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AI and Idioms: Enhancing Idiomatic Competence in EFL through ChatGPT

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly become a pivotal force in education, offering personalized learning pathways and dynamic solutions to longstanding instructional challenges. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, idiomatic competence remains a challenging aspect of language development, often eluding effective coverage through conventional teaching methods. This article examines the integration of AI-driven tools, specifically ChatGPT, in enhancing idiomatic competence within EFL curricula. It contends that ChatGPT provides contextualized examples, real-time feedback, and interactive dialogues, bridging the gap between memorization and real-world application while fostering fluency, cultural awareness, and linguistic accuracy. The discussion situates these developments within the broader evolution of technology in language education, from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to AI-supported methodologies. While highlighting ChatGPT's innovative and adaptive instructional potential, the article also addresses ethical concerns, privacy risks, and content reliability, underscoring the need for a balanced, strategic approach to AI integration. Finally, the article identifies key research directions aimed at optimizing AI's educational impact in EFL idiom instruction.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving world, the question is no longer *whether* Artificial Intelligence (AI) should be integrated into education, but *how* it can be harnessed most effectively. AI has become a cornerstone of modern innovation, addressing everything from simple queries to complex challenges. It has influenced numerous domains, including education, and its potential extends beyond automation—it is reshaping learning by enhancing knowledge acquisition, idiomatic competence, and personalized instruction. For example, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), AI tools such as ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, offer transformative potential by improving personalized learning, accessibility, and engagement (Hong, 2023). This technological shift moves beyond traditional methods, providing dynamic solutions to

longstanding linguistic challenges and setting the stage for a more effective approach to language instruction.

Idiomatic competence is a fundamental aspect of language mastery, yet it remains one of the most challenging areas for EFL learners. Idioms often convey meanings that cannot be inferred from their individual components, making them difficult to acquire through conventional instructional methods (Martinez & Murphy, 2011). Historically, idiomatic expressions were introduced in EFL settings through memorization and isolated exercises, often lacking authentic context (Liontas, 2015). However, with advancements in AI, language learners now have access to interactive platforms such as ChatGPT, which offer real-time feedback, contextual explanations, and scenario-based applications, significantly enhancing their ability to comprehend and use idiomatic language effectively (Kohnke et al., 2023). This capability bridges the gap between rote learning and practical application, fostering both fluency and cultural awareness.

Despite its promise, integrating AI into education presents several challenges, including ethical dilemmas, privacy concerns, and the need for equitable access (Trust et al., 2023). ChatGPT's ability to generate dynamic dialogues and adapt to individual learner needs creates an immersive platform for practicing authentic conversations (Hong, 2023). However, these benefits must be balanced with a strategic framework to ensure responsible and ethical use. This tension underscores the importance of comprehensively examining the role of AI in EFL instruction.

This article examines the role of ChatGPT in enhancing idiomatic competence within EFL curricula. To provide context, it traces the historical development of technology in language education, highlighting the shift from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to AI-driven methodologies. It then evaluates ChatGPT's contributions to idiom instruction by analyzing both its strengths and limitations. The discussion extends to pedagogical implications, emphasizing the necessity of a balanced approach to AI integration in language learning. Finally, the article proposes key areas for future research aimed at optimizing ChatGPT's educational impact while ensuring alignment with principles of innovation, equity, and instructional effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AI is not merely a tool for efficiency; it is a transformative force in education. It enables innovative teaching methods, advances technological capabilities, and drives research beyond the constraints of traditional education. At the heart of this transformation lies AI's ability to process vast amounts of data, identify patterns, and generate insights that might otherwise take humans years to uncover.

Technology in Education and Idiomatic Competence

The evolution of AI in education can be understood through three key paradigms. According to Ouyang and Jiao (2021), the first, shaped by behaviorism, positions AI as a directive tool through which students passively receive support. The second paradigm, influenced by cognitive and social constructivism, envisions AI as a collaborator that fosters active engagement. The third, rooted in connectivism, empowers learners to assume greater control of their education through a dynamic synergy among learners, instructors, technology, and information. AI has emerged as a powerful partner in this process (Hong, 2023), offering real-time feedback, personalized learning pathways, and adaptive strategies that address each learner's unique challenges and strengths.

Across generations, the role of technology in education has undergone a transformative evolution, shaping how learners engage with knowledge and redefining pedagogical strategies (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020). Each era of technological progress has introduced tools designed to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and quality of education, with language learning emerging as one of its most significant beneficiaries (Carr et al., 2011). The transition from traditional methods reliant on textbooks and classroom instruction to technology-integrated approaches marks a profound shift in educational paradigms. This shift holds particular significance for EFL learners, who face distinct challenges in mastering linguistic structures, cultural nuances, and idiomatic-figurative expressions. For these learners, technology offers solutions that bridge gaps in exposure, interaction, and feedback. From early computer-assisted language instruction to contemporary applications of AI, technology has consistently fostered dynamic, personalized, and immersive environments that address the diverse needs of language learners (Zhao & Lai, 2007).

Idiomatic competence is a critical dimension of language proficiency, extending beyond the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. It encompasses the ability to comprehend, interpret, and appropriately use idiomatic expressions—phrases whose meanings cannot be inferred from their literal components. For example, expressions such as *kick the bucket* or *spill the beans* convey figurative meanings that pose challenges for learners unfamiliar with the cultural and linguistic nuances of a language.

Traditionally, language proficiency was predominantly conceptualized as linguistic competence, with an emphasis on the mastery of grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary (Schmidt, 1992). Forty-five years ago, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework for communicative competence, delineating four interrelated dimensions: (a) linguistic competence, referring to the formal properties of language, including syntax, morphology, and phonology; (b) sociolinguistic competence, encompassing the ability to navigate language use within diverse social and cultural contexts; (c) discourse competence, involving the capacity to construct and interpret coherent, contextually appropriate communication; and (d) strategic competence, denoting the ability to employ communicative strategies to manage breakdowns and enhance message effectiveness.

Building upon this framework, Liontas (2015) conceptualized *idiomatic competence* as "the ability to understand and use idioms appropriately and accurately in a variety of sociocultural contexts, in a manner similar to that of native speakers, and with the least amount of mental effort" (p. 623). As articulated by Liontas (1999), idiomatic competence encompasses a speaker's knowledge of what constitutes correct and contextually appropriate idiomatic language use in alignment with specific communicative goals. This competence integrates both *linguistic competence*, which includes phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic knowledge, and *pragmatic competence*, which involves nonlinguistic, paralinguistic, sociolinguistic/functional, discourse-related, personal, world, and intercultural knowledge. In contrast, *idiomatic performance* refers to the application of this knowledge in interpreting and producing idiomatic expressions that are socially and contextually appropriate (Liontas, 1999, 2015). Within this framework, two key characteristics of idiomatic performance emerge. First, *idiomatic usage* reflects the degree to which individuals demonstrate their understanding of idiomatic structures and meanings. Second, *idiomatic use* reveals their ability to effectively apply this understanding in real-world communication to fulfill both social and linguistic objectives. These two facets operate collaboratively to facilitate fluent, contextually sensitive idiomatic expression.

Learners progress through distinct stages of idiomatic competence, a process facilitated by exposure to authentic learning environments. As articulated by Liontas (2015), this developmental

trajectory begins with the *declarative stage*, progresses to the *associative stage*, and culminates in the *autonomous stage*. During the associative stage, learners gain partial control over idiomatic expressions, whereas the autonomous stage is characterized by the effortless and automatic comprehension and production of idioms in contextually appropriate ways. Achieving autonomous idiomatic competence requires extensive *proceduralization*, supported by frequent encounters with idiomatic expressions in authentic contexts. At this advanced stage, learners exhibit highly effective and fluid use of idioms. The progression from the declarative to the associative, and ultimately to the autonomous stage, is referred to as *idiomatization*. Liontas (1999) defines *idiomatization* as "the process of becoming idiomatized to the target culture (i.e., the extent to which learners achieve idiom-language norms) over time through continuous exposure and practice" (p. 452). The level of idiomatization achieved correlates directly with the degree of idiomatic competence developed. In this regard, a reciprocal relationship exists between the *process of idiomatization* and the *development of idiomatic competence*, with each reinforcing the other.

The advancement of technology in education has profoundly transformed both student learning and instructional practices. The shift from conventional tools, such as chalkboards, to interactive smartboards, and from printed textbooks to digital platforms, has significantly improved the accessibility, engagement, and personalization of education (Kohnke et al., 2023). Through technologies like computers, mobile learning applications, AI, and ChatGPT, learners now have the opportunity to access tailored resources, collaborate with peers, and immerse themselves in learning experiences once deemed unattainable. This technological shift not only enhances the quality of education but also equips students with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital and dynamic global landscape.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The integration of technology into language education dates back to the late 20th century, marked by the emergence of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). CALL transformed language education by utilizing computer technology to improve learning through interactive, multimedia-driven activities. Tools such as grammar checkers, text reconstruction software, and concordancers have played a pivotal role in developing core linguistic skills (Chapelle, 2001). Levy (1997) redefined CALL as an educational framework in which computers are not mere adjuncts but integral, supportive tools in the language acquisition process. CALL seeks to create digital environments that foster authentic, interactive learning experiences, mirroring natural language acquisition processes and enabling learners to develop proficiency through engagement (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). The widespread availability of computers in educational institutions facilitated the rapid adoption of CALL as a transformative methodology in language instruction. CALL enables the personalization of learning, promotes learner autonomy, and supports a student-centered pedagogy tailored to individual needs and preferences. It also provides opportunities for learners to engage in both individualized programs and collaborative activities in networked environments, thereby extending authentic communication beyond traditional classroom settings (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020). By emphasizing a learner-driven approach, CALL has significantly enhanced the effectiveness and engagement of language education practices.

Building upon this foundational framework, research consistently underscores the transformative impact of CALL on students' motivation and their acquisition of communicative competence in languages like English (Lee et al., 2016). A primary advantage of CALL lies in its

capacity to deliver immediate feedback and facilitate individualized learning pacing—essential elements in EFL instruction. This resonates deeply with constructivist learning theories, which prioritize active engagement and personalized learning experiences. Moreover, the integration of multimedia in CALL enriches multiple facets of language acquisition. To illustrate, visual aids such as video clips not only enhance cultural understanding but also sharpen listening skills by immersing learners in authentic accents and intonation patterns (Chapelle, 2001).

In addition to these multimedia benefits, Aljebreen and Alzamil (2022) explore the pedagogical advantages of using short films to foster idiomatic competence among Saudi EFL learners. By seamlessly integrating visual and auditory elements, short films create a multimodal, immersive learning environment that has been shown to be more effective than traditional text-based methods. This research reveals substantial improvements in idiomatic comprehension among students who engaged with short films. Additionally, the students exhibited a notably positive reception of this interactive and engaging pedagogical tool. These findings underscore the potential of short films to enrich EFL pedagogy and foster a deeper understanding of idiomatic expressions within a dynamic, learner-centered framework.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The rapid proliferation of mobile technologies has profoundly reshaped the landscape of language education, unlocking transformative opportunities for flexibility, learner autonomy, and contextually rich learning experiences. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as a pivotal pedagogical framework, responding to the ubiquitous integration of mobile devices. This approach harnesses the portability and immediacy of mobile technologies, enabling learners to engage with language resources across diverse settings, both formal and informal. In contrast to traditional methods, MALL utilizes mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized, fast-paced world, overcoming the limitations of static learning environments and computer labs (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Expanding on these advancements, research has demonstrated MALL's capacity to enhance various facets of language learning, with a particular emphasis on idiomatic competence. Wu et al. (2016) examined how the audio-visual mobile app MEILA supports English idiom acquisition among EFL learners, focusing on the relationship between learner engagement and improved idiomatic learning outcomes. The results underscore MALL's efficacy in language education, with MEILA notably enhancing idiomatic learning outcomes. Its integration of rich audio-visual materials effectively supported learners in deepening their comprehension and retention of idiomatic expressions.

Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Language Learning (AIALL)

Emerging in the early 1950s, the field of AI has rapidly transformed technology and scientific research, driven by continuous advancements and diverse applications (Liontas, 2006). At its core, AI seeks to replicate human cognitive processes, enabling machines to perform complex tasks such as pattern recognition, language comprehension, and adaptive learning. A key subset of AI, Generative AI (GenAI), utilizes deep learning models to generate human-like content, including text and images, based on sophisticated prompts (Pack & Maloney, 2024). These innovations have paved the way for AI to address real-world challenges, with the education sector standing as a prominent beneficiary. The potential of AI in education is particularly compelling, as it allows for the analysis of vast datasets, automates repetitive tasks, and customizes learning experiences. By

mimicking human abilities in areas such as decision-making, learning, and contextual understanding, AI-powered applications—such as natural language processing (NLP), expert systems, and interactive learning environments—offer unprecedented personalization (Samoili et al., 2020). Liontas (2006) foresaw that tools like intelligent tutoring systems would soon demonstrate AI's transformative potential in language acquisition, poised to "hit the ground running" and "open doors" to groundbreaking methods in language education, thereby facilitating enhanced comprehension and communication through cutting-edge computational techniques.

A notable advancement in this field is the emergence of personalized learning, enabled by generative AI. Unlike traditional pedagogical approaches, which often struggle to meet the diverse needs of learners, generative AI meticulously analyzes individual performance data to deliver tailored feedback and interventions (Hong, 2023). For instance, ChatGPT, a conversational AI tool developed by OpenAI, provides personalized support by identifying specific learning obstacles, such as challenges in vocabulary acquisition or writing structure (Hong, 2023). This personalized approach not only addresses learners' weaknesses but also fosters their self-confidence, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and effective learning environment. AI promotes lifelong learning, personalized skill development, and greater access to educational resources by complementing human abilities rather than replacing them (Kangiwa et al., 2024). These advancements facilitate the creation of a vibrant digital learning ecosystem that nurtures creativity, collaboration, and the dissemination of knowledge, ultimately empowering individuals and communities to thrive in an ever-evolving global context (Hockly, 2023).

Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT)

Launched in November 2022, ChatGPT demonstrates AI's educational potential by leveraging vast digital datasets and natural language processing to emulate human-like interactions (Hong, 2023). According to Adeshola and Adepoju (2024), ChatGPT is trained on extensive internet text data and utilizes a transformer architecture to process data in parallel, enhancing its suitability for natural language tasks. It enables dynamic, interactive discussions, offering personalized feedback and empathetic responses. Beyond education, ChatGPT finds applications in predictive analytics, scientific research, and energy optimization. However, the rise of AI-generated content, including technologies like deepfakes, also introduces ethical concerns that require careful regulation. AI's impact on education is further underscored by its ability to provide adaptive learning experiences. By using algorithms to tailor content to individual needs, AI fosters personalized learning that enhances engagement and improves outcomes (Hockly, 2023). Tools like ChatGPT and intelligent tutoring systems also support language practice in authentic contexts, promoting deeper understanding and active engagement (Kohnke et al., 2023). As AI evolves, it will redefine educational methodologies, driving innovation in teaching and learning. Educators must prepare students to navigate this technological era responsibly, emphasizing the importance of the ethical use of technology over restrictions.

CHATGPT AS A TOOL FOR IDIOMATIC MASTERY

The integration of technology into education is not a recent phenomenon but rather a process that has evolved over several decades. Technological advancements have progressively supported learners, particularly those with limited exposure to new languages. Access to authentic materials

and immersive learning experiences has expanded, enabling students to engage with language in more meaningful and effective ways. This evolution paved the way for the incorporation of innovative tools like AI, which has further transformed language education, especially in idiom instruction. The growing reliance on digital tools, online resources, and interactive platforms underscores the indispensable role of technology in modern education. The continued integration of advanced digital technologies into educational contexts, regardless of whether it is welcomed or resisted, is an unavoidable progression.

Idiomatic expressions are essential for achieving native-like fluency, as their meanings transcend the literal interpretations of individual words. For EFL learners, mastering idioms is crucial for effective and natural communication, overcoming challenges posed by direct translation. Teaching idioms focuses on comprehension, retention, and practical application, engaging cognitive processes that foster deeper conceptual understanding and linguistic flexibility. Researchers have long emphasized the importance of idiomatic competence in attaining fluency and comprehension, highlighting that idioms are vital for effective communication and cultural understanding, as they reflect authentic language use in real-life contexts (Liontas, 2002; Martinez & Murphy, 2011).

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a transformative force in language education, introducing innovative approaches to idiom instruction. Applications like GPT have become game-changers, with their unprecedented subscription growth underscoring AI's vast potential to revolutionize language learning (Hong, 2023). In this context, ChatGPT serves as an invaluable resource for both educational content creation and language acquisition. Its ability to autonomously generate diverse texts, such as papers, abstracts, and textbooks, with minimal human input, positions it as an essential tool for educators and learners alike. AI enables educators to incorporate ChatGPT into diverse teaching strategies, enhancing the interactivity and dynamism of the learning experience. Students, in turn, can use ChatGPT to explore linguistic concepts independently, which cultivates a more intelligent and adaptable learning environment.

Despite its transformative potential, the integration of ChatGPT into educational settings requires careful attention to several key factors, including data quality, knowledge accuracy, privacy, and ethical concerns. A strong justification for its use in EFL instruction is its ability to expose learners to authentic language use (Hong, 2023). Colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references are essential components of advanced language proficiency. Rather than limiting instruction to grammar and vocabulary, ChatGPT can create immersive, contextually rich learning environments in which learners have meaningful opportunities to strengthen their communicative competence for real-world interactions.

As noted earlier, idiomatic competence is a considerable challenge for non-native speakers, as idioms often carry meanings that cannot be deduced from the individual words (Liontas, 2015). Expressions such as *hit the road*, *don't pull my leg*, and *don't beat around the bush* often pose challenges for learners. In these cases, ChatGPT not only defines the idioms but also contextualizes them. For example, *hit the road* could lead learners to interpret it literally, picturing someone physically striking the road. ChatGPT clarifies the figurative meaning— "to leave or start a journey"—and provides an illustrative example: *"It's getting late; we'd better hit the road if we want to make it to the party on time."* Similarly, *don't pull my leg* is explained as "don't joke or tease me," with a contextualized example: *"You said you won the lottery. Come on, don't pull my leg!"* The idiom *don't beat around the bush*, often misinterpreted as a literal action of circling a bush, is redefined as "don't avoid saying something directly," with the example: *"Stop beating around the bush and tell me what you really think!"*

This divergence between literal and figurative meanings highlights the inherent challenges EFL learners face in mastering idioms. ChatGPT effectively bridges this gap by offering immediate, contextually enriched explanations that enhance both comprehension and usage. There are two compelling arguments for integrating ChatGPT into EFL education. The first argument centers on ChatGPT's ability to simulate real-world dialogues in which idiomatic expressions appear naturally. This process helps learners understand how to use idioms in real-life communication. For example, the AI guides learners through scenario-based activities, such as planning a trip or discussing daily routines, naturally incorporating idioms. These contextualized interactions move learners beyond rote memorization and encourage deeper comprehension and retention of idioms. Hong (2023) highlights how AI tools like ChatGPT create interactive learning environments that mirror real-life language use. These environments engage learners directly and help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. By facilitating authentic language encounters, ChatGPT supports the internalization of idiomatic structures and improves learners' communicative competence.

The second argument for integrating ChatGPT into EFL education highlights its ability to offer personalized feedback and create adaptive learning pathways that meet individual student needs (Esfandiari & Allaf-Akbary, 2024). ChatGPT improves language learning efficiency by providing instant feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, helping learners quickly identify and correct their errors. Additionally, it generates diverse practice materials, such as flashcards, quizzes, and reading exercises, fostering a well-rounded learning experience. EFL learners often struggle with grammar gaps, idiomatic expressions, and pronunciation. ChatGPT interprets learner inputs and provides context-specific explanations. For instance, when learners encounter idioms like *hit the road* or *don't beat around the bush*, ChatGPT clarifies their meanings immediately. If a learner asks, "What does *hit the road* mean? Does it mean to punch the road?" ChatGPT explains: "*Hit the road* is an idiom that means to leave or begin a journey." ChatGPT also provides real-life examples to illustrate idioms in context, which helps learners grasp their meanings and use them confidently in conversation.

Traditional pedagogical methods often rely on generalized feedback, which may not fully address individual learners' specific errors. In contrast, ChatGPT engages learners through customized dialogues that directly respond to their particular mistakes or inquiries. For example, if a learner writes, "I hitted the road yesterday," ChatGPT immediately corrects this: "The word *hitted* is incorrect. The past tense of *hit* is also *hit*. Your sentence should be: *I hit the road yesterday*." This real-time correction, paired with a clear grammatical explanation, reinforces linguistic rules and reduces the likelihood of repeated errors. Reflecting this function, Hong (2023) discusses ChatGPT's role as a virtual tutor and notes its capacity to simplify complex linguistic concepts and deliver personalized feedback, both of which contribute to a more effective and responsive learning experience.

A persistent challenge in traditional educational settings is delayed feedback, which can hinder learner progress. ChatGPT resolves this by offering immediate, personalized responses, allowing learners to correct errors in real time and to accelerate language development. Its capacity to deliver tailored feedback and adapt to diverse learner needs positions ChatGPT as a transformative tool in EFL education. Through continuous feedback, multimodal support, and the promotion of self-directed learning, ChatGPT overcomes key limitations of conventional teaching methods. Balcı (2024) observes that beyond enhancing linguistic competence, ChatGPT fosters learner autonomy. Its integration bridges gaps in traditional methodologies and advances more effective, inclusive, and innovative language instruction.

Integrating ChatGPT into EFL Classrooms

Building on previous discussions of ChatGPT's capabilities and challenges, its integration into EFL pedagogy carries significant implications for language instruction. By offering contextualized learning, delivering personalized feedback, and promoting learner autonomy, ChatGPT holds the potential to profoundly reshape language acquisition. However, its implementation requires careful planning to address ethical considerations, mitigate risks, and ensure a responsible, balanced approach to AI in the classroom. This shift toward AI-enhanced instruction could improve proficiency, engagement, and academic outcomes while simultaneously presenting new challenges for educators, who must adapt their strategies to integrate AI tools effectively.

Building on these considerations, we now explore four key themes that showcase how ChatGPT can enhance language learning, particularly in mastering idiomatic expressions. These themes highlight how ChatGPT empowers learners in diverse ways and enrich both the depth and breadth of idiomatic competence through personalized, interactive, and autonomous learning experiences.

- **Contextualized Learning**: ChatGPT provides authentic, contextualized usage of idiomatic expressions, which is crucial for developing idiomatic competence. Since idioms often present challenges due to their figurative nature and cultural specificity, ChatGPT can generate sentences or dialogues that demonstrate idioms in real-life scenarios, while also offering cultural and situational explanations for their usage. As a result, students can access diverse sentence examples that illustrate vocabulary use in various authentic and meaningful contexts.

- **Personalized Feedback and Scaffolding**: ChatGPT delivers personalized feedback that refines learners' understanding and use of idioms by identifying errors, suggesting corrections, and offering simplified explanations or synonyms. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes scaffolding as vital to language development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), and ChatGPT serves in this capacity by guiding learners through their zone of proximal development (ZPD). As Hong (2023) observes, it addresses vocabulary challenges and linguistic difficulties through tailored feedback. AI chatbots also offer step-by-step guidance for complex issues, effectively overcoming the constraints of traditional classroom environments where immediate feedback is often unavailable (Li & Miao, 2022). ChatGPT thus holds potential as a scaffold for authentic, adaptive language interactions, customized to individual learner needs (Alm & Watanabe, 2023).

- **Interactive Learning**: ChatGPT facilitates interactive learning by creating dynamic dialogues where learners can practice idiomatic expressions. Role-playing, open-ended prompts, and simulated conversations provide opportunities to use idioms in meaningful ways. These exchanges provide immediate feedback on the accuracy and appropriateness of idiom usage. This feedback helps learners solidify their understanding and improve their application of idioms. ChatGPT adapts to learners' proficiency levels, ensuring that the challenges they face are appropriate and contribute to gradual development. By simulating authentic communication scenarios, ChatGPT encourages active participation in real-world language use. Kohnke et al. (2023) highlight that, in addition to enhancing idiomatic competence, ChatGPT boosts learners' confidence and allows them to use idioms naturally in daily conversations.

- **Learner Autonomy**: ChatGPT enables learners to take control of their language learning by providing opportunities for independent practice, thus reducing their reliance on teacher guidance. It offers on-demand explanations of idioms and allows learners to ask follow-up questions about their meanings, origins, or related expressions. This level of interaction promotes self-directed learning, a key factor in language development. ChatGPT serves as a versatile tool that supports learners in pursuing their own educational paths. Additionally, it has been recognized for its role in enhancing learner autonomy by providing personalized, adaptive learning experiences that cater to individual needs (Balcı, 2024).

Notwithstanding the significance of the implications mentioned above, the integration of ChatGPT into educational settings raises several critical concerns—ranging from credibility and accuracy to supplementing traditional methods, privacy and ethical considerations, and the digital divide—that must be addressed to ensure its responsible use. One of the foremost issues is the credibility and accuracy of the tool's outputs. ChatGPT generates text based on predictive patterns rather than verifying factual information. As a result, it can produce fabricated data, errors in mathematical or scientific calculations, and even non-existent citations. Relying on ChatGPT for accurate information without critical evaluation can disrupt the educational process and pose significant risks to both teaching and learning (Trust et al., 2023).

ChatGPT should be viewed as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. While AI has the potential to enhance educational practices, excessive reliance on it may undermine the value of human interaction and traditional pedagogical strategies. Therefore, it is essential to integrate ChatGPT thoughtfully within a balanced, well-rounded learning environment to preserve the dynamic nature of education and prevent potential disruptions.

Another critical issue concerns privacy and ethical considerations. ChatGPT collects and retains user data, which raises significant concerns, particularly in educational settings where sensitive student information is involved. The potential for misuse or unauthorized access to such data highlights the need for stringent ethical safeguards. Educational institutions must carefully evaluate the implications of using AI tools that handle personal data to ensure privacy and compliance with legal standards.

Finally, ChatGPT's pricing model exacerbates the digital divide, restricting access for students who cannot afford premium features or are located in regions with limited access. This disparity underscores existing inequities in technology access and calls for a more equitable distribution of educational tools. To maximize the benefits of AI in education, it is critical that all students, regardless of their economic background or geographic location, have equal opportunities to engage with these technologies. Together, these concerns emphasize the need for a cautious and informed approach to integrating ChatGPT into educational contexts. By addressing these risks, educators can unlock the potential of AI while safeguarding the interests of both students and educators.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

This article has argued that integrating ChatGPT into EFL instruction provides valuable opportunities for enhancing idiomatic competence. Through contextualized learning, personalized feedback, interactive practice, and the promotion of learner autonomy, ChatGPT demonstrates its

potential as a valuable educational tool. The key takeaway is that AI tools can complement traditional teaching methods and enable educators to create more flexible, adaptive, and engaging learning experiences that address the diverse needs of students.

As ChatGPT becomes more embedded in EFL education, several promising research directions emerge to further enhance its role in developing idiomatic competence. Longitudinal studies could assess its long-term effects on learners' ability to retain and apply idioms in real-world contexts, building on preliminary findings by Aljebreen and Alzamil (2022), which suggest improved comprehension through AI tools. Such research could track progression through Liontas's (2015) stages of "idiomatization"—*declarative*, *associative*, and *autonomous*—comparing AI-assisted learners with those using traditional methods. This comparison would provide insights into sustained proficiency gains and help refine instructional strategies to ensure that the benefits of AI are both lasting and impactful.

Refining ChatGPT's feedback mechanisms presents another key opportunity. While it provides tailored corrections, as noted by Hong (2023), further research into adaptive models—incorporating culturally nuanced examples or gamified elements—could enhance engagement and understanding. Exploring algorithms that adjust feedback based on learner proficiency would align with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, thus strengthening ChatGPT's scaffolding potential, as supported by Li and Miao (2022). This approach could deepen learners' mastery of idioms, making learning more relevant and effective.

Ethical and privacy challenges warrant further investigation. Investigating the impact of data collection on student trust and exploring anonymized, localized versions of ChatGPT, as Trust et al. (2023) suggest, could reduce privacy risks. Additionally, developing policies to ensure equitable access, as Li and Miao (2022) emphasize, is crucial to prevent exacerbating educational inequalities. Interdisciplinary research could explore the cognitive effects of ChatGPT-assisted idiom learning, focusing on memory, cultural empathy, and linguistic creativity, potentially reshaping models of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Such insights could guide the design of next-generation AI tools, as Liontas (2006) recommends, maximizing ChatGPT's impact in EFL education while ensuring responsible usage.

In closing, the adoption of ChatGPT requires careful consideration of its limitations, including risks of overreliance, accuracy issues, privacy concerns, and disparities in access across different socioeconomic and geographical contexts. As with any technological tool, its classroom use must be approached with caution to avoid unintended consequences. To fully leverage its benefits while minimizing drawbacks, educators must critically assess its impact, integrate it strategically, and ensure alignment with a balanced pedagogical framework. In doing so, they can harness AI's transformative potential to enrich language education while preserving an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Much work remains to determine the optimal balance between AI-driven instruction and human interaction, as well as to address persistent concerns related to accuracy, ethics, and accessibility. Furthermore, continued exploration of broader AI applications and their long-term impact on idiomatic competence is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of AI-based instruction compared to traditional methods.

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