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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' TRUST AND DEPENDENCY TOWARD CHATGPT IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract: This study explores junior high school students' trust and dependency toward ChatGPT in learning English within an Indonesian EFL context. Using a qualitative design, three students who frequently used ChatGPT were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students developed conditional trust, recognizing both the usefulness and limitations of ChatGPT. Dependency varied from supportive use to strong reliance, with some students showing reduced confidence without AI assistance. While ChatGPT improves learning efficiency and accessibility, excessive reliance may reduce students' cognitive engagement and independent problem-solving. The study highlights the importance of guided and critical use of AI tools to support learner autonomy while preventing overdependence.

Keywords: ChatGPT; EFL learning; student trust; learning dependency; artificial intelligence in education

MENELUSURI TINGKAT KEPERCAYAAN DAN KETERGANTUNGAN SISWA SMP TERHADAP CHATGPT DALAM PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menelusuri tingkat kepercayaan dan ketergantungan siswa SMP terhadap ChatGPT dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dalam konteks EFL di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif, tiga siswa yang sering menggunakan ChatGPT dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengembangkan kepercayaan bersyarat, menyadari baik kegunaan maupun keterbatasan ChatGPT. Ketergantungan bervariasi dari penggunaan yang mendukung hingga ketergantungan yang kuat, dengan beberapa siswa menunjukkan penurunan kepercayaan diri tanpa bantuan AI. Meskipun ChatGPT meningkatkan efisiensi dan aksesibilitas pembelajaran, ketergantungan berlebihan dapat mengurangi keterlibatan kognitif siswa dan kemampuan pemecahan masalah secara mandiri. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya penggunaan alat AI yang terarah dan kritis untuk mendukung otonomi belajar siswa sekaligus mencegah ketergantungan berlebihan.

Kata kunci: ChatGPT; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL); kepercayaan siswa; ketergantungan belajar; kecerdasan buatan dalam pendidikan

INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesian junior high schools (SMP) as part of the national curriculum aimed at developing students' foundational communicative competence. However, EFL instruction at the secondary level continues to face structural challenges, including limited exposure to authentic language use, uneven instructional quality, and students' low confidence in using English actively (Anwar et al., 2020). With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), digital technologies have increasingly entered classroom and out-of-class learning environments. AI-driven tools are now recognized as transformative forces in education, reshaping instructional practices, assessment models, and learner support systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Among recent innovations, ChatGPT has attracted significant attention due to its ability to generate human-like responses, provide grammar explanations, assist writing development, and offer immediate feedback (Kasneci et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). In Indonesian EFL contexts, emerging research indicates that students perceive ChatGPT as accessible, efficient, and supportive in assisting English learning tasks (Afkarin & Asmara, 2024; Putri et al., 2025).

The rapid adoption of ChatGPT in educational contexts has also generated scholarly discussion regarding its pedagogical implications. Systematic reviews suggest that while generative AI tools provide opportunities for personalized learning and increased engagement, they simultaneously raise concerns about critical thinking, academic integrity, and overreliance (Zhai, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). In language learning specifically, AI tools can serve as conversational partners, writing assistants, and feedback providers, potentially enhancing learners' autonomy and self-regulated learning processes (Dizon et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of such tools is closely tied to learners' perceptions and trust in the system. Trust plays a crucial role in technology adoption and continued use, influencing how learners evaluate and rely on AI-generated responses (Rahman et al., 2023). Research in educational technology further indicates that students' trust in AI systems affects their engagement patterns and learning behaviors (Rahimi & Shute, 2021).

In EFL contexts, students may develop trust in ChatGPT due to its immediacy, perceived accuracy, and non-judgmental interaction style (Ho, 2024; Meluwu & Neman, 2025). For adolescent learners who may feel hesitant to speak English in front of peers or teachers, AI tools can provide a psychologically safe space for experimentation and practice. Nevertheless, scholars caution that excessive or uncritical trust in AI-generated content may reduce learners' cognitive engagement and limit opportunities for independent problem-solving (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Zhai, 2023). Such concerns are particularly relevant for junior high school students, who are still developing critical thinking skills and self-regulated learning capacities.

Closely connected to trust is the issue of dependency. Dependency on AI tools may emerge when students repeatedly rely on automated assistance for idea generation, translation, or grammar correction rather than engaging in independent language construction (Ho, 2024). Studies in EFL settings suggest that while AI tools can scaffold learning, sustained reliance may influence learner autonomy and shift responsibility for learning from the student to the system (Sister et al., 2025). The concept of learner autonomy, widely recognized as central to sustainable language development, emphasizes students' capacity to take responsibility for their own learning processes (Little, 1991). When AI tools become primary sources of answers rather than learning support mechanisms, questions arise regarding how autonomy is negotiated in AI-mediated learning environments.

Despite the expanding body of research on ChatGPT in language education, most empirical investigations have concentrated on higher education contexts and adult learners (Dizon et al., 2025; Liu, 2023). Consequently, limited attention has been given to younger learners in secondary school settings, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. Adolescents differ from adult learners in

terms of cognitive maturity, metacognitive development, and digital literacy, which may shape how they construct trust and dependency toward AI tools (Rahimi & Shute, 2021; Meluwu & Neman, 2025). There remains a need for in-depth qualitative inquiry that captures how junior high school students who actively use ChatGPT experience and interpret its role in their English learning practices.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of selected junior high school students who frequently use ChatGPT in learning English. By focusing on detailed accounts from a small group of participants, this study seeks to understand how trust toward ChatGPT is formed, how dependency manifests in students' learning behaviors, and how these experiences influence their engagement with English learning tasks. Rather than measuring frequency of use or general attitudes, this research prioritizes in-depth narratives to capture how adolescent learners interpret, negotiate, and make meaning of their interactions with AI in their everyday academic practices. Through qualitative exploration, this study contributes nuanced insights into the responsible and pedagogically sound integration of AI tools in Indonesian secondary EFL education, particularly in supporting learner autonomy without fostering overreliance.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore junior high school students' trust and dependency toward ChatGPT in learning English. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations rather than to quantify variables or test causal relationships. The research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, aiming to capture how adolescent learners construct meaning from their interactions with artificial intelligence within their EFL learning context. To analyze the collected data, this study applied thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows for systematic identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning across qualitative data. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining how trust is formed and how dependency is manifested in students' learning behaviors.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of three junior high school students (SMP level) in Indonesia who frequently use ChatGPT in learning English. The small number of participants aligns with qualitative research principles that emphasize depth and richness of data over broad generalization. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, specifically criterion-based selection, to ensure that those involved had direct and meaningful experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The selection criteria required that participants be actively enrolled in junior high school, study English as a foreign language, and have used ChatGPT multiple times for English-related tasks such as translation, writing assistance, or grammar checking. This sampling strategy enabled the collection of detailed and information-rich accounts relevant to the research focus.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. The interview questions were developed based on three conceptual foundations: trust in technology as discussed in technology acceptance research, the concept of learner autonomy emphasizing students' responsibility in managing their own learning, and contemporary discussions regarding the opportunities and challenges of generative AI in education. The interview protocol was designed to explore students' reasons for using ChatGPT, their perceptions of its reliability and usefulness, situations in which they relied heavily on the tool, and their reflections on independence and confidence when completing English tasks with and

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without AI assistance. This structure ensured that the instrument remained theoretically grounded while allowing space for participants' authentic narratives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 5 to 15 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity, comfort, and depth of expression, considering that the participants were junior high school students. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy during analysis. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. These procedures were implemented to ensure that the research adhered to fundamental ethical principles in qualitative inquiry.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), beginning with familiarization with the data and continuing through initial coding, theme development, theme review, and final interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to the development of trust toward ChatGPT, patterns of dependency in learning practices, emotional responses toward AI assistance, and implications for learner autonomy. To enhance credibility, the transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, and reflective notes were maintained throughout the coding and interpretation process. The aim of the analysis was not to generalize findings to a wider population but to provide rich, contextualized insights into how selected junior high school students experience and interpret the role of ChatGPT in their English learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis involved several stages including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and reviewing and defining themes. Through this process, a number of codes were identified and grouped into broader subthemes and themes. Table 1 illustrates the coding process that led to the development of the themes in this study.

Table 1
Coding Process Based on Interview Data

Participant & Data Extract	Code	Subtheme	Theme
P1: "Saya pakai ChatGPT untuk membantu menemukan kosakata dan menerjemahkan." P1: "Kadang bisa dipercaya kadang tidak."	Using ChatGPT for vocabulary help Partial trust in ChatGPT	ChatGPT as learning support tool Conditional trust	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT
P1: "Jawabannya di dunia nyata tidak sesuai dengan ChatGPT." P1: "Kalo Bahasa Inggris ga pernah cek lagi."	ChatGPT gives incorrect answers No verification in English tasks	Awareness of AI limitations Trust without verification	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT
P1: "Biasanya coba sendiri dulu baru buka ChatGPT." P1: "Kalo ga boleh pake ChatGPT biasa aja."	Attempting task before AI help No emotional reliance	AI as secondary support Low dependency	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P1: "Positifnya lebih mudah menerjemahkan."	Easier translation	Learning convenience	Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning
P1: "Negatifnya bisa kecanduan tanpa mikir sendiri."	Risk of addiction	Overreliance concern	Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning
P2: "Biasanya dipakai buat tugas yang sulit."	Using ChatGPT for difficult tasks	Task-based usage	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT

P2: "Kadang ada jawaban yang aneh."	Strange or incorrect answers	Doubt toward AI answers	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT
P2: "Kalau beda dengan guru lebih percaya guru."	Teacher authority preferred	Trust hierarchy (teacher > AI)	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT
P2: "Aku ngerjain dulu baru cek GPT."	Double-checking answers	AI as confirmation tool	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P2: "Tanpa ChatGPT biasa aja karena ada buku."	Alternative resources available	Low dependency	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P2: "ChatGPT bikin tugas lebih cepat."	Faster task completion	Efficiency in learning tasks	Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning
P2: "Tapi jadi males mikir."	Reduced cognitive effort	Laziness in thinking	Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning
P3: "Sekarang hampir semua tugas Bahasa Inggris pakai ChatGPT."	Heavy AI usage	Frequent reliance	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P3: "Langsung buka ChatGPT biar cepat."	Immediate AI use	AI-first learning behavior	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P3: "Kalau ga ada ChatGPT rasanya ga yakin jawabannya benar."	Loss of confidence without AI	Psychological dependency	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT
P3: "Jawaban ChatGPT dipercaya selama tidak ketahuan salah."	Blind trust in AI	High trust toward AI	Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT
P3: "Kadang jadi males mikir."	Reduced effort in learning	Passive learning tendency	Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning
P3: "Kalau ChatGPT hilang nilai mungkin turun."	Fear of losing AI support	Strong dependency	Learning Dependency on ChatGPT

The analysis revealed three main themes: (1) Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT, (2) Learning Dependency on ChatGPT, and (3) Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning. These themes illustrate how students evaluate the reliability of ChatGPT, how they integrate it into their learning practices, and how they perceive its influence on their English learning process.

Formation of Trust toward ChatGPT

The first theme describes how students develop trust toward ChatGPT as a learning tool. Participants reported that ChatGPT was frequently used to support English learning activities, particularly for vocabulary assistance and translation. For instance, Participant 1 explained that the tool helped them find English vocabulary and translate sentences when completing assignments. This suggests that students perceive ChatGPT as a practical and accessible resource that can assist them in completing language-related tasks.

Despite this usefulness, students also demonstrated awareness that ChatGPT responses are not always reliable. Participant 1 mentioned that some answers generated by ChatGPT did not match real-life situations, indicating the presence of inaccuracies in certain responses. Similarly, Participant 2 reported encountering unusual or confusing answers when using the tool. These experiences show that students recognize the limitations of AI-generated responses.

Another important aspect of this theme is the hierarchy of trust between learning sources. Participant 2 stated that when ChatGPT’s answers differed from the teacher’s explanation, the teacher’s response was considered more trustworthy. This finding indicates that although students rely on ChatGPT as a supplementary learning tool, traditional educational authorities such as teachers continue to hold a dominant position in students’ perception of reliable knowledge.

Overall, the findings suggest that students develop conditional trust toward ChatGPT. While the tool is widely perceived as helpful, students remain aware that its responses may not always be accurate and therefore require careful consideration.

Learning Dependency on ChatGPT

The second theme highlights the degree to which students rely on ChatGPT during their English learning activities. The data reveal that the level of dependency varies across participants.

Participant 1 demonstrated relatively low dependency on ChatGPT. The participant explained that they usually attempted to complete English assignments independently before



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consulting ChatGPT for assistance. In this case, the AI tool was used primarily as a secondary support resource rather than the main problem-solving tool.

Participant 2 showed a moderate level of dependency. The participant reported using ChatGPT mainly when encountering difficult tasks and occasionally using it to confirm answers after completing assignments. This indicates that ChatGPT functioned as a complementary tool that supported the learning process without completely replacing other learning resources.

In contrast, Participant 3 demonstrated a higher level of dependency on ChatGPT. The participant indicated that ChatGPT was frequently used for English assignments and often became the first resource accessed when completing tasks. Furthermore, the participant expressed reduced confidence in answering questions without the assistance of ChatGPT. This suggests that frequent interaction with AI tools may gradually lead to psychological reliance on technology when performing academic tasks.

These findings illustrate that students' dependency on ChatGPT exists along a continuum ranging from supportive use to strong reliance, depending on their individual learning habits and levels of confidence.

Perceived Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning

The third theme focuses on students' perceptions of how ChatGPT influences their English learning experience. Participants identified both positive and negative effects associated with the use of the tool.

On the positive side, students reported that ChatGPT helped them complete assignments more efficiently. Several participants explained that the tool made it easier to translate sentences, understand unfamiliar vocabulary, and finish tasks more quickly. For example, Participant 2 noted that ChatGPT allowed them to complete English assignments faster than when relying solely on textbooks or other traditional resources.

However, participants also acknowledged potential negative consequences of relying heavily on ChatGPT. Some students expressed concern that frequent use of the tool might reduce their motivation to think independently. Participant 1 mentioned that excessive reliance on ChatGPT could lead to a habit of completing tasks without attempting to solve problems independently. Similarly, Participant 3 indicated that frequent use of ChatGPT sometimes reduced their effort to think critically when completing English tasks.

Taken together, these findings suggest that ChatGPT offers significant practical benefits for English learning, particularly in terms of efficiency and accessibility. At the same time, excessive reliance on the tool may influence students' independent learning behaviors and critical thinking processes.

Discussion

This study explored junior high school students' trust and dependency toward ChatGPT in learning English within an EFL context. The findings revealed three main themes: the formation of trust toward ChatGPT, varying levels of dependency on the tool, and its perceived impact on students' learning. These findings provide important insights into how younger learners interact with AI-assisted language learning tools and how such interactions influence their learning behaviors.

Trust toward ChatGPT in EFL Learning

The findings indicate that students develop conditional trust toward ChatGPT. While participants perceived the tool as useful for vocabulary assistance and translation, they also demonstrated awareness that its responses are not always accurate. This aligns with previous studies showing that students tend to trust AI tools based on perceived usefulness and convenience, while still recognizing potential limitations (Rahman et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Interestingly, the findings also highlight the presence of a trust hierarchy, in which teachers are still regarded as more reliable sources of knowledge compared to AI systems. This supports earlier research suggesting that, despite the increasing integration of AI in education, human instructors continue to play a central role in validating information and guiding students' learning

(Afkarin & Asmara, 2024). In the context of junior high school students, this reliance on teachers may be even more pronounced due to their developing critical thinking skills and limited experience in evaluating information independently.

At the same time, some participants exhibited uncritical trust behaviors, such as not verifying ChatGPT's answers in certain situations. This reflects concerns raised in previous studies that excessive reliance on AI-generated responses without verification may lead to misconceptions or superficial understanding (Liu, 2023; Ho, 2024). Therefore, while trust in ChatGPT can facilitate learning, it also requires careful guidance to ensure that students remain critical users of technology.

Dependency on ChatGPT in Learning Practices

The findings demonstrate that students' dependency on ChatGPT varies along a continuum, ranging from low to high reliance. Some students used ChatGPT as a supplementary tool after attempting tasks independently, while others relied on it as a primary resource for completing assignments. This variation is consistent with previous research indicating that learners adopt different usage patterns depending on their confidence, learning habits, and perceived difficulty of tasks (Dizon et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

A particularly notable finding is the emergence of psychological dependency, where students expressed reduced confidence in completing tasks without ChatGPT. This supports earlier studies suggesting that frequent use of AI tools may influence learners' self-efficacy and increase reliance on external support systems (Sister et al., 2025). For junior high school students, who are still developing self-regulated learning skills, such dependency may have significant implications for their long-term learning development.

However, it is important to note that not all forms of dependency are inherently negative. Moderate use of ChatGPT as a support or confirmation tool can enhance learning efficiency and provide immediate feedback, which is beneficial in language learning contexts. The key issue lies in balancing the use of AI tools with independent learning efforts.

Impact of ChatGPT on English Learning

The findings reveal that ChatGPT has both positive and negative impacts on students' English learning. On the positive side, students reported that the tool improved efficiency by helping them complete tasks more quickly and access language support easily. This aligns with previous research highlighting the potential of ChatGPT to enhance language learning by providing instant feedback, explanations, and language examples (Wang et al., 2023; Meluwu & Neman, 2025).

On the negative side, participants expressed concerns that frequent use of ChatGPT could reduce their motivation to think independently and engage deeply with learning tasks. This finding supports previous studies that warn against the risk of passive learning and overreliance when students depend too heavily on AI-generated outputs (Sister et al., 2025; Ho, 2024). In such cases, students may prioritize task completion over meaningful learning, which can hinder the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

For junior high school students, these impacts are particularly significant, as this stage represents a critical period for developing foundational language skills and learning autonomy. Without proper guidance, the convenience offered by ChatGPT may unintentionally lead to reduced cognitive engagement.

Implications for EFL Learning in Indonesian Junior High Schools

The findings of this study suggest that the integration of ChatGPT in EFL learning should be approached with careful consideration. While the tool offers substantial benefits in terms of accessibility and efficiency, it also poses challenges related to trust and dependency.

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to use ChatGPT responsibly. This includes encouraging students to verify AI-generated information, promoting independent problem-solving,

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and integrating AI use as part of a structured learning process rather than a shortcut for completing tasks. Additionally, fostering students' awareness of both the strengths and limitations of AI tools can help them develop more critical and autonomous learning behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined junior high school students' trust and dependency toward ChatGPT in learning English and revealed that students develop conditional trust based on both perceived usefulness and awareness of its limitations. The findings demonstrate that dependency on ChatGPT exists along a continuum, ranging from supportive use to strong reliance, with some students showing decreased confidence when learning without AI assistance. While ChatGPT offers significant benefits in improving learning efficiency and accessibility, its excessive use may reduce students' critical thinking and independent learning engagement. These results suggest that the integration of ChatGPT in EFL contexts should be carefully guided by teachers to ensure that the tool supports, rather than replaces, students' learning processes. Encouraging critical evaluation of AI-generated content and promoting balanced use of technology are essential to maintaining learner autonomy. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and explore long-term effects of AI use on students' learning development.

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