

**Students' Perceptions of Using ChatGPT in Learning English Vocabulary:
A Narrative Inquiry**

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Abstract

Article History:

Received: 23/06/2026

Accepted: 02/07/2026

Published: 10/07/2026

Keywords:

ChatGPT,

Narrative inquiry,

Students Perception,

Technology,

Vocabulary.

ChatGPT is increasingly used as a tool for learning English vocabulary among Indonesian EFL university students. Employing a qualitative narrative approach, the study explores students' perceptions and experiences in utilizing ChatGPT to support vocabulary learning. Data were collected through participants' accounts of their learning experiences and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis by Riessman. The findings reveal that ChatGPT promotes faster and more practical vocabulary learning by providing instant definitions, synonyms, and explanations, which enhance students' understanding and confidence. Furthermore, its accessibility supports self-directed learning and increases learner motivation. However, several challenges were identified, including concerns about information accuracy, excessive dependence on technology, and the potential reduction of critical thinking skills. The study concludes that ChatGPT can serve as an effective vocabulary learning tool when used critically and accompanied by active verification of information, suggesting the need for guided and responsible integration of AI tools in EFL learning contexts.

Kata Kunci:

ChatGPT,

Inkuiri Naratif,

Persepsi Mahasiswa,

Teknologi,

Kosakata.

Abstrak

ChatGPT semakin sering digunakan sebagai alat untuk mempelajari kosakata bahasa Inggris di kalangan mahasiswa perguruan tinggi Indonesia yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Dengan menggunakan pendekatan naratif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi dan pengalaman mahasiswa dalam memanfaatkan

ChatGPT untuk mendukung pembelajaran kosakata. Data dikumpulkan melalui uraian para peserta mengenai pengalaman belajar mereka dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis naratif tematik menurut Riessman. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ChatGPT mempercepat dan mempermudah pembelajaran kosakata dengan menyediakan definisi, sinonim, dan penjelasan secara instan, yang meningkatkan pemahaman dan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa. Selain itu, aksesibilitasnya mendukung pembelajaran mandiri dan meningkatkan motivasi peserta didik. Namun, beberapa tantangan teridentifikasi, termasuk kekhawatiran mengenai akurasi informasi, ketergantungan berlebihan pada teknologi, dan potensi penurunan keterampilan berpikir kritis. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa ChatGPT dapat berfungsi sebagai alat pembelajaran kosakata yang efektif jika digunakan secara kritis dan disertai verifikasi informasi secara aktif, yang menunjukkan kebutuhan akan integrasi alat AI yang terarah dan bertanggung jawab dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL).

INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advancements have brought about significant changes in educational practices, including in the context of English language learning. One of the most widely used technologies is artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, which has been extensively utilized to support students in various learning activities (Sujannah et al., 2025). This technology enables students to translate texts, understand learning materials, and expand their vocabulary more accurately. In vocabulary learning, ChatGPT can directly provide definitions, synonyms, and example sentences, allowing students to access information quickly and easily. These features contribute to a more engaging and interactive learning experience, aligning with the preferences of today's students who seek digital tools that are fast and easily accessible (Imran et al., 2024).

However, despite its advantages, ChatGPT's role in learning also raises some concerns, particularly regarding the accuracy of information and students' reliance on technology (Sujannah et al., 2025). Although students find using ChatGPT convenient, excessive reliance on this tool can reduce independent

learning efforts and limit the development of critical thinking skills (Imran et al., 2024). Furthermore, the answers generated by ChatGPT are not always entirely accurate, so users need to verify the information from reliable sources (Augenstein et al., 2024). These challenges highlight the importance of re-examining how students interact with and evaluate this technology in their learning process.

Motivation and learning experiences also play a significant role in how students use digital tools like ChatGPT. Each learner interacts with this technology differently, depending on their individual learning styles, needs, and preferences (Alsagoor et al., 2025). Some students use ChatGPT as a supplementary tool to improve their vocabulary, while others rely on it as their primary learning resource. These differences in usage can influence student engagement, independence, and overall learning outcomes, particularly in the development of their vocabulary. This tendency may be related to the fact that ChatGPT is easy for students to use (Dzimar et al., 2026).

Previous studies have reported generally positive perceptions of ChatGPT in English language learning. Hertiki et al. (2025) found that English education students considered ChatGPT useful for improving grammar and vocabulary and increasing time efficiency in completing assignments, although concerns regarding over-reliance and generic responses were also identified. Similarly, Arumsari et al. (2025) revealed that students perceived ChatGPT positively, particularly for translation activities, accessing information, and completing assignments, which contributed to the development of their EFL skills. In addition, Fang and Han (2025) through a review of 25 studies on ChatGPT in foreign language teaching and learning, reported positive perceptions related to context-based vocabulary learning, interactivity, and the enhancement of analytical skills. Nevertheless, the authors emphasized the need for further empirical research to better understand the effectiveness of ChatGPT in specific language learning contexts.

Although previous studies have investigated the use of ChatGPT in educational settings, most have employed quantitative and survey-based approaches. Consequently, students' in-depth experiences and personal accounts of using ChatGPT for English vocabulary learning remain underexplored. Therefore,

it is important to investigate how students perceive the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in vocabulary learning. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of ChatGPT's role in students' learning experiences and to identify appropriate and balanced ways of integrating this technology into English vocabulary learning (Aldowsari & Aljebreen, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs the narrative inquiry method proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to explore students' perceptions of using ChatGPT for learning English vocabulary. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that views experiences as stories shaped by personal, social, and situational factors (Dzimar et al., 2025). This method helps researchers understand how students' perspectives develop through their experiences of learning vocabulary with ChatGPT. Following Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, the study examines temporality, referring to students' past and present experiences of using ChatGPT for vocabulary learning; sociality, referring to their feelings, beliefs, and interactions with peers or lecturers regarding the use of ChatGPT; and place, referring to the contexts in which ChatGPT is used, such as classrooms, homes, or other learning environments.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews to allow participants to share their perspectives on using ChatGPT for vocabulary learning. Participants were invited to describe how they used ChatGPT, the benefits they experienced, and the challenges they encountered. The data sources included interview transcripts, field notes, and participants' digital interactions related to their use of ChatGPT. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis by (Riessman, 2008). The analysis was conducted through iterative stages of interpreting participants' stories and composing research texts that represented their experiences (Clandinin, 2016). Consistent with Narrative Inquiry, meanings were co-constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants, providing a deeper understanding of the benefits and limitations of using ChatGPT for vocabulary learning (Clandinin, 2006).

The participants in this study consisted of three second-semester students from the English Language Education Program at a university in Pekalongan. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria, particularly their active use of ChatGPT to understand difficult or unfamiliar English vocabulary. The three participants had varying experiences with ChatGPT in terms of their level of understanding, patterns of use, and degree of reliance on the tool. Although they were enrolled in the same program, these differences provided diverse perspectives on ChatGPT's role in vocabulary learning and enabled the researcher to obtain data that aligned with the study's objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from interviews with students in the English Language Education Program who use ChatGPT as a tool to learn English vocabulary. The results of this study illustrate how ChatGPT helps students understand new vocabulary, particularly when they encounter difficult words in courses taught in English. Additionally, these findings reveal students' perceptions and feelings regarding the use of ChatGPT, including its benefits and challenges in the learning process. The data is organized thematically to highlight key aspects of the students' experiences, with a focus on their perceptions and emotional responses when using ChatGPT for vocabulary learning.

Students' Perceptions

Some participants noted that using ChatGPT makes it easier to understand new vocabulary more quickly. Its quick response feature allows students to look up word meanings without having to manually open a dictionary. Additionally, ChatGPT provides synonyms and example sentences that help students understand how words are used in context. Rina (a second-semester student) explained:

"When I use ChatGPT, I can immediately see the word's meaning, its synonyms, and example sentences. So I understand it faster than if I looked it up myself in a dictionary." (Rina, WhatsApp Interview, March 2, 2026).

Rina's experience suggests that the immediacy of ChatGPT's responses reshaped the way she approached vocabulary learning. Rather than spending considerable time searching through multiple sources, she was able to obtain explanations instantly and continue learning without interruption. This experience appeared to increase her sense of efficiency and autonomy, as she could independently resolve vocabulary difficulties whenever they arose. From a narrative perspective, ChatGPT became more than a source of information; it functioned as a learning companion that supported her ongoing engagement with English vocabulary.

Additionally, flexibility is one of the main advantages of using ChatGPT. Students can access it anytime and anywhere, whether studying at home or outside the classroom. This ease of access makes the learning process more practical and unrestricted by time or location. Andi (a second-semester student) stated:

"I usually use ChatGPT when I have an assignment at school that I don't understand or when I come across new vocabulary. The best part is that I can use it anytime; I don't have to wait long." (Andi, WhatsApp Interview, March 3, 2026).

This indicates that the flexibility of digital technology can support students' independent learning, in line with the concept of technology-based learning that emphasizes easy access and broad reach. Furthermore, some participants also noted that ChatGPT helped improve their overall understanding of English-language materials. It goes beyond just vocabulary; it also helps them understand texts, sentences, and the contextual use of language. Siti (a second-semester student) said:

"Sometimes I don't just ask for the meaning of a word, but also ask for an explanation of the sentence. That way, I understand the intended meaning, not just the literal definition." (Siti, WhatsApp Interview, March 3, 2026).

This experience demonstrates that ChatGPT can serve as a learning tool that supports deep understanding, not just knowing new vocabulary. However, not all student perceptions are positive. Some participants expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information provided by ChatGPT. They realized that the answers given are not always correct, so they need to double-check them. Siti (a second-semester student) stated:

“Sometimes I’m still unsure about the answers, so I double-check them on Google or DeepL to make sure they’re correct.” (Siti, WhatsApp Interview, March 3, 2026).

This indicates that while ChatGPT offers convenience, students still need critical thinking skills to verify the information provided. In addition, excessive use of ChatGPT can lead to dependency. Some participants admitted that they had become overly reliant on ChatGPT to complete assignments. Rina (a second semester student) shared:

“When I have an English assignment, I sometimes use ChatGPT. Sometimes I get lazy to think for myself first or look it up in an online dictionary it’s like I’m already dependent on it” (Rina, WhatsApp Interview, March 3, 2026).

This finding indicates that uncontrolled use of technology can reduce students’ learning independence. Therefore, there needs to be a limit on its use to ensure it continues to support the learning process optimally. Participants recognize that ChatGPT cannot fully replace the role of independent learning. Although it helps, students still need to understand the material through their own efforts. Andi (a second semester student) stated:

“ChatGPT is helpful, but we still have to study on our own. If we just rely on it, we won’t really understand it” (Andi, WhatsApp Interview, March 3, 2026).

This statement underscores that ChatGPT should be used as a tool, not as the sole source of learning. This aligns with the principles of active learning, which emphasize the importance of student engagement in the process of understanding the material.

Students’ Feelings Toward Using ChatGPT

Some participants reported that they found ChatGPT helpful and convenient for learning English vocabulary. The ease of accessing word definitions, synonyms, and example sentences made the learning process more practical. This fosters a positive attitude toward the use of technology in learning. Andi (a second semester student) stated:

“I feel really helped, because if there’s a word I don’t know, I just ask and get the answer right away” (Andi, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026)

This sense of being helped indicates that ChatGPT is capable of providing emotional support during the learning process, particularly in reducing the difficulties students typically face when learning new vocabulary. Additionally, participants also feel more comfortable because the learning process becomes faster. Not having to spend a long time looking up word meanings or understanding sentences makes students feel more relaxed while studying. Rina (a second semester student) said:

“Learning becomes faster, so I don’t get tired of looking up word meanings one by one especially for me, who’s still a freshman in my second semester” (Rina, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

This sense of comfort contributes to a faster learning experience, so students don’t feel overwhelmed when studying English. Furthermore, some students, including participants, mentioned that they feel more confident in understanding English texts after using ChatGPT. With the help of the explanations provided, students became more confident in their understanding. Siti (a second semester student) said:

“Now I feel more confident when working on assignments for courses I find difficult, because if I don’t understand something, ChatGPT can help me right away” (Siti, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

This shows that ChatGPT not only provides instant help but also boosts students’ confidence in learning the language. Additionally, using ChatGPT fosters higher motivation to learn. The ease and speed of accessing information make students more interested in continuing to learn English. Andi (a second-semester student) explained:

“It’s easier to study now, because it doesn’t feel as difficult as it used to before artificial intelligence existed” (Andi, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

This motivation is a key factor in learning success, as students feel that learning English has become easier. However, not all feelings that arise are positive. Some participants expressed doubts about the answers provided by ChatGPT. They

realized that not all information can be trusted immediately. Siti (a second semester student) said:

“Sometimes I’m still unsure, afraid the answers might not be accurate because they sometimes seem unconvincing.” (Siti, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

In addition, there are also concerns about dependence on technology if it is used continuously. Some participants felt that excessive use of ChatGPT could reduce their ability to think independently. Rina (a second semester student) said:

“I’m afraid it will become a habit, and I’ll end up unable to think critically and become dependent on it.” (Rina, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

This sentiment reflects students’ awareness of the importance of balance in technology use. Participants also felt the need to maintain critical thinking when using ChatGPT. They recognized that the information provided must be understood and verified. Rina (second semester student) stated:

“You have to think through the answers again; you can’t just take them at face value.” (Rina, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

Additionally, some students mentioned that they sometimes feel confused when the results provided do not match their expectations or differ from other sources. Andi (second semester student) said:

“Sometimes the answers are different from what I learned in the book, so I end up confused and doubt the results.” (Andi, WhatsApp Interview, March 4, 2026).

These findings indicate that the use of ChatGPT in vocabulary learning not only elicits positive feelings such as being helped, feeling comfortable, confident, and motivated, but also feelings of doubt, worry, and the need to continue thinking critically. This underscores the fact that the use of technology in learning must be accompanied by students’ awareness and control to ensure it continues to provide significant benefits.

The findings show that students generally perceive ChatGPT as a helpful tool in learning English vocabulary, especially in understanding new words quickly and contextually. The ability to access meanings, synonyms, and example sentences in a short time supports students in accelerating their comprehension of unfamiliar

vocabulary (Aldowsari & Aljebreen, 2024; Nation, 2017). In addition, the flexibility of using ChatGPT anytime and anywhere encourages more independent and practical learning habits among students. These results are in line with previous studies, which highlight that AI based tools can enhance vocabulary acquisition and support learner autonomy in EFL contexts. Moreover, students' experiences also indicate that ChatGPT assists them not only in vocabulary learning but also in understanding broader language contexts, such as sentences and texts (Alsagoor et al., 2025).

In terms of emotional responses, students tend to experience positive feelings such as being helped, comfortable, and more confident when using ChatGPT. The ease of access and quick responses reduce learning pressure, making students feel more relaxed and motivated in studying English. This increased motivation plays an important role in sustaining students' engagement in the learning process, especially when dealing with challenging materials (Imran et al., 2024). These findings support the idea that integrating artificial intelligence into learning can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment. Furthermore, the sense of confidence gained by students reflects how technology can contribute to positive learning experiences and attitudes toward language learning (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023).

In spite of the positive perceptions and feelings, some challenges were also identified in the use of ChatGPT. Students expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information and felt the need to verify answers from other sources, indicating the importance of critical thinking in AI-assisted learning (Nation, 2001). In addition, there is a concern about dependency, where excessive use of ChatGPT may reduce students' ability to think independently. This aligns with studies that highlight the potential risks of over-reliance on AI tools in educational settings. Students' awareness of these limitations shows that they understand the importance of balancing technology use with their own efforts in learning, which is also supported by research emphasizing the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated information (Fang & Han, 2025)

CONCLUSION

This study explored how ChatGPT, as an AI tool, can serve as an AI-assisted tool for vocabulary learning among students in the English Language Education Program. The results indicate that ChatGPT provides practical and immediate assistance in understanding vocabulary through instant definitions, synonyms, and easy-to-understand explanations. Participants reported positive impacts on their learning, such as increased motivation, self-confidence, and flexibility in accessing resources. These features contribute to a more self-directed learning experience.

On the other hand, this study also highlights several challenges, particularly regarding information accuracy and the risk of overreliance on ChatGPT. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering critical digital literacy, enabling students to evaluate, verify, and responsibly use AI-generated information rather than accepting it uncritically. Furthermore, balanced integration of AI-based tools is necessary to support independent learning and maintain students' critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, ChatGPT can capably support vocabulary learning when paired with critical digital literacy. Its role as a learning tool can enhance students' understanding and engagement, though it still requires active participation and independent effort from learners. Future research could explore the long-term effects of using ChatGPT, examine its impact on various language skills, and investigate how different levels of reliance on the tool affect students' learning outcomes.

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