# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AI-SUPPORTED LANGUAGE LEARNING AND DIGITAL LITERACY: A THAI UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *The integration of AI-driven tools in education is transforming language acquisition and digital citizenship. This study explores students' perceptions of how such tools support their English learning and ethical digital behaviour. For low-proficiency learners, these tools offer a pathway to develop essential 21st-century skills. This study presents a Thai university case study using an AI-supported, hobby-based learning model to enhance English language proficiency, digital literacy, and ethical online behaviour. Tools such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit were used in structured tasks, including discussion forums and video tutorials. A mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitative data from 79 students were analysed to assess their perceived improvements in writing, speaking, tool use, and ethical awareness. Qualitative data from six semi-structured interviews and student artefacts (Reddit posts and video tutorials) provided illustrative insights into learning experiences and self-reported confidence building. The findings suggest growth, rather than measured gains, in writing fluency, speaking clarity, and multimodal communication. Students reported improved confidence in using AI tools and demonstrated better understanding of privacy, copyright, and responsible tool use. As a case study of one university course, the findings reflect student perceptions within this limited context. The study highlights how carefully scaffolded AI-supported learning may benefit low-proficiency learners, especially when combined with interest-based tasks. The model offers a practical framework for educators seeking to integrate AI into language education while promoting digital citizenship. The study acknowledges the limitations of self-report data, and directions for further research are suggested.*

**Keywords:** *AI-enhanced learning, digital literacy, language education, online behaviour, perceived learning outcomes*

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## Introduction

The integration of AI-driven learning tools in education is transforming language acquisition and digital citizenship globally. For low-proficiency learners, tools such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit provide unique opportunities to enhance language skills, digital literacy, and ethical online behaviour. However, seizing these opportunities requires an understanding of how students perceive these tools and of how they can report their learning experiences. Such learners often face challenges, such as an over-reliance on literal translations, a lack of contextual understanding, and insufficient guidance in ethical tool use. Addressing these challenges requires structured, innovative instructional models tailored to meet the specific needs of low-proficiency learners.

The 'Hobby Course' described in this study was initially designed for higher-proficiency international students at a Thai university. It was adapted for Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1-level students enrolled in the university's Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology. This adaptation emphasises practical learning through AI-based tools and hobby-based tasks. Previously, the Hobby Course proved successful in motivating learners through intrinsic engagement with personalised, hobby-centered activities (Watson Todd & Rangsarittikun, 2021). In the present adaptation, the model incorporated AI-supported tasks guided by the 'instant noodle approach,' a micro-learning strategy that allows students to complete small, manageable activities while building confidence and digital literacy. This approach reflects current discussions of AI as a potential disruptor of language education (Watson Todd, 2025), showing how a guided, ethical integration of AI tools can support basic-level learners.

Especially in the case of low-proficiency learners, the use of AI tools must be carefully scaffolded in order to address linguistic and technical barriers (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2023a). Structured activities like Reddit discussions and video tutorials provide practical opportunities to refine language use while fostering digital citizenship. The present study focuses on how students perceive their development of language skills, digital literacy, and ethical online behaviour during participation in an AI-enhanced Hobby Course at one Thai university. The research also considers the role of social-media communication in shaping ethical awareness, as discussed by Rangsarittikun and Watson Todd (2024). As a case study of a single course, the findings do not aim for generalisation but rather for contextual insights into students' experiences and for their self-reported growth.

## Research Questions

1. How does participation in an AI-enhanced model course influence students' perceived development of English language skills (writing,

speaking, and multimodal communication) and their self-reported confidence in using these skills?

2. How do AI-based tools, e.g., ChatGPT and Google Translate, support students' perceived growth in digital literacy in educational contexts?

3. How do students develop ethical awareness and responsible online behaviour as part of digital citizenship in an AI-enhanced learning environment?

## Literature Review

### *The Role of AI in Language Learning*

AI-driven tools are reshaping language education by offering personalised learning pathways that adapt to individual needs. Tools like ChatGPT and Google Translate provide instant feedback and error correction, allowing learners to refine their writing and speaking skills (Annamalai et al., 2023; Mohamed, 2024). In many cases, their main benefit lies in how students perceive these tools as supportive and confidence-building, especially those who need continuous feedback and simplified explanations. These tools can also promote autonomy and self-regulated learning, fostering confidence among low-proficiency learners who require frequent feedback and support (Kim & Su, 2024; Egbert, 2020). Several studies have highlighted that regular feedback and practice through digital tools can increase learners' confidence in using English. In this study, confidence refers to learners' belief that they can successfully complete specific English tasks, such as writing online posts or speaking in front of others. When students receive quick feedback or can revise their work, their confidence usually grows over time (Egbert, 2020; Bui, 2024).

For speaking and conversational skills, AI chatbots simulate authentic interactions, encouraging learners to engage in real-world language use (Hockly, 2023). Research by Kim and Su (2024) demonstrated that chatbot use increased learners' willingness to communicate in a second language, reflecting similar self-reported gains to those investigated in the current study. Additionally, AI tools facilitate multimodal learning by enabling students to integrate text, speech, and visual elements, thereby enhancing overall communication skills (Črček & Patekar, 2023). Collaborative online platforms, as emphasised by Grothaus (2022), further extend these capabilities by creating environments where students can develop language and digital skills through interactive and authentic tasks. However, scholars also note that AI technologies must be integrated with caution, as over reliance can limit independent thinking or critical reflection (Alharbi, 2023; Halaweh, 2023). As Watson Todd (2025) explains, since generative AI has become a disrupter in language education, educators need to guide students in using it responsibly and reflectively. These align well with the AI-supported model presented in this case study.

### *AI Tools for Low-Proficiency Learners*

Low-proficiency learners face distinct challenges, including literal translations and limited contextual understanding when using AI tools (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2023b). Tools like ChatGPT and Google Translate serve as scaffolding devices, bridging gaps in comprehension and language production. However, these tools must be used with structured guidance to prevent errors and ensure meaningful learning outcomes (Halaweh, 2023). Thai studies also indicate that clear instructional scaffolding is crucial when integrating AI in English learning contexts. For example, Boonmoh and Kulavichian (2023a) found that Thai pre-service teachers often struggle with tool selection and ethical use, and Sanmuang et al. (2024) observed that even elderly EFL learners benefit from prompt-based learning when guidance is provided.

The current study draws on the principles of 'just-in-time' learning, as encapsulated in the 'instant noodle approach' introduced in this study. This strategy emphasises quick, accessible learning pathways that minimise cognitive overload while supporting iterative cycles of practice and feedback. This approach aligns with the concept of microlearning, which suggests that small, focused learning units enhance retention and lower anxiety (Chik, 2014). It also reflects one of the tenets of cognitive load theory, i.e., that reducing task complexity helps low-proficiency learners to build knowledge progressively. For instance, students can use Google Translate to draft posts for Reddit discussions, revise their work with teacher feedback, and repeat the process to refine their writing. This approach mirrors effective scaffolding techniques that promote confidence and gradual skill development. Hawley and Allen (2018) further suggest that projects involving iterative production, such as video tutorials, can encourage low-proficiency learners to take ownership of their learning and gradually develop autonomy. Such scaffolding-based, micro-task approaches are particularly relevant in the Thai context, where AI use in education is growing but still uneven (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2023a).

### *Digital Literacy and Citizenship in AI-Enhanced Learning*

Digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to encompass critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and responsible online behaviour. Tools like ChatGPT and Google Translate often appear user-friendly but require careful instruction to ensure appropriate use (Alakrash & Abdul Razak, 2021). Educators play a vital role in guiding students to recognise AI limitations and to avoid over-reliance on such tools (Tour, 2020). Recent research emphasises that AI literacy must also include inculcating an awareness of privacy, data ethics, and authorship integrity (Rangsarittikun & Watson Todd, 2024).

In the present study, Reddit discussions provided an authentic platform for students to practice digital citizenship by engaging with real online communities. These activities required students to navigate public forums responsibly, respect intellectual property, and adhere to platform rules. Such experiences align with global calls to integrate ethical literacy into education, preparing students for responsible digital engagement in an increasingly AI-driven world (Tikhonova & Raitskaya, 2023). Yet, as Hockly (2023) and Williams (2024) caution, digital citizenship must also include critical evaluation of AI-generated content in order to prevent misinformation and unethical usage. Collaborative tasks, as highlighted by Chau et al. (2024), play a pivotal role in enhancing both intercultural communication and digital literacy, ensuring that students are equipped for a globally connected environment. In this sense, the current study contributes to discussions of how low-proficiency learners perceive and internalise digital ethics within real-world online contexts.

### *Empirical Studies from Hobby-Based Learning*

Hobby-based learning, as demonstrated by Watson Todd and Rangsarittikun (2021), effectively enhances intrinsic motivation by aligning educational tasks with students' personal interests. Although initially designed for proficient learners, this study extends the Hobby Course framework to A1-level students, illustrating its potential for broader applicability. By focusing on hobbies, students engage with tasks that are personally relevant, fostering emotional investment and sustained motivation (Chik, 2014). In the Thai context, similar learner-centred strategies have been shown to increase both engagement and confidence in integrating technology (Boonmoh & Kulavichian, 2023b).

This study innovates on the Hobby Course by integrating AI tools like ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit into its framework. The 'instant noodle approach' complements hobby-based learning by simplifying complex tasks into manageable steps. The combination of AI support, microlearning, and hobby-based tasks reflects a practical adaptation for low-proficiency learners, merging cognitive and motivational benefits. For example, video tutorials require students to script, record, and revise their work iteratively, enabling them to develop multimodal skills in a structured yet flexible environment. Such tasks not only build language proficiency but also enhance critical digital skills, bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application (Hafner, 2014; Črček & Patekar, 2023). Moreover, the inclusion of collaborative digital tools aligns with the findings of Grothaus (2022), who emphasises the importance of interactive platforms in fostering both academic and social skills. These earlier findings support the present study's focus on how students perceive AI-supported, hobby-based learning as both engaging and confidence building.

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This exploratory mixed-methods case study focuses on students' perceptions of AI-supported language learning and digital literacy development in one Thai university course. Quantitative survey data were combined with qualitative thematic analysis to provide both breadth and depth of understanding. This approach enabled an integrated exploration of how students perceived their experiences with AI-driven learning tools, allowing for triangulation of data from surveys, interviews, and student-generated artefacts such as video tutorials and Reddit posts. The 'case' in this study refers to one specific course context rather than to individual learners, and findings are context-bound rather than generalisable. The research examined three areas: students' perceived development of English language skills, i.e., writing, speaking, and multimodal production; their perceived growth in digital literacy; and their understanding of ethical online behaviour. The mixed-methods design aimed to describe learning experiences rather than measure actual skill gains.

### *Participants*

The participants were drawn from the LNG120 General English course at a Thai university, comprising 355 first-year students across 11 sections. For this study, two sections, totalling 79 students, were selected, focusing on students from the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology. These students were CEFR A1-level English learners, representing the low-proficiency learner group targeted in this study. The sample was selected through convenience and purposive sampling to represent typical low-proficiency learners within this program. This sample was chosen to provide a manageable yet representative subset of the larger student population.

Additionally, six students were purposefully selected for semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen based on varying levels of engagement in course activities, such as Reddit discussions and video tutorial production. This purposeful sampling aimed to capture diverse perspectives on the use of AI-driven tools and their impact on learning. The qualitative data were obtained to provide depth and to illustrate students' reported experiences, rather than statistical representativeness. The findings are context-specific and are not intended for generalisation beyond this case.

***Instruments***

*Survey*

A self-administered survey in Thai, distributed via Google Forms, was employed to evaluate students' perceptions of their learning outcomes across four key areas: Language Skills (writing, speaking, and multimodal production), Digital Literacy (proficiency in using AI tools such as Google Translate, ChatGPT, and Reddit), Ethical Awareness and Online Behaviour (understanding of privacy, copyright, and appropriate tool use), and Course Experience (students' overall impressions of the course, its motivational impact, and their preference compared to traditional grammar lessons).

The survey consisted of 16 Likert-scale items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items were drawn and adapted from validated instruments used in prior research on AI-enhanced education (Črček & Patekar, 2023) and supplemented with three additional items under Course Experience to capture students' subjective feedback on the course design. These additions provided valuable insights into how students perceived the innovative teaching approach compared to conventional methods.

In this study, 'confidence' means students' belief that they can successfully complete specific English tasks, such as writing Reddit posts or speaking in videos. Confidence is measured through survey items related to these tasks and is illustrated by comments from the interviews.

To ensure that the instrument was accessible to A1-level learners, the survey was piloted with a small group of participants from the same proficiency level. Minor modifications were made based on feedback in order to improve clarity and readability for students with limited English proficiency. Internal consistency and so reliability were examined using Cronbach's α, which indicated a satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$). The final version of the survey was reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring compliance with ethical research guidelines.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into students' experiences with the course. The interview protocol was designed around four key themes: Digital Literacy in AI tools, e.g., how students engaged with Google Translate and ChatGPT; Ethical Awareness and Online Behaviour, e.g., responsible use of digital tools; reflections on learning tasks, e.g., confidence and skill development through Reddit discussions and video tutorials; and self-reflection, e.g., perceptions of the 'instant noodle approach'.

Interviews were conducted individually, in person, and lasted 10–15 minutes. To ensure that participants could express themselves comfortably and clearly, the interviews were conducted in Thai. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and subsequently translated into English for thematic analysis. Interview data were used to illustrate patterns emerging from the survey and from the analysis of student artefacts, highlighting how students described their perceived learning progress and confidence development.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

The data collection process spanned one entire semester and was structured into three phases: Phase 1: Training and Orientation (Weeks 1–5) introduced students to the course structure, learning objectives, and the AI tools, including ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit. This phase emphasised ethical considerations, such as privacy protection and intellectual property awareness, establishing a foundational understanding of the tools and guidelines for their appropriate use.

Phase 2: Implementation of Learning Tasks involved two main activities. During Weeks 1–7, students participated in Reddit discussions, where they posted and interacted with others by reflecting on their hobbies while adhering to platform rules. These activities focused on language use, digital citizenship, and peer engagement. For Weeks 8–14, students engaged in video tutorial creation, which involved planning, scripting, recording, and editing videos that showcased hobby-related activities. Feedback cycles from peers and instructors helped students refine their work iteratively.

Phase 3: Data Collection (Week 15) concluded the semester with the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms, yielding 79 responses. Six participants participated in semi-structured interviews to provide detailed insights into their learning experiences. Additionally, student outputs, including Reddit posts and video tutorials, were reviewed and analysed for evidence of language improvement and ethical awareness. Public Reddit posts were collected in compliance with the platform's terms of use and anonymised before analysis to protect privacy.

### *Data Analysis*

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to evaluate students' perceived improvements across four key areas: Language Skills, Digital Literacy, Ethical Awareness, and Course Experience. These analyses provided an overview of general trends, highlighting the strengths and areas of reported impact for the AI-enhanced Hobby Course. The inclusion of the Course Experience items allowed for additional insights into students' overall perceptions of the course's effectiveness and its motivational impact compared to traditional grammar-focused instruction. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of learning trends, rather than inferential generalisation.

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts and to student outputs. The process began with familiarisation, where transcripts and outputs were read multiple times to identify recurring patterns. Initial coding was performed in order to assign labels to concepts such as 'confidence building' and 'privacy awareness'. These codes were then grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions. To enhance credibility, triangulation was applied by comparing the findings from the surveys, interviews, and artefacts. Reddit discussions were analysed for examples of writing revision, peer interaction, and ethical online conduct, while video tutorials were evaluated for language clarity, multimodal presentation, and reflections on responsible AI use. These qualitative findings served to illustrate and contextualise the trends detected in the survey results.

### *Ethical Considerations*

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and privacy. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi under protocol KMUTT-IRB-COA-2025-001. All the participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Pseudonyms were used in interview transcripts to maintain confidentiality, and no personal identifiers were collected. Publicly available online data (Reddit posts) were anonymised before inclusion in the dataset, and any identifying information was removed. Data were securely stored on encrypted servers, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Ethical awareness was also included as part of the instructional process, encouraging students to reflect on responsible tool use and privacy management throughout the course.

## Results

This section presents the findings of the study, addressing the three key objectives aligned with the research questions: (1) Students' perceived development of language skills, (2) Students' perceived enhancement of digital literacy, and (3) Students' perceived growth in ethical awareness and online behaviour. The results derive from the survey responses from 79 students, the thematic analysis of 6 student interviews, and student-generated outputs such as Reddit posts and video tutorials. All quantitative findings are based on self-reported perceptions rather than objective performance data. Qualitative excerpts are used to illustrate these reported perceptions.

**Table 1.** *Survey Results on Students' Perceptions of Language Skills, Digital Literacy, Ethical Awareness, and Course Experience*

| Key Areas | Survey Items | Mean (M) | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Language Skills** | I have improved my ability to write clearly. | 4.35 | 0.56 |
| | I feel more confident in speaking. | 4.28 | 0.62 |
| | I can produce multimodal outputs (like videos). | 4.12 | 0.68 |
| **Digital Literacy** | I have improved my proficiency in using Google Translate. | 4.45 | 0.50 |
| | I have improved my proficiency in using ChatGPT. | 4.32 | 0.58 |
| | I can conduct advanced searches on Google. | 4.25 | 0.61 |
| | I can create and edit video content. | 4.38 | 0.54 |
| **Ethical Awareness** | I am aware of online privacy risks. | 4.48 | 0.52 |
| | I understand copyright issues. | 4.30 | 0.60 |
| | I can identify trustworthy online sources. | 4.29 | 0.59 |
| | I follow ethical guidelines when using online tools. | 4.42 | 0.55 |
| | I follow platform rules when posting online. | 4.41 | 0.56 |
| | I do not share personal information online. | 4.52 | 0.50 |
| **Course Experience** | I enjoy this course more than traditional grammar lessons. | 4.58 | 0.50 |
| | This course motivates me to learn English. | 4.55 | 0.52 |
| | I would recommend this course to others. | 4.60 | 0.48 |

***Development of Language Skills***

The first research question focused on perceived changes in English language skills, including writing, speaking, and multimodal production. As shown in Table 1, reported improvement and confidence in their writing skills (M = 4.35, SD = 0.56), confidence in speaking (M = 4.28, SD = 0.62), and the ability to create multimodal outputs, such as video tutorials (M = 4.12, SD = 0.68).

The students' reflections indicated that their sense of writing improvement derived from structured feedback and revision cycles on Reddit. Student 2 reflected, "On Reddit, I learned that sometimes my first post was not good enough. But the teacher made me check my grammar, and I could see my own mistakes." Similarly, Student 5 shared, "At first, I thought my post was perfect, but when I got feedback, I saw how many errors I made. After editing and re-posting, I felt more confident in my writing." These examples illustrate students' reported perceptions of growth rather than measured linguistic gains.

In speaking, students reported feeling more comfortable as they created and refined video tutorials using the 'instant noodle approach'. Student 3 remarked, "Making a video was tough at first, but after doing it step-by-step and getting feedback, I became more comfortable. I realized that speaking in front of a camera is a form of practice." Peer feedback also contributed to perceived confidence building. Student 1 explained, "When I heard comments from my friends, they told me to speak slowly and clearly. I took this advice, and my second video was much better." These qualitative excerpts suggest that structured, iterative learning and peer interaction encouraged students to perceive improvement in their communication abilities.

### *Enhancement of Digital Literacy*

The second research question examined how the students perceived the role of AI tools in developing digital literacy. Survey data revealed significant gains in students' reported proficiency with Google Translate (M = 4.45, SD = 0.50) and in terms of their ability to create and edit videos (M = 4.38, SD = 0.54). Students also reported improvements in their use of ChatGPT (M = 4.32, SD = 0.58) and advanced Google search techniques (M = 4.25, SD = 0.61).

Interview comments revealed how students moved from being passive to being more strategic users of technology. Student 3 explained, "At first, I thought Google Translate was just for translating words. But, I learned to write simpler sentences and even check accuracy by translating back and forth." This perception shows students' growing awareness of how to use AI tools more critically and purposefully.

Students also described refining their skills in prompt writing for ChatGPT. As Student 5 noted, "ChatGPT helped me simplify text and make it sound more natural. I realised I could give clear prompts, and it would give me better answers." The iterative nature of creating and editing videos also contributed to students' perceived development of multimodal digital skills. Student 6 shared, "At first, I found video editing challenging because I was unfamiliar with the software. However, with practice and support from friends, I gradually improved."

These accounts highlight how students perceived themselves as becoming more independent and confident users of AI-supported tools. The analysis of artefacts, such as Reddit posts and videos, serves as illustrative evidence of these perceptions, showing students' experimentation with different digital tools.

### *Growth in Ethical Awareness and Online Behaviour*

The third research question explored students' perceived ethical awareness and use of responsible online behaviour. Survey results suggested high levels of awareness across all items related to ethical behaviour, with the highest scores for "I do not share personal information online" (M = 4.52, SD = 0.50) and "I follow ethical guidelines when using online tools" (M = 4.42, SD = 0.55). Students also reported a significant understanding of copyright issues (M =

4.30, SD = 0.60) and the ability to identify trustworthy online sources (M = 4.29, SD = 0.59).

Interview data further supported these findings. Student 1 shared, “On Reddit, I learned to follow platform rules. My post was banned once for using an inappropriate image, so now I’m much more careful.” This illustrates perceived ethical learning through real-world experiences rather than formal instruction.

Students also recalled key messages about responsible AI use. Student 5 said, “The teacher always said not to share personal information online. This made me more aware of the risks and how to use tools responsibly.” Similarly, Student 2 remarked, “The teacher always emphasised, ‘Don’t let the tools control you – control the tools.’ That changed how I approach technology.” These comments reflect students’ perceived internalisation of ethical awareness and digital responsibility.

Privacy protection and respect for copyright were recurring themes in both interviews and artefacts. The analysis of students’ Reddit posts showed that they avoided sharing personal details and cited image sources properly after feedback, suggesting greater ethical sensitivity.

Overall, students perceived themselves as becoming more mindful and responsible digital citizens, with these perceptions being self-reported rather than behaviourally measured.

### *Course Experience*

The final part of the survey explored students’ perceived satisfaction with and motivation for the AI-supported Hobby Course. Ratings were consistently high, with “I would recommend this course to others” (M = 4.60, SD = 0.48) scoring the highest, followed by “I enjoy this course more than traditional grammar lessons” (M = 4.58, SD = 0.50) and “This course motivates me to learn English” (M = 4.55, SD = 0.52).

Students described the course as engaging and relevant. Student 3 stated, “This course is very different from what I’ve done before. It makes learning English more fun because I can talk about my hobbies and use tools like ChatGPT and Reddit.” Student 4 added, “I used to hate grammar lessons because they were so hard. But in this course, I learned step by step, and it made me want to keep improving.” These reflections align with survey trends showing strong positive perceptions of motivation and enjoyment.

Students also valued the real-world usefulness of the tasks. Student 5 noted, “The tools we used are things I can actually use outside of school. It’s not just about passing a test – it’s about real-life English.”

Overall, these findings suggest that students perceived the AI-supported, hobby-based approach as engaging, practical, and motivating. The positive perceptions reflected in both the quantitative and qualitative data highlight how carefully structured AI-enhanced tasks can improve the confidence and enjoyment of low-proficiency learners.

## Discussion

### *Language Skills Development*

This study explored how an AI-enhanced Hobby Course impacted students' perceived language development and confidence. Firstly, we address RQ1: How does participation in an AI-enhanced model course shape students' perceptions of their English language skills (writing, speaking, and multimodal skills) and their confidence in using these skills? The findings reveal that students perceived notable improvements in their writing, speaking, and multimodal production, underpinned throughout by task-based and iterative learning processes.

Students demonstrated reported growth in writing through structured Reddit discussions that required them to create posts, reflect on feedback, and revise their work. This iterative process deepened their engagement with language structures, echoing Hafner's (2014) and Egbert's (2020) observations that authentic, task-based digital activities promote writing fluency and clarity. Similarly, Črček and Patekar's (2023) emphasis on learning through feedback and revision resonates with the course's design, which cultivated students' confidence in written communication. Grothaus (2022) further supports the role of collaborative and reflective tasks in building effective communication skills in online contexts.

An equally noteworthy finding was the perceived increase in speaking confidence. The iterative production of video tutorials provided a low-stakes environment for students to rehearse, record, and refine their oral presentations. Bui (2024) noted similar benefits, emphasising how reflection and iterative cycles can reduce speaking anxiety and enhance self-efficacy. Furthermore, the multimodal nature of these activities supported integrated language development, as students combined speaking, writing, and visual presentation skills – an approach validated by Nami and Asadnia's (2024) findings on self-created digital content. Hawley and Allen (2018) reinforce this view, emphasising the transformative potential of video creation in fostering both language skills and critical thinking.

The present findings also correspond with those of Rangsarittikun and Watson Todd (2024), who demonstrated that structured, multimodal communication on social media enhances clarity and audience awareness, these being skills similar to those practised by students in this course. This suggests that the combination of AI tools and hobby-based activities can support effective, context-sensitive communication even in low-proficiency learners.

The ‘instant noodle’ approach, a pedagogical framework emphasising accessible, iterative tasks, played a central role in these outcomes. Unlike traditional grammar-focused methodologies, this approach fostered learner autonomy by prioritising small, achievable steps. Watson Todd and Rangsarittikun (2021) and Chik (2014) advocate for such learner-centred strategies, which emphasise practical, confidence-building activities tailored to learners’ contexts and capabilities. From a theoretical viewpoint, the ‘instant noodle’ approach aligns with the principles of microlearning and cognitive load theory, with a focus on enabling learners to process manageable units of input and to gradually build linguistic confidence.

### *Digital Literacy Enhancement*

The course also examined students’ perceived digital literacy, addressing RQ2: How do AI-based tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Translate) support the perceived development of students’ digital literacy in educational contexts? The findings highlight students’ reported transition from passive to strategic users of AI tools, showing an improved ability to critically engage with technology.

Students’ reported proficiency with Google Translate and ChatGPT improved significantly, as they adopted techniques like reverse translation and prompt refinement. These practices developed critical thinking and problem-solving skills, aligning with Mohamed’s (2024) findings that AI tools, when paired with appropriate scaffolding, foster self-regulation and strategic learning. Additionally, Ovcharuk et al. (2020) note that such tool mastery not only democratises learning but also equips learners with skills essential for lifelong education.

These outcomes mirror Boonmoh and Kulavichian’s (2023a) study on Thai pre-service teachers, who gradually developed digital competence through scaffolded use of educational technologies based on the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model. Similarly, low-proficiency learners in the present study learned to integrate AI tools at the substitution and augmentation levels before reaching more creative applications, illustrating a comparable developmental process.

The concept of algorithmic literacy, emphasising active control over AI tools, emerged as a pivotal theme. Students recognised the limitations of AI outputs and learned to provide precise prompts to ChatGPT for more effective results. Williams (2024) and Hockly (2023) similarly emphasise the importance of teaching learners to critically evaluate and strategically use digital tools, fostering a balance between human agency and technological assistance.

The iterative production of video tutorials further enhanced students' multimodal literacy. By scripting, recording, and editing their videos, students developed integrated digital skills, in line with Tour's (2020) and Hafner's (2014) advocacy for multimodal learning as a cornerstone of digital literacy. The 'instant noodle' approach facilitated this progression, breaking complex tasks into manageable steps and fostering gradual yet meaningful skill development. This process also reflects the findings of Sanmuang et al. (2024), who reported that elderly Thai EFL learners improved their confidence and digital awareness when guided to use ChatGPT prompts to promote community products, suggesting that effective scaffolding, rather than age or proficiency, is key to successful AI-based learning.

At the same time, students' reflections on Google Translate use echo the findings of Boonmoh and Kulavichian's (2023b) study, which found that Thai EFL learners often struggle with literal translation and contextual accuracy. The present findings suggest that repeated feedback and guided revision can help learners to move beyond translation dependency toward contextual understanding, an important step in digital literacy development.

### *Ethical Awareness and Digital Citizenship*

Addressing RQ3: How do students perceive their ethical awareness and responsible online behaviour as part of digital citizenship in an AI-enhanced environment? The findings indicate substantial reported awareness of privacy, copyright, and responsible tool use. These perceptions were shaped by authentic, real-world experiences that required students to act responsibly within digital spaces.

Specifically, the students' participation in Reddit discussions cultivated practical awareness of platform rules and appreciation for the consequences of unethical actions, such as posting inappropriate content. This experiential learning aligns with Tikhonova and Raitskaya's (2023) argument that real-world tasks are instrumental in fostering ethical digital practices. Similarly, Grothaus (2022) emphasises the importance of navigating cultural and contextual nuances in collaborative online environments, a skill students developed through their interactions.

An emphasis on 'controlling the tools, not being controlled by them' was a central theme in both teacher guidance and student reflections. This principle helped students internalise ethical practices, such as verifying AI outputs and safeguarding personal data, in line with with Hockly's (2023) call for critical digital literacy. The inclusion of structured teacher guidance corresponds with the findings of Sanmuang et al. (2024), who highlighted the role of teacher facilitation in shaping Thai students' positive attitudes toward ChatGPT.

By engaging in video production and Reddit interactions, students encountered real-world dilemmas involving privacy, copyright, and digital etiquette. These experiences echoed Chau et al.'s (2024) findings that collaborative online learning environments foster ethical reflection and intercultural competence. Moreover, Major et al. (2021) emphasise that ethical literacy should complement technical proficiency, a balance effectively achieved in this course. These findings also resonate with those of Watson Todd (2025), who warned that generative AI may disrupt language education if ethical awareness and critical pedagogy are neglected. The present course model demonstrates a constructive way to address these concerns through explicit ethical instruction.

### *Course Experience and Its Broader Implications*

The inclusion of Course Experience as a focus area demonstrated the potential of AI-enhanced Hobby Courses to transform learners' perceptions of satisfaction and engagement with language learning. This study reveals how the integration of meaningful, hobby-based tasks with advanced digital tools can foster emotional and motivational connections to learning, addressing the challenges often encountered by low-proficiency learners.

These findings align with existing research on the benefits of hobby-based learning and task-based approaches in language instruction. Hawley and Allen (2018) emphasize that incorporating creative outputs, such as video production, encourages emotional engagement and learner autonomy. Similarly, Chik (2014) underscores the importance of aligning educational activities with learners' personal interests to sustain motivation and promote active learning. By incorporating tools like ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit, the course provided an engaging and contextually relevant framework for language development, consistent with Firat's (2023) emphasis on the transformative role of AI tools in modern education.

The positive reception of the course is also in line with a Thai study by Boonmoh and Kulavichian (2023a), who found that integrating technology in manageable, familiar stages enhances the motivation of pre-service teachers. For A1-level students, this gradual, hobby-based engagement may similarly reduce anxiety and promote willingness to learn.

High satisfaction ratings for survey items under Course Experience, such as "I would recommend this course to others" ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.48$), highlight the broader pedagogical value of AI-enhanced hobby-based models. These results echo Alakrash and Abdul Razak's (2021) argument that digital literacy, when effectively integrated into EFL contexts, can enhance both motivation and practical skill development. Furthermore, this study reinforces the need for courses to prioritize enjoyment and engagement as core elements of the learning process.

However, while students' self-reported outcomes were strongly positive, these data represent perceived experiences rather than measured proficiency gains. Future iterations of this course should include pre- and post-assessments or linguistic analyses of artefacts in order to objectively confirm these trends.

### *Theoretical and Practical Implications*

This study contributes to the growing body of research on AI-enhanced learning, offering both theoretical insights and practical applications. The 'instant noodle' approach provides a micro-scaffolded learning framework that integrates AI tools into low-resource educational settings, particularly for low-proficiency learners. Its focus on iterative, accessible tasks bridges the gap between traditional pedagogy and the needs of 21st-century learners, fostering both language proficiency and digital literacy.

From a practical perspective, the findings emphasise the need for educators to prioritise authentic, task-based activities that leverage AI tools strategically. For instance, incorporating tools like ChatGPT and Google Translate into hobby-based curricula can enhance engagement and provide students with practical skills applicable in real-world contexts. Additionally, embedding ethical literacy as a core component ensures that learners become responsible and reflective users of technology.

At the institutional level, this study supports Watson Todd's (2025) call for the balanced integration of generative AI into language curricula, thereby encouraging creativity and critical use while safeguarding ethical and pedagogical standards.

Policymakers and curriculum designers can draw from these findings to develop cost-effective, scalable models that bridge linguistic and digital divides. By aligning learning tasks with learners' interests and contextual needs, such models can sustain motivation and engagement, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. The findings are based on students' self-reported perceptions and on qualitative reflections rather than on objective measures of language performance. The small number of interview participants limits the generalisability of qualitative interpretations. Future research could include pre- and post-tests, language analysis of artefacts, or longitudinal tracking of skill retention.

Moreover, the present study focused on a single institutional context. Comparative studies across faculties or universities could test the adaptability of the AI-enhanced Hobby Course model. Further exploration of the 'instant noodle' approach may also clarify its theoretical foundations in microlearning and cognitive load management.

Finally, researching the ethical dimensions of AI use in education requires continuous examination, particularly concerning data privacy, bias, and the issue of authorship in the case of generative tools. Future studies could investigate how teachers can balance innovation with responsibility in diverse EFL contexts.

Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of AI-supported learning and examine its adaptability in multilingual, low-resource, and rural contexts. Emerging technologies such as multimodal AI systems offer opportunities to refine and expand the model's applicability, ensuring that AI serves as a bridge, not as a barrier, to inclusive and ethical language education.

## Conclusion

This study illustrates the potential of AI-enhanced learning models for low-proficiency learners, demonstrating how tools like ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Reddit can foster perceived improvements in language confidence, digital literacy, and ethical awareness. By integrating iterative, task-based activities within a structured Hobby Course, the study empowered A1-level learners to become more confident, critical, and ethical users of digital tools.

These results contribute to current discussions on the use of AI in education (Watson Todd, 2025), showing that effective integration depends not only on technology but also on pedagogy, guidance, and ethical reflection.

The findings provide direct answers to the research questions. First, the iterative learning design significantly enhanced the students' writing, speaking, and multimodal production skills, as evidenced by improved confidence and output quality. Second, the students developed better digital literacy skills by learning to use AI tools strategically, moving from passive use to active problem-solving and critical engagement. Third, through real-world tasks and teacher guidance, the students cultivated a deeper understanding of ethical principles, including privacy protection, copyright adherence, and responsible online behaviour. The practical implications of these findings are significant. The Hobby Course model offers a replicable and scalable framework for integrating AI tools into low-resource educational contexts, supporting underserved populations globally. Its learner-centred approach emphasises authentic, engaging tasks that align with students' interests, promoting intrinsic motivation and sustainable learning outcomes. Embedding ethical training into AI-enhanced curricula ensures that students are equipped to navigate digital spaces responsibly, a critical skill in today's interconnected world.

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