

The Lived Experiences of Nursing Students in Using ChatGPT to Learn English for Specific Purposes: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: Although ChatGPT has been widely utilized to aid English language learning, previous studies have focused mostly on learning outcomes rather than students' lived experiences in ESP contexts. Thus, this study examines nursing students' experiences in using ChatGPT to learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The study used a qualitative phenomenological design to investigate how students perceive and interpret ChatGPT in academic and professional settings. Purposive sampling was used to choose five nursing students because phenomenological research places more emphasis on gathering detailed, rich narratives of participants' lived experiences than on getting a large sample size. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and documentation, which included prompts and screenshots of participants' activities with ChatGPT. The data were analyzed according to Moustakas's phenomenological methods. The results show that ChatGPT is an effective tool for learning English, accessing nursing-related literature, generating ideas, and assisting with academic works. It boosts students' confidence and motivation, while decreasing anxiety. Students participate critically and reflectively by questioning ChatGPT's interpretations, analyzing evidence, exploring alternate hypotheses, and comparing knowledge with classmates and lecturers. Nursing students' use of ChatGPT is influenced by their disciplinary background, making it more purposeful and applicable to their professional demands. However, the findings also reveal limitations, including inconsistent and overly general responses. The findings emphasize the necessity of teaching students how to use ChatGPT critically and ethically in ESP learning..

Keywords: ChatGPT, English for Specific Purposes, nursing students, lived experience, phenomenology.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming more integrated into educational practices. According to the Digital Education Council (2024), 86% of students globally use AI in their studies, while 54% use AI on a weekly basis. ChatGPT is the most widely used AI tool, with 66% of students reporting its use. ChatGPT is one the most well-known AI-powered technologies. It is a generative artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI that can generate human-like responses via natural language interaction. ChatGPT has grown in popularity in educational contexts since its initial release due to its capacity to provide rapid feedback, provide explanations, support writing activities, and enable autonomous learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Lo, 2023). These characteristics have established ChatGPT as a potentially beneficial learning resource for students from a variety of academic fields.

The incorporation of ChatGPT into language learning has sparked increased scientific attention (Yan, 2023). Previous research has demonstrated its ability to help with vocabulary acquisition, grammatical development, writing enhancement, and learner engagement. Song and Song, (2023)

contended that ChatGPT facilitates personalized language acquisition by offering instant and specialized support. Similarly, Kasneci et al. (2023) proposed that generative AI technologies have the potential to improve educational experiences by providing adaptive support and easily available learning resources. Furthermore, Kohnke et al. (2023) stressed how AI-powered technology might promote learner autonomy by encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning processes. These findings indicate that ChatGPT has the potential to transform language learning experiences both within and outside of conventional educational settings. However, earlier research has also brought attention to ChatGPT's drawbacks, such as the potential for producing false information, moral dilemmas, and the requirement for human supervision when utilizing AI-generated responses (Zhai, 2023).

The relevance of ChatGPT is especially clear in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. ESP is distinct from general English instruction in that it emphasizes language acquisition that is specifically related to learners' academic and professional needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as a language teaching approach in which content and methodology decisions are based on the learners' individual reasons for learning English. Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) noted that ESP is intended to meet the unique communicative needs of various areas and professions. As a result, learners are expected to achieve both general language competence and the specialized language abilities required for their professional contexts.

Nursing students rely heavily on English for academic and professional development. Nursing education demands students to learn medical terminology, read international journal articles, comprehend evidence-based healthcare literature, and communicate effectively in healthcare settings. Many of these resources are available primarily in English; therefore, English language skills are a key aspect of nursing education. However, nursing students frequently struggle to master English due to the complexities of medical terminology, a lack of authentic language practice opportunities, and the demanding nature of their academic programs. As a result, many students seek additional assistance from technological tools that might aid language learning and comprehension.

Several research have looked into the application of ChatGPT in nursing education and healthcare-related learning settings. Karaçay and Yaşar (2025) discovered that ChatGPT enhanced nursing students' learning experiences by improving access to information and academic achievement. Gonzalez-Garcia et al. (2025) found that AI technologies can help nursing students manage academic work and understand difficult healthcare concepts. Although these studies show the potential benefits of ChatGPT, most previous research has concentrated on learning outcomes, effectiveness, or pedagogical applications.

Despite the rising volume of research on ChatGPT, insufficient emphasis has been placed on students' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their interactions with technology. Existing research tends to focus on measurable outcomes rather than investigating how students experience, interpret, and incorporate ChatGPT into their regular academic activities. Furthermore, little research has particularly explored nursing students' experiences with ChatGPT in ESP learning environments. Understanding these experiences is critical since technology use is influenced not just by its functional capabilities, but also by learners' emotions, beliefs, social interactions, disciplinary backgrounds, and contextual factors.

To fill this gap, the current study looks on the lived experiences of nursing students who use ChatGPT for English for Specific Purposes learning. This study aims to investigate how nursing students encounter ChatGPT, how they understand its significance in their learning processes, and how their disciplinary environment influences how they use the technology. By studying these experiences, the study contributes to a better understanding of the role of artificial intelligence in ESP learning and sheds light on the benefits and limitations of incorporating ChatGPT into nursing education.

Method

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate nursing students' lived experiences while utilizing ChatGPT for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. Phenomenology was chosen because it enables researchers to explore how people perceive and interpret a certain phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research aims to comprehend the essence of participants' experiences by investigating their perceptions, interpretations, and reflections on a shared phenomenon. Participants' subjective experiences were analyzed following Moustakas' phenomenological analysis procedures, allowing themes to emerge through the processes of horizontalization, meaning clustering, and synthesis of the essence of the experience.

The research subjects were five sixth-semester nursing students from Tanjungpura University who had completed the English course in the nursing program during the 2025 academic year. Five students were chosen using purposive sampling because they had firsthand experience utilizing ChatGPT to improve their English learning. To ensure the data's relevance, they had to meet the following criteria: (1) they were nursing students who had completed ESP-related learning activities, (2) they had used ChatGPT for English learning, and (3) they were willing to participate in interviews and provide supporting documentation about their use of ChatGPT.

Semi-structured interviews and documentation were used to gather data. Through one-on-one interviews, each participant was able to provide a detailed account of their experiences. With consent from the participants, the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Participants were also asked to submit screenshots of specific ChatGPT discussions pertaining to their English learning activities and examples of prompts they frequently used in order to bolster the validity of the results. These multiple data sources allowed for data source triangulation, which produced a more thorough knowledge of participants' lived experiences by enabling the interview data to be verified with supporting documentation.

The data were analyzed according to Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach. The analysis begins with the transcription and repeated reading of the interview material to become acquainted with the students' experiences. Significant statements about the phenomenon were discovered via horizontalization and then organized into meaning units. These meaning units were then organized into themes that represented common patterns among students' experiences. Following thematic development, textural descriptions were created to describe what students encountered, while structural descriptions were created to explain how the experiences occurred in specific situations and conditions. Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were combined to capture the core of the students' lived experiences with ChatGPT for English for Specific Purposes.

Results and Discussion

ChatGPT as a Learning Support Tool

The findings demonstrated that students viewed ChatGPT as a multifunctional learning support tool that helped them with numerous areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. Students described ChatGPT as a useful resource for understanding English materials, improving writing skills, generating ideas, organizing tasks, and comprehending nursing-related stuff delivered in English. Rather of serving primarily as a grammatical correction tool, ChatGPT became interwoven into students' daily learning activities and a useful source of academic assistance. For example, Participant 1 explained: *"ChatGPT helps me check and correct my grammar because most of the times I have already written the sentences, so I just ask ChatGPT to revise and correct them."* Furthermore, Participant 3 highlighted the importance of ChatGPT in enhancing sentence formation: *"ChatGPT often provides alternative sentences, which helps me learn how to construct sentences in a better way."*

One of the most commonly reported applications of ChatGPT was writing aid. Students frequently utilized the tool to check grammar, change sentence structures, expand vocabulary, and improve the intelligibility of their written work. Interestingly, most students did not rely on ChatGPT to generate entire assignments. Instead, they often wrote initial drafts on their own before requesting ChatGPT to revise or improve their work. This pattern indicates that ChatGPT served as a supporting scaffold, supplementing students' prior efforts rather than replacing them completely. This discovery is consistent with the concept of scaffolding, which involves learners receiving temporary assistance to complete activities beyond their current level of competence (Wood et al., 1976). In this case, ChatGPT provided linguistic assistance to students, allowing them to improve their writing while being active participants and owners of the learning experience.

The documentation data supported these findings. The students' prompts commonly included requests for grammar correction, sentence revision, translation, summarization, concept explanation, and clarification of nursing-related materials. Some of the prompts included *"Please correct the grammar according to proper English grammar,"* *"Please translate this international journal article,"* and *"Please provide a summary of this English journal article."* These patterns show that students actively interacted with ChatGPT as part of their learning process, using it to overcome both language-related and academic challenges.

Another essential part of ChatGPT utilization was reading comprehension and content understanding. Students stated that ChatGPT helped them clarify complex texts, learn unfamiliar terms, and interpret nursing-related journal articles. Given that many nursing resources are written in English, they saw ChatGPT as a useful tool for closing the gap between their existing language skills and the linguistic needs of their academic studies. Participant 2 noted: *"Lecturers usually ask students to find nursing journal articles in English, so I use ChatGPT to help me find them. I also ask ChatGPT to help translate English texts, check my grammar, and organize my sentences."*

These findings confirm Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) theory that ESP learning is motivated by learners' specific academic and professional needs. The results further support Oxford's (2015) definition of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, since students actively monitored, revised, and improved their language production. The findings align with previous research by Karaçay and Yaşar (2025) and Gonzalez-Garcia et al. (2025), which found that ChatGPT improves understanding and academic achievement among university students. However, the current study builds on earlier research by demonstrating how ChatGPT becomes integrated into nursing students' everyday learning routines, serving as both a language-learning aid and a doorway to disciplinary information.

Development of Confidence and Motivation

The data show that ChatGPT was considered to improve students' confidence and motivation in studying English. ChatGPT was frequently described by them as a helpful tool that reduced fear, increased comfort, and encouraged more participation in English-related academic tasks. As Participant 1 explained: *"I feel more confident with my writing because I believe the grammar of my sentence corrected by ChatGPT is aligned with proper English usage."* and also Participant 2: *"Also, during class presentations where I have to explain slides in English, ChatGPT helps me arrange my words so I feel more confident."*

Students reported that receiving fast feedback from ChatGPT increased their confidence in their language use. The ability to seek corrections, explanations, and recommendations without fear of judgments produced a learning atmosphere in which students felt at ease experimenting with English. Several students indicated that ChatGPT increased their confidence in producing English texts by allowing them to check grammatical accuracy and enhance sentence structure before completing assignments.

The data also suggested that ChatGPT has a favorable effect on motivation. Students noted that ChatGPT's accessibility and reactivity made learning English easier and less daunting. Rather than considering English as a difficult subject, students reported being more willing to interact with English materials since help was easily available anytime they encountered issues. Some students also stated that ChatGPT inspired them to learn new terminology, practice writing, and try more sophisticated sentence patterns. As Participant 5 stated: *"I definitely feel helped by ChatGPT, so it motivates me to learn English using it."*

Although students reported generally pleasant experiences, developing confidence was not without its hurdles. Some students described periods of uncertainty when ChatGPT provided multiple alternative responses or answers that differed from other sources. However, these encounters rarely discouraged learning. Instead, they frequently encouraged students to study further and gain a better comprehension of the material.

These findings back up Dörnyei and Ryan's (2019) claim that affective factors play an important role in language acquisition success. The findings are also consistent with Kohnke et al. (2023), who proposed that AI-powered learning aids can boost learner motivation by offering individualized and fast support. In this study, ChatGPT not only aided language learning but also created pleasant emotional experiences that encouraged long-term engagement with English.

Critical and Reflective Use of ChatGPT

This study's major finding was that students did not use ChatGPT passively or uncritically. Instead, they exhibited critical awareness and reflective participation when interacting with technology. For example, Participant 4 said: *"It is true that we cannot fully trust ChatGPT 100% because it is only an artificial intelligence. It generates responses based on the data it has, but it cannot always verify the accuracy of that information. Therefore, if there is a difference between ChatGPT's response and what the lecturer explains, I try to seek validation from the lecturer. I usually ask whether the result from ChatGPT is correct or not. So, I do not immediately accept ChatGPT's answers. With lecturers, we can ask for direct validation. From this experience, I learn to be more careful with AI-generated results and not use them blindly, but to analyze them first, since ChatGPT is only a tool to assist, not to do the work entirely."*

Students repeatedly stated that information generated by ChatGPT should not be accepted without verification. They often compared ChatGPT replies to data gathered from lecturers, peers, journal papers, and other learning tools. When contradictions arose, students actively examined conflicting sources to determine which information was the most reliable and contextually relevant.

When there was a clash between ChatGPT and other information sources, students frequently regarded lecturers as the most authoritative source. This implies that, while ChatGPT was regarded as an effective learning assistance tool, students were nevertheless aware of its limitations and sought human confirmation for accuracy. This preference can be linked to a variety of variables, including lecturers' academic credibility, disciplinary expertise, and professional background. Unlike ChatGPT, lecturers have contextual understanding of nursing education, curriculum expectations, and students' learning needs, allowing them to deliver more accurate and situation-specific guidance. Furthermore, lecturers' institutional authority as acknowledged educators may increase students' trust in their decisions, especially when assessing the veracity of AI-generated data.

These data suggest that individuals used higher-order thinking processes like evaluation, comparison, and reflection. The findings confirm Oxford's (2015) concept of metacognitive regulation is represented in students' ongoing monitoring and evaluation of information.

Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning

Another major theme is the social dimension of ChatGPT usage. Despite fears that AI could limit human connection, students characterized ChatGPT as a stimulus for collaboration and discussion. Rather than replacing peer and lecturer interactions, ChatGPT evolved into a platform that enabled students to share ideas, check facts, and enhance their understanding. This finding is consistent with Tlili et al. (2023), who stated that ChatGPT should be seen as an educational assistant that promotes learning processes while preserving the critical role of human interaction in education.

Students regularly discussed ChatGPT-generated responses with classmates, compared different outputs, and expressed their thoughts on the accuracy and appropriateness of material. These encounters frequently resulted in collaborative problem solving and a stronger knowledge of academic content. Peer discussions enabled students to discover inconsistencies, examine alternate views, and refine their interpretations of ChatGPT material. As Participant 4 said: *“Yes, I have discussed it with my classmates, especially because in nursing English courses there are group assignments. In those situations, we usually have to agree on one answer for the whole group. So, we often discuss ChatGPT’s responses and analyze them together, whether we all agree with the responses or if there are other suggestions to improve them.”*

Lecturers played an important part in students’ learning experiences by acting as the primary source of validation for AI-generated data. When ambiguity emerged, students frequently sought clarification from lecturers and compared classroom explanations to ChatGPT responses before accepting material. This shows that students regarded lecturers as the most authoritative and trustworthy source of disciplinary information, with ChatGPT serving as a supplementary learning resource rather than a replacement for lecturer expertise. As a result, the incorporation of ChatGPT into learning did not lessen the function of lecturers, but rather emphasized their value in directing students’ critical evaluation of AI-generated content.

This study lends support to Lantolf et al.’s (2014) sociocultural viewpoint, which sees learning as a socially mediated process influenced by interactions with others. The findings further support Kohnke et al.’s (2023) argument that when AI technologies are properly integrated into educational environments, they can improve cooperation and student engagement. Rather than isolating learners, ChatGPT frequently encouraged them to engage in meaningful discussions with their peers and lecturers.

Influence of Nursing Context

The results show that students’ experiences with ChatGPT were heavily influenced by their disciplinary background as nursing students. Unlike ordinary English learners, they utilized ChatGPT mostly to address issues related to nursing education and professional development.

Students commonly utilized ChatGPT to learn medical terms, read nursing journal articles, translate healthcare-related information, and prepare academic projects on nursing issues. Documentation data revealed numerous prompts related to medical terminology, nursing procedures, journal summaries, and patient communication. For examples, students asked, *“Please explain the differences among common English nursing terminology abbreviations”*, *“What English phrases can be used when introducing oneself to a patient?”* and *“Provide English journal articles about diabetes published within the last five years.”* These examples demonstrate how students used ChatGPT not only to develop their English skills, but also to meet the unique language requirements of nursing education. Nursing students, unlike those studying general English, must acquire technical medical vocabulary, interact effectively with patients and healthcare professionals, and read discipline-specific academic literature. As a result, ChatGPT served as a resource for both language development and access to nursing-related information.

Students also linked their use of ChatGPT to future professional objectives. Many saw English competence as necessary for obtaining international healthcare information, pursuing employment possibilities abroad, and communicating successfully in global healthcare contexts. As a result, ChatGPT was viewed as a tool that promoted both academic performance and professional development.

These findings provide strong support for the ESP concepts provided by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Basturkmen (2010), and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), who highlighted that language learning should be closely matched with learners' disciplinary and vocational needs. The findings are also consistent with Kasneci et al. (2023), who proposed that AI systems can give context-sensitive help suited to certain learning settings.

Limitations and Challenges of ChatGPT

Despite the various benefits, all students reported several limitations and obstacles with using ChatGPT. One of the most commonly raised problems was inconsistencies between ChatGPT responses and information provided by lecturers or other academic sources. Such disparities occasionally caused confusion, requiring students to decide which source was more reliable.

Students also stated that certain ChatGPT responses lacked the necessary depth and specificity for academic purposes. While the tool was generally useful for gaining preliminary explanations and summaries, several students believed that the answers were too broad to suit the needs of higher academic activities. As a result, they saw the value of establishing effective prompting tactics to achieve more accurate and contextually relevant responses.

Another challenge was the danger of over-reliance. Although students valued the ease of ChatGPT, they recognized that undue reliance could restrict independent thinking and learning. As a result, students underlined the significance of balancing AI support with personal effort, critical thinking, and collaboration with human specialists.

These findings back up Kasneci et al. (2023), who cautioned that generative AI systems may output inaccurate, incomplete, or contextually inappropriate information. According to the findings, ChatGPT's performance is determined not just by the technology but also by learners' capacity to analyze, verify, and appropriately use AI-generated information.

Essence of the Experience

The essence of nursing students' lived experiences is the ongoing negotiation between the opportunities afforded by ChatGPT and their responsibility to remain autonomous, critical, and academically accountable learners. Rather than merely using ChatGPT as a source of information, students saw it as a learning companion that helped them learn English while also requiring them to actively construct meaning from the responses. Their experience was formed by a continuous process of analyzing, validating, and integrating AI-generated data with their own expertise, disciplinary expectations, and interactions with lecturers and peers. As a result, ChatGPT's value was not just derived from its technological capabilities, but also from students' ability to use it ethically and critically as part of their learning process.

Conclusion

Using a phenomenological approach, this study investigated nursing students' lived experiences in using ChatGPT for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. The findings revealed that ChatGPT functioned as a multifunctional learning support tool for English learning and nursing-related academic tasks. The data also revealed that ChatGPT boosts students' confidence and motivation. Students felt more at ease participating in English learning activities and gained

confidence in their language skills because of its fast feedback, linguistic support, and clear explanations. Furthermore, students did not utilize ChatGPT passively. Their experiences were marked by critical review, reflection, and ongoing verification of information through peer conversations, consultations with lecturers, and comparisons to other academic sources.

Another significant conclusion is that ChatGPT use took place within a larger social and educational setting. Rather than replacing human interaction, ChatGPT frequently enhanced collaborative learning by allowing students and lecturers to talk, share material, and evaluate together. Furthermore, their disciplinary backgrounds as nursing students had a significant impact on how they used ChatGPT. Their interactions with the technology were shaped by the academic and professional needs of nursing education. Students used ChatGPT to understand medical terminology, access nursing literature, complete discipline-specific assignments, and prepare for future professional communication. Despite its benefits, students identified many drawbacks of ChatGPT, including discrepancies in responses, insufficient depth of information in some circumstances, and the risk of overreliance. These challenges underscore the significance of retaining critical awareness and using ChatGPT as a supplement to autonomous learning or expert guidance.

The nature of students' lived experiences might be defined as a dynamic balance of technological support and critical engagement. ChatGPT was regarded as a beneficial learning tool that assisted students in navigating the linguistic and academic hurdles of nursing education while encouraging them to be thoughtful, autonomous, and responsible learners. Overall, these findings fulfill the research objectives by illustrating how nursing students encountered and interpreted ChatGPT for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning, as well as how their disciplinary environment influenced their usage of the technology.

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