, along with risks of bias and misinformation. Overall, the study emphasizes ChatGPT's potential to enrich EFL instruction while suggesting further research to thor-

oughly and comprehensively evaluate its effectiveness[2]. In addition, Aravantinos et al.[38] emphasize the critical role of AI in higher education by analyzing its impact on student engagement and academic performance, further contextualizing the potential for AI-enhanced learning environments. To cultivate the development of pedagogically powerful and ethically robust AI-enhanced learning environments, it is essential to critically explore the experiences and perceptions of the teachers and users engaged in these contexts.

A significant number of studies have considered Chat-GPT to be very effective and to have several pedagogical benefits[44]. However, although some studies demonstrate the value of ChatGPT in language teaching and learning[9], there is a lack of research exploring how teachers perceive ChatGPT and how this tool influences teaching and learning, especially in the Saudi context. For example, the study conducted by Allehyani and Algamdi[45] in Mecca surveyed the views of teachers but used questionnaires, and the focus of the study was also on early childhood learning. Meanwhile, Alqahtani[46] focused on the perceptions of students and teachers toward the integration of ChatGPT in writing classes at a Saudi university by conducting a comprehensive review. The study of Masoudi[47] examined ChatGPT's effectiveness in improving the English writing skills of Saudi students by using a mixed-methods approach. In another research paper, Sobaih et al.[15] explored students' use and acceptance of ChatGPT in Saudi Arabia using quantitative research data. Alqasham[48] explored the implications of Chat-GPT for English language acquisition by Saudi EFL learners using qualitative research tools. Later, Alhammad[49] conducted a quantitative study on 28 female EFL students in a Saudi university to examine how ChatGPT can support the literature appreciation skills of EFL learners.

To the researchers' best knowledge, there is a paucity of research studies that investigate EFL female Saudi teachers' mentality regarding ChatGPT. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how this tool is adopted in English language teaching and by identifying the pedagogical effects and limitations within the Saudi context. In addition, this study highlights the implementation of ChatGPT in the ELT context in the Saudi setting. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of EFL female Saudi teachers regarding the impact of ChatGPT on ELT in the Saudi context. The research questions are:

1. How do EFL Saudi teachers perceive ChatGPT as a tool for English language teaching?
2. What are the limitations and pedagogical benefits of Chat-GPT in the ELT context from the EFL Saudi teachers' perspective?

This study is of considerable significance for policy makers and teacher educators involved in improving language education policies to support the needs of EFL teachers. This study is also essential in terms of exploring the perceptions of university EFL teachers toward ChatGPT and understanding how to provide the essential vision and insight regarding its possible benefits and limitations in the education environment. Moreover, the findings of the current study may contribute to informed judgments about the suitable uses of ChatGPT in education, particularly at the university level.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study aims to explore and describe EFL Saudi teachers' perceptions of using ChatGPT as a potential tool for language learning. To meet this aim, it was deemed that a qualitative methodology informed by the interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate approach. Interpretivist studies aim to study individuals with various behaviors, views, and attitudes[50]. Similarly, according to Pring[51], qualitative research design is appropriate for deciphering the meanings through which a social or personal phenomenon is perceived (p. 45). This approach is appropriate for exploring complex, contextualized phenomena and capturing participants' lived experiences[52].

Although qualitative research has advantages, it also has limitations in terms of generalizability. The findings are context-specific and may not represent the perspectives of all EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia or other regions[53]. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size of 13 participants, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, may limit the breadth of perspectives captured. To address these limitations, efforts were made to ensure a diverse sample with regard to teaching experience and institutional backgrounds, and findings are presented as insights rather than definitive conclusions. Future research could build on this study by employing mixed

methods or larger-scale quantitative approaches to enhance generalizability[54].

3.2. Participants

The 13 Saudi EFL female teachers in this study were selected using the principle of purposive sampling[55]; we sought access to potential participants who would provide 'information-rich' data in terms of our research questions[56]. These participants were chosen based on the following criteria: they are EFL Saudi teachers in Saudi Arabia, who have experience using ChatGPT for more than five months, which they use in academic research and to design their lectures, and so they have the required knowledge and experience of using ChatGPT and can offer beneficial perceptions that support the objectives of this study. All the participants who contributed were female and aged between thirty- and forty-years-old when the interviews took place. Due to the strict gender-based segregation in Saudi educational settings[57], the researchers had access only to female students, administrators, and instructors. Moreover, the participant selection—concentrating exclusively on female EFL teachers—aligns with the cultural and social context of Saudi Arabia, where gender plays a significant role in shaping educational practices and interactions[58]. Given that recording male participants' voices is not considered to be appropriate in many parts of Saudi Arabia (especially in rural areas), it was not possible to interview male participants through telephone or video calls[57]. The chosen participant base allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and experiences of female educators, who represent a substantial portion of the teaching workforce in the region[59]. However, it is acknowledged that this focus limits the diversity of viewpoints, as male teachers' perspectives were not included. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating male participants to provide a more thorough understanding of EFL teachers' experiences with ChatGPT.

All participants were fully informed about the research's aims and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were explicitly briefed on how their data would be stored and used. Specifically, participants were assured that the recorded interviews would be securely stored on encrypted devices accessible only to the research team, and the data would solely be used for academic purposes related to this study. The participants' identities were protected through pseudonymization, and these measures were explained to them during the informed consent process to ensure transparency and build trust.

The majority of the 13 teachers had over four years of teaching experience and held degrees at Master's and PhD level in language teaching and education, and applied linguistics (7 PhDs, 6 MAs). All participants were informed about the aims of the research and the voluntary aspect of the involvement of their participation and were made aware that all the data would remain confidential. Lastly, all participants were interviewed with mutual consent and by an earlier appointment. Pseudonyms are used for the teachers throughout the manuscript (Teacher #2 = T2).

It is important to identify information-rich cases in qualitative research[55]. The sample size was determined based on achieving data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerged after the twelfth interview[60, 61]. The focus on female participants aligns with the gender-segregated nature of Saudi educational settings, which presented cultural and logistical challenges for accessing male participants. However, this approach allowed us to explore female EFL teachers' perspectives in-depth, with rich and detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives, and recognizing their significant role in the Saudi education system.

3.3. Data Collection

The tools used for collecting data in this study are semi-structured interviews. We conducted interviews face-to-face in a quiet room on the university campus with 13 EFL female Saudi teachers, with each interview lasting 40–45 minutes. The semi-structured interview allows participants to speak in a detailed way and provides them the freedom to discuss their personal experiences and to address what is most important to them within the pre-designed framework of the researcher[50]. All the interviews were conducted in English and were recorded and securely stored with the consent of the participants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. The interview guide included open-ended questions, such as, 'How do you perceive the role of ChatGPT in supporting EFL teaching?', 'How can it be integrated into educational content?', and 'What benefits and drawbacks do you anticipate when using ChatGPT in your classroom?'

4. Data Analysis

To interpret the data collected in this study, the topic was narrowed down into smaller parts and analyzed to understand how these parts are connected to each other[62]. This analysis process is actually started and maintained alongside data collection, allowing the researcher to 'cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating for collecting new, often better, data'[63]. For the data analysis, thematic analysis was adopted. After transcribing the interviews verbatim, the data were read multiple times to achieve familiarization. Initial codes were generated inductively, focusing on significant phrases or patterns related to the research questions. Transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns, with themes emerging through an iterative process of reviewing, categorizing, and then refining the data. This approach allowed for a nuanced interpretation of teachers' insights based on the data collected.

The process of data analysis can be divided into several phases, as follows: a) transcribing interviews manually and returning them to the participants for member checking[53], a process that enables participants to explain or clarify any significant points that appear in the transcripts; b) manually interpreting and choosing descriptive codes by highlighting the texts; c) importing the data sources into NVivo software version 11; d) revealing the ideas, categories and themes; e) considering the codes again in NVivo and exploring connections between them and forming them into groups; and f) constructing categories and themes. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the study data, so as to concentrate on 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'[64]. To ensure methodological rigor, a six-phase framework for thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke[64] was followed: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes that reflect key features of the data, (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes, (4) reviewing and refining themes to ensure alignment with the dataset, (5) defining and naming themes to capture their essence, and (6) producing a coherent narrative that integrates the themes with the research questions.

To validate the themes, two independent researchers reviewed the codes and themes, ensuring consistency and reliability through intercoder agreement. This collaborative process helped refine the themes and resolve any discrepancies. The iterative nature of this approach ensured that the final themes were representative of the data and methodologically robust.

For additional analysis, important elements and their supporting records were transcribed into a spreadsheet in order to recognize frequent patterns and themes. Then, we employed *a posteriori* coding. For example, for Research Question (RQ) 1, we initially categorized six meaningful codes (ChatGPT as an assistant, designer, motivator, tutor, fountain of knowledge, creator and tutor) but later developed these to represent only one general thematic code (Benefits for English language teachers in using ChatGPT). Additionally, three codes were generated (robber, cheater, unemotional) for RQ 2 and were later reduced to two broader thematic codes (Limitations for English language teachers in using ChatGPT, and Grasping the benefits of using ChatGPT).

5. Findings

The results of the thematic analysis are discussed in this section. These findings reveal the female EFL teachers' viewpoints regarding ChatGPT use in the Saudi context. In addition, the findings revealed the affordances and challenges of utilizing ChatGPT within ELT in Saudi Arabia.

5.1. Benefits for English language Teachers in Using ChatGPT

'ChatGPT is a fountain of knowledge'

The findings revealed that the majority of participants expressed positive perceptions about using ChatGPT as a teaching tool. Some participants described how ChatGPT assists them in designing lesson plans, including time management for every task, and providing activities and exercises. Such a perception was shared by T2:

> *Let me tell you something, in the recent past, I was very confused about how I could explain [during] the students' lecture about the resources of language acquisition… I need something very simple which helps me to explain most easily. Then I used ChatGPT, which really helped in designing a lesson plan about the theories in language acquisition for the un-*

dergraduate level. Really it was designed in a matter of seconds. In my opinion, ChatGPT is like a fountain of knowledge (T2)

T5 believed that ChatGPT assists students in searching for answers to lecturers' questions and assists them in formulating questions and producing replies, which may enhance their progress in practicing their language skills and improving their language proficiencies.

Some participants mentioned that ChatGPT helped them create effective teaching strategies and provide a way to interact with students effectively, particularly when planning exercises based on language. Such perceptions were shared by T6 and T11:

ChatGPT is a valued tool because it assists me in engaging with my students in a more active way (T6)

I think ChatGPT has a huge impact on how [we can] teach English... it helps me to create a new way in teaching a sample of grammar in a way that students can understand it more easily and concisely (T11)

Furthermore, some of the participants showed that ChatGPT could increase students' motivation and provide teachers and students with extra opportunities to use the time saved to concentrate on other tasks. As T4 and T3 said:

I think that ChatGPT could help students to be motivated and engaged which improves their language learning processes (T4)

ChatGPT could give rich feedback to students and provide them with time to focus more on the other tasks (T3)

In addition, some participants showed that ChatGPT can assist teachers in preparing materials that are tailored to the student's skill level at Al-Manar University. For example, ChatGPT can provide teachers with exercises and worksheets that are suitable for the students' level to achieve the teaching objectives (T1 and T4). Another participant (T9) showed that ChatGPT assisted her by providing new explanations and thoughts for her class planning.

'ChatGPT is a personal tutor'

Participants also expressed views that ChatGPT can serve as a personal tutor for the teachers as well as the students. These positive perceptions were based on how Chat-GPT can give instructions to both teachers and students.

As an Arab EFL teacher who has no exposure to the literature of the world, ChatGPT helps me summarize paragraphs about the historical aspects of a certain age and gives examples of similar works through cultures and languages such as Old English, Middle English periods, and the Renaissance, etc. (T13)

I noticed in the English class that ChatGPT helps students edit their writing and practice vocabulary terms providing individualized tutoring and editing their ideas and resources (T8)

With a single click, ChatGPT helps me to design a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation step by step (T1)

ChatGPT helped me to write a final example for my students – a process that normally takes me hours, it took only 30 minutes with the assistance of ChatGPT (T2)

ChatGPT also helps students formulate their questions and interpretations in an understandable and comprehensive way when writing a paragraph (T10). Some of the participants described how ChatGPT can give teachers several ideas about the topics that they would like to prepare and guide them on how to explain the difficult items easily. Furthermore, it helps teachers by providing some ideas about warm-up activities that help students to better engage in the lesson. For example, T5 mentioned that 'it is amazing in giving me lots of thoughts about warm-up activities for undergraduate students'.

5.2. Limitations for English Language Teachers in Using ChatGPT

'ChatGPT robs students' motivation, creativity, and critical thinking skills

In this study, participants were aware that there are limitations when using ChatGPT. Although the majority of participants revealed that ChatGPT could easily answer any question, especially in academic research and when creating

activities and lessons, they also shared their concerns that it robs students of motivation, creativity, and critical thinking skills. For example:

> *By using ChatGPT, the students may become too reliant on this tool and they lack the motivation to learn in a valuable way (T12)*

> *I think that ChatGPT may rob the students' critical thinking skills because it [does] the thinking for them… for example, students could rely on it without thinking critically about what to write (T9)*

> *If ChatGPT can answer any questions for students, they will not attempt to develop their critical thinking skills (T1)*

Some participants (such as T5, T11, T9, and T2) expressed that if EFL teachers were to depend on ChatGPT all of the time, they may lose their own creativity in preparing lessons, choosing teaching methods, and designing materials.

'ChatGPT is a cheater and lacks emotional awareness'

Some participants revealed that overuse of ChatGPT could involve students trying to use it to complete their assignments or exams without comprehending the material, stealing answers from previous chats with the bot, or utilizing weaknesses in the system to achieve illegal access.

> *Students may use it as a main learning tool and they rely on it all the time, but they are not using it as a supplement to their language learning (T7)*

> *I am concerned that students use ChatGPT as a shortcut instead of joining in the significant learning process (T12)*

Some participants revealed their concern about ChatGPT in terms of dishonesty, lack of authenticity, and plagiarism. For example, as T5 showed, ChatGPT has disadvantages. One of them is plagiarism (T5). Another participant (T3) showed that ChatGPT uses untrustworthy references. ChatGPT's materials may not always be reliable because the GPT model lacks comprehensive data.

Some participants revealed that although ChatGPT assists teachers, it lacks emotional intelligence, leading to a potential issue if 'teachers cannot interact in an appropriate way to the needs of the students' emotions' (T9). Another participant highlighted that 'ChatGPT is unable to understand and manage the students' own emotions practically in a learning context' (T13). In addition, T8 and T10 asserted that human interaction and personalized feedback from a teacher cannot be replaced by ChatGPT, which does not have the necessary human lived experiences.

5.3. Grasping the Benefits of Using ChatGPT

Although the limitations of using ChatGPT were highlighted in the interviews, participants were still aware of its essential usage in a language and teaching context. They asserted that, by promoting responsible use, they could assist students in employing the power of ChatGPT in an effective way, improving their essential skills in the digital age.

> *ChatGPT is a useful and supportive tool to learn language…we should organize its uses with the students in the class…for that reason, we must use it in a dependable and in a responsible way (T2)*

> *It is very important to train teachers and stakeholders on an effective way in using this new technology for better learning and teaching (T6)*

Furthermore, two of the participants revealed that by maintaining a strong awareness of ChatGPT's uses, teachers could create an effective and future-ready learning environment.

> *It's essential to recognize that ChatGPT is very important in a language teaching and learning context. I believe we have to [be] aware, understand what ChatGPT is, and how to use it in order to help our students and guide them (T9)*

> *If a teacher has an awareness of what this AI is for, she can help her students use it and direct them in a way that leads to the creation of an effective learning atmosphere (T3)*

Therefore, as suggested by T3 and T9, an understanding of the functions, aims, and limitations of ChatGPT will help teachers to expertly explain the tool to their students and to provide appropriate support and advice regarding its use.

Furthermore, T2 added that comprehension and awareness of ChatGPT encourage teachers to educate their students by demonstrating responsible technology use and discussing these issues with their students. Finally, many participants (including T1, T10, T5, T8, T12 and others) recognized that this is a quickly changing educational landscape for AI tools, particularly regarding ChatGPT. They stated how an awareness of technological advancements could help teachers to continually update their skills, remain relevant, and become equipped for future growth. In addition, technology awareness can help teachers to make up-to-date choices about the tools they use and to assess their efficiency.

6. Discussion

The current study explores the viewpoints of Saudi EFL teachers on ChatGPT's potential as a teaching aid in ELT, considering both its benefits and limitations. In response to the first research question, which examines how EFL Saudi teachers perceive ChatGPT as a tool for teaching and learning English, the findings revealed that teachers viewed ChatGPT as a valuable asset in their educational toolkit. Aligning with prior research [3, 65, 66], teachers view ChatGPT as a tool for enhancing teaching efficiency, particularly in the case of repetitive or time-sensitive tasks, such as planning lessons and material creation. This positive perception aligns with ChatGPT's role as a 'fountain of knowledge,' aiding instructional planning and delivering tailored exercises to meet diverse student needs. Through real-time responses, ChatGPT can play a key role in boosting lesson interactivity and engagement, potentially enhancing students' language learning experiences [10, 11]. Likewise, our study's findings correspond with those of Almanea [67], indicating that both EFL instructors and learners had positive attitudes toward using ChatGPT in language learning, although they expressed concerns about possible misuse and its negative implications for academic integrity.

Addressing the second research question, which explores the limitations and pedagogical advantages of ChatGPT in the ELT context from EFL Saudi teachers' perspectives, this study reinforces concerns about the risks of excessive dependence and over-reliance on AI. Reflecting the findings of Obaid et al. [14], participants voiced concerns regarding ChatGPT's possible impact on students' motivation,

critical thinking, cognitive ability and independence—skills foundational to academic growth [16, 68, 69]. The thematic code describing ChatGPT as a 'robber' captures teachers' concerns regarding student dependency on AI, and its potential to weaken and undermine creativity and critical thinking development [17]. Furthermore, the limitations of ChatGPT in verifying the accuracy of content and the risk of generating biased information underscore the need for caution and responsible use of AI tools in education [15].

Although recognizing its instructional advantages, teachers also noted that ChatGPT, as an unemotional tool, lacks the capacity to address students' affective needs, limiting its ability to deliver the personalized feedback and emotional support central to effective teaching [40]. This lack of responsiveness to individual student emotions highlights the indispensable role of teachers in nurturing both academic and emotional growth.

Promoting awareness of ChatGPT's capabilities and limitations among teachers and students is essential for balanced AI use. Focused training initiatives, as suggested by T3 and T9, could enhance educators' ability to integrate ChatGPT effectively, fostering a forward-thinking learning environment while mitigating potential risks [4]. This recommendation is consistent with existing research that demonstrates well-informed use of AI can lead to improved pedagogical outcomes [32]. Although the primary focus of this study was on immediate attitudes and perceptions, it is essential to consider the long-term pedagogical implications of these challenges. Future research could explore how these challenges evolve over time and their potential influence on sustainable teaching practices.

To address the long-term pedagogical implications of ChatGPT's limitations, one could critically examine how its reliance on large datasets may lead to the reinforcement of biases, the risk of promoting superficial learning, and the overdependence of students and teachers on AI tools. These issues could hinder critical thinking and creativity in educational contexts. To mitigate these problems, it is necessary to integrate ChatGPT thoughtfully, ensuring its role complements rather than replaces traditional teaching methods. Solutions could include incorporating human oversight, fostering digital literacy to help users critically evaluate AI-generated content, and promoting the balanced use of AI alongside active, student-centered learning approaches.

Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of research on ChatGPT's role in language education, providing nuanced insights and perspectives into its practical and ethical implications in a Saudi EFL context. Although ChatGPT holds potential as a complement to traditional teaching methods, its limitations highlight the importance of careful, guided integration. This finding suggests a divergence from studies that have portrayed AI integration as entirely beneficial[70], indicating that while the enthusiasm for AI is widespread, practical challenges remain, which were not always emphasized in earlier works.

Future research must explore effective strategies for using AI in ways that enhance, rather than replace, essential teacher–student interactions and skill development. Also, future research could investigate how students themselves perceive ChatGPT use in language learning and whether their experiences differ from teachers' perspectives. Additionally, studies could explore ChatGPT's impact on student outcomes, particularly in terms of language proficiency and engagement. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in assessing the long-term effectiveness of AI tools in EFL classrooms. Moreover, expanding the scope of research to include teachers from other regions and comparing findings could generate a more comprehensive understanding of the global implications of AI in language education. Addressing the limitations of this study, such as its small sample size and focus on a single region, would allow future research to offer more generalizable insights.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the specific experiences of female EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia, an area that has received limited attention in the literature. While studies like those of Johnson and King[71] and García-Martínez et al.[72] have explored the use of AI in classrooms, few have focused specifically on the Middle Eastern context. The positive but cautious stance of Saudi teachers toward ChatGPT adds a nuanced perspective to the global debate on AI in education. Additionally, the study reveals that teachers are particularly interested in using ChatGPT for lesson planning and student interaction but are hesitant about its role in assessment and grading, which extends our understanding of AI's practical applications in language teaching. This new information can inform educators and policymakers who are contemplating the use of AI tools in their teaching environments.

The implications for practice are significant. Given the teachers' enthusiasm for ChatGPT's potential but also their concerns about its limitations, professional development programs should focus on providing clear, practical training and guidance on how to use AI tools effectively and address potential challenges. Teachers need more support in understanding how to integrate ChatGPT into their daily teaching practice, especially in terms of assessing student progress and ensuring the tool's accuracy. Furthermore, as teachers indicated a desire for more reliable resources, collaborations between AI developers and educators are essential to create more context-specific, user-friendly tools. These recommendations can help bridge the gap between technology and traditional student-centered teaching processes.

7. Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into Saudi teachers' perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT as a tool for teaching EFL, demonstrating both its benefits and challenges. The findings reveal that teachers generally view ChatGPT as a beneficial supplement for English language teaching, especially in its capability to support lesson planning, create interactive learning materials, and increase student engagement. ChatGPT's capacity for providing immediate feedback and assisting in various educational tasks positions it as a valuable asset in the classroom; these positive findings align with recent studies[73]. Yet this study also brings attention to significant limitations in ChatGPT use, including the risk of fostering an overdependence on AI that may impede students' motivation, critical thinking, and creativity.

While the study's primary focus is on contextualizing ChatGPT's use within the Saudi EFL setting, we propose the adoption of a practical framework to support effective integration of the tool, while recognizing its various challenges and potential benefits. The framework offers five steps for effective integration. The first step involves professional development: teacher training programs should demonstrate how to effectively utilize ChatGPT to fulfill teaching strategies, support teachers' pedagogical aims, and ensure its use aligns with educational goals[74]. The second step is teacher monitoring: teachers should be encouraged to monitor and adjust ChatGPT's outputs to confirm accuracy and minimize biases. Third, planned integration is advised:

teachers should design activities such as writing assignments, grammar exercises, or vocabulary expansion by using ChatGPT as a supportive resource[75]. Fourth, we recommend student training be implemented: students should be taught how to critically interact with AI with an emphasis placed on personal evaluation and improvement of its responses[76]. Finally, ethical use plans should be devised: policies should be established to encourage the responsible use of AI, supporting students' honesty and integrity, and protecting their data[77].

One of the study's limitations is its reliance on a single Saudi university with a sample confined to female EFL teachers. This narrow focus restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions, genders, and institutional contexts. Another constraint lies in the qualitative nature of the data collection, as interviews may not capture the full scope of ChatGPT's impact in practical teaching environments. Additionally, while this study investigates teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT, it does not directly capture student outcomes, resulting in a gap in understanding how AI influences learning effectiveness and engagement from student perspectives. Another limitation of this study is the lack of emphasis on the long-term implications of the identified challenges. This aspect warrants further exploration to understand the potential impact of ChatGPT on pedagogical strategies over time.

In summary, while ChatGPT holds potential as a tool for enhancing ELT practices, its effective integration calls for thoughtful consideration of both its pedagogical benefits and possible limitations. Future studies might address these limitations by broadening the sample to encompass male and international EFL educators and by incorporating a mixed-methods approach that assesses student perspectives and learning outcomes. Such efforts would offer a more comprehensive and holistic view of ChatGPT's role in enhancing and transforming language education across diverse settings.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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