# AI-Mediated Discourse Reconfiguration in Saudi EFL Classrooms: Undergraduate Students' Perceptions and Experiences

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**ABSTRACT**
Contrary to viewing AI primarily as learning support, this research treats it as an agency for mediating discourse, thereby redefining participants' involvement, feedback mechanisms, sources of authority, learner agency, dependency, authorship, and legitimacy of acquired knowledge. A mixed-methods approach was employed in this study, with two-hundred and fifty Saudi EFL undergraduates majoring in English at four Saudi universities answering a questionnaire rooted in the frameworks of SFL and CDA and interviews with a purposive sample of twenty participants. Descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze quantitative data while qualitative data was analyzed thematically using notions derived from SFL and CDA frameworks. Results indicated that students perceived AI-mediated interaction as instrumental in shifting classroom discourse from traditional teacher-student structure to a triadic teacher-student-AI structure. Moreover, AI was seen as a private tutor, feedback provider, corrector, and linguistic evaluator, whereas teachers were still considered necessary for contextual validity, guidance on ethics, and pedagogical judgment of learners' performance. Gains were reported by the students' during individual usage of AI as a learning agency, though reservations were expressed about overdependence on AI, decreased interaction with peers/teachers, standardization of language use, and doubtful authorship. The study concluded that the role of AI in Saudi EFL classrooms went beyond being merely supportive in education and shaped the restructuring of discourse relations, power structures, and language learning practices.

**KEYWORDS:** AI-mediated discourse; classroom discourse; discourse reconfiguration; SFL, CDA.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that different types of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, translation apps, paraphrasing tools, and language learning platforms, have quickly become integrated into educational contexts and practices. The integration of AI tools into language education is significant due to the fact that AI operates via language. As such, AI tools can analyze, correct, translate, summarize, rephrase, assess, and produce language. For EFL learners, the availability of language assistant tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, machine translation systems, and AI-powered writing platforms means instant access to linguistic feedback and alternative forms or patterns of language use. Hence, generative AI does not just serve as a mere backdrop for EFL classes, it serves as a linguistic tool with potential to shape how students pose their questions, compose their answers, receive feedback, and evaluate their competence in English (Bearman et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023; Walter, 2024).

There has been extensive research on generative AI in language education over the past few years with studies exploring students' perceptions toward AI-based technologies in classrooms, teachers' readiness in employing AI tools, impact of AI on language skills, efficacy of feedback provided by AI, and ethical aspects associated with academic integrity (Abduljawad, 2024; Abdelhalim, 2025; Alkhateeb, 2025; Alsalem, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2025; Werdiningsih et al., 2024). A large corpus of research has established that students appreciate the accessibility, efficiency, and usefulness of AI tools in grammar instruction, vocabulary building, translation, writing assistance, and explanations for various language phenomena. At the same time, a comparable corpus has highlighted issues associated with overreliance on AI tools, originality of authorship, accuracy, biases, and development of critical AI literacy (Long & Magerko, 2020; Schneider & Oliveira, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). Notwithstanding their disagreements, results converge on considering AI tools primarily interventional, or supportive mechanisms in learning. While little attention has been given to how AI could reshape the framework of classroom learning in terms of the discourse it involves, it is important to recognize this potential influence on the nature of educational practices in classrooms.

Classroom discourse plays an important role in the process of learning a foreign language because it organizes discourse structures such as learners' participation, turn-taking, correction, feedback, question-answer interactions, and identity construction. Unlike other subjects taught in language classrooms, language itself becomes a discourse tool, as well as the object of learning. Students learn English during classroom interactions, but they also learn how to be recognized as speakers of English by teachers, peers, texts, and how to organize discourse structures (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Walsh, 2011). With the entry of AI, the dynamics of classroom participation changed because, along with teacher-student or student-student interactions, a new, third source of discourse appeared. Moreover, it is a source superior to any predecessor as it provides immediate and apparently reliable responses.

Some questions related to the context of EFL classrooms arise from this development. What will happen if students ask AI before asking the teacher? How would classroom participation be affected if learners show their work to teachers after they used AI feedback? How will students' voices and English be affected if AI helps them produce polished academic output? How would the redistribution of evaluation authority occur if AI was the source of the students' output? What if students relied more on AI's corrective feedback? These questions are not concerned with whether AI improves students' language skills or with guiding students on how to use AI platforms. Rather, they are concerned with how AI impacts discourse relations in the EFL classroom.

The context of EFL in Saudi Arabia is especially relevant to examining these issues for more than one reason. Learning English at Saudi universities is associated with success as it is linked to international relations and employability. Saudi universities and EFL instructors have become increasingly engaged with digital teaching and learning to facilitate education, in general, and English learning, in particular (Abduljawad, 2024; Abdelhalim, 2025; Alkhateeb, 2025; Alsalem, 2024). Nevertheless, empirical studies on Saudi EFL students' perceptions of AI-supported learning and the context-related structures such as classroom participation, authority, feedback, and agency, remain limited.

In order to fill this gap, the present study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Saudi undergraduate EFL students towards AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration. The study theoretically relies on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). SFL is relevant because it conceptualizes language as a socially motivated

communicative tool used for constructing social roles and purposes (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). CDA, on the other hand, has been applied because it examines the connections among discourse, power dynamics, ideology, and legitimacy within institutional settings (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). AI here becomes not just a neutral technology tool but a discourse-mediating presence reshaping classroom discourse practices.

Existing studies on generative AI mainly focus on its usefulness, efficiency, writing support, feedback speed, learners' attitudes, and learners' uptake of AI tools. (Abduljawad, 2024; Alsalem, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2025). However, these studies pay limited attention to how AI platforms may affect interactional relationships and reshape classroom discourse, including participation, feedback, authority, and correction, which are central elements of EFL classroom interaction (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Walsh, 2011; Alrefaee et al., 2025). In the Saudi EFL context too, research has typically focused on similar issues, such as attitudes, AI-assisted writing, teacher readiness, and ethical concerns, thus marking a gap in literature.

This study therefore, aims to explore how Saudi undergraduate EFL students perceive and experience AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration in classrooms. Rather than focusing on the impact of AI on linguistic performance, this study specifically investigates how generative AI reshapes participation, feedback practices, authority, learner agency, dependency, authorship, and perceptions of acceptable English in classroom interaction.

## 2. Research Questions

This study answers the following questions:

1. How do Saudi undergraduate EFL students perceive the role of generative AI in reconfiguring classroom discourse?
2. How do students perceive AI-mediated interaction as reshaping participation, feedback, and repair practices in EFL classrooms?
3. How do students perceive the relationship between teacher authority and AI evaluative authority in AI-mediated EFL learning?
4. How do students perceive the effects of AI-mediated interaction on learner agency, dependency, authorship, and language standardization?
5. What themes emerge from students' accounts of their experiences of AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration?

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Primarily, the significance of this study lies in its focus on AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration in EFL classrooms rather than on the practical benefits of AI for language development. Although previous studies have explored learners' and teachers' attitudes toward AI, limited research has investigated how AI may reshape classroom interaction, discourse practices, and ideological dynamics in EFL contexts (Abduljawad, 2024; Alkhateeb, 2025; Alsalem, 2024). Second, the study contributes to research on Saudi EFL higher education where AI-supported tools are being increasingly integrated into learning environments. This substantial reliance on AI will likely impact learner agency, participation, dependency, authorship, and orientations toward standardized English varieties (Schneider & Oliveira, 2025; UNESCO, 2023; Walter, 2024). Third, the study offers theoretical and methodological contributions by integrating SFL and CDA to

examine discourse, power, and meaning-making in AI-mediated classrooms (Fairclough, 2003; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) through a mixed-methods design comprising a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Classroom discourse in EFL education*

Classroom discourse has long been viewed as an important aspect of teaching and learning in organizing how knowledge is introduced, negotiated, practiced, evaluated, and legitimized. In language-learning settings, classroom discourse becomes especially significant, since language comprises both the medium of instruction and the subject matter of learning. Students not only absorb linguistic input but also become involved in classroom interactions, receive feedback and questions from teachers, and have opportunities for repetition and participation (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Walsh, 2011). Therefore, changing the structure of classroom discourse is likely to affect how learners view the process of language learning, how they position themselves as participants, and what kind of English output is regarded as acceptable or successful.

Early on, the emphasis in classroom discourse was on its structure and one-directional pattern. For example, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) found that the Initiation-Response-Feedback pattern was quite frequent in classroom discourse. This pattern consists of three stages: the teacher asking a question, the learner answering, and the teacher giving feedback. This model clearly and explicitly shows how the pedagogical authority of teachers was established in EFL classrooms. Walsh (2011) notes that teachers' powerful role in classroom communication decided the extent to which students can actively engage in language use and participate in classroom communication.

The advent of generative AI changed the discourse structure as contemporary students use AI to ask questions, check grammar, rephrase response, prepare for classroom participation, or claim authorship. Moreover, AI also expands the feedback mechanism beyond the teachers' agency to provide individual, almost instant response on student output.

### *Generative AI in EFL learning*

Generative AI has gained prominence in language pedagogy due to its ability to generate, edit, explain, translate, foster independent learning, and assess language for EFL learners. It is therefore not surprising that EFL learners have positive attitudes towards AI (Abduljawad, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2025; Werdiningsih et al., 2024; Al-Ahdal & Alharbi, 2021; Al-Ahdal, 2020). However, although instructors acknowledge the utility of AI for EFL learners, they are concerned about issues related to academic integrity, overreliance, loss of creativity, and lack of regulatory guidelines for using AI in academic institutions (Abdelhalim, 2025; Alkhateeb, 2025; Alsalem, 2024; Alqasham & Al-Ahdal, 2022).

Most of the existing literature focuses on AI as a tool to facilitate the learning process, improve language performance, or provide instant responses for language tasks. While these assisting functions remain useful, they do not necessarily account for the transformations in discourse that AI generates (Alharbi & Al-Ahdal, 2025). Therefore, research on AI in EFL settings should include not only the analysis of students' attitudes toward using AI for academic purposes but also how they view AI in relation to the instructor, their perception of AI feedback, their practices of using AI-generated texts in class, and how AI influences their perceptions of correct language use, authorship, and

legitimacy. According to Bearman et al. (2023) and UNESCO (2023), these aspects are important due to the strong influence of AI outputs over EFL linguistic behaviors.

### *AI as a discourse-mediating presence*

The main argument underlying this study is that the use of AI to generate language content should be conceptualized as a discourse-mediating presence in EFL classrooms. While traditional pedagogical resources still help students, the unique response mechanisms of AI tools makes them an inalienable part of classroom discourse. The role of such a discourse mediator creates new challenges in the context of EFL classrooms. Students in traditional EFL classes would normally seek the help of their teacher, textbooks, and peers. With AI readily available, EFL students may have yet another authority evaluating their language performance. The use of AI by EFL students may reshape classroom practices, as students may bring AI-generated contributions into classroom discussions, increasingly rely on them, and treat them as authoritative guidance for their participation.

### *Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and AI-mediated classroom discourse*

Systemic Functional Linguistics serves as a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing AI-mediated classroom discourse. According to SFL, language is a social semiotic system, rather than merely a system of grammatical rules (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The perspective of SFL becomes particularly important in the context of EFL since the use of language inside these classrooms creates not only communicative opportunities, but also creates relations and constructs roles, values, feedback, authority, and learner identities.

The significance of SFL in studying AI-mediated discourse stems from its emphasis on three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Specifically, the ideational function of language deals with the representation of experiences and actions. In AI-mediated EFL discourse, it might indicate whether students treat AI agents as actors, helpers, correctors, evaluators, or sources of knowledge. The interpersonal function of language refers to social relations, roles, attitudes, and authority. By using mood, modality, and appraisal, speakers/writers convey certainty, obligation, evaluation, and judgment (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005). The textual function of language concerns information organization and presentation. In particular, AI-generated texts tend to show well-organized structures and appropriate, coherent arguments.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis and AI-mediated authority*

CDA helps explain why certain meanings are socially significant as it studies the relationships among discourse, ideology, power, legitimization, and social practice (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This matters because the advent of AI in classroom discourse has shifted the traditional structure of discourse because AI encompasses not only linguistic issues but also broader concerns about authority, standardization, authorship, dependence, institutional management, and educational values.

From the CDA perspective, AI outcomes extend beyond pure linguistic aspects and focus, for example, on what constitutes fluent, correct, academic, professional, and socially acceptable English. When students keep asking AI to "make this better," "make

it academic," or "fix the grammar," they internalize language learning as a continuous process of correction and improvement (Bearman et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

CDA can also help reveal sources of authority other than teachers involved in AI use in EFL classrooms. In some cases, AI becomes a trusted provider of instant, detailed feedback. Yet, AI remains unaware of students' and tasks' specific contexts, teachers' instructions, institutional regulations, and cultural implications. Consequently, AI gains a lot of authority, despite being pedagogically a limited aid.

Tension between teacher's authority and AI's authority is thus initiated. While teachers may have fewer opportunities for direct evaluation in AI-mediated classrooms, they remain important contextual validators. For example, they supervise students' interaction with AI and provide their comments on AI-generated text.

This study relies on SFL and CDA constructs in developing questionnaire items and interview dimensions. Therefore, SFL and CDA serve as the basis for exploring how AI influenced students' perceptions of role shifts, discourse relations, and how meanings are socially significant in Saudi EFL classrooms.

### *Learner agency, dependence, and critical AI literacy*

Learner agency can be defined as learners' ability to take decisions, carry out responsibilities, and engage in learning processes. In second-language acquisition, agency is highly associated with learner autonomy, confidence, participation, and effective use of resources (Benson, 2011; Mercer, 2012). As far as language education is concerned, generative AI can promote learning autonomy by providing instant feedback, examples, corrections, and alternative options for various linguistic features. In cases when students are hesitant to address certain questions during the class, they might seek AI assistance to figure out meanings and prepare appropriate responses.

However, although AI can help learners become more independent of their teachers, it can also generate new types of complex dependencies. Students may rely on AI before even starting to process tasks. Their dependency can be especially strengthened when AI gives them confident, polished feedback. Thus, while AI increases agency, it simultaneously decreases self-reliance.

Now it would be appropriate to refer to critical AI literacy as a means to understand this dilemma. Critical AI literacy includes not only how to use AI effectively, but also knowing how to evaluate its content, understand its limitations, and recognize its potential biases. In EFL classrooms, critical AI means the ability to use it without losing personal identity and autonomy.

### *AI, standardized English, and authorship in EFL classrooms*

One of the most important discourse effects of generative AI relates to the potential standardization of language. AI produces highly grammatical, cohesive and coherent English. For EFL learners, this represents an attractive source to present high-quality English.

Research in applied linguistics shows that English is used differently around the world, and standards of correctness and legitimacy vary according to institutional contexts, power relations, and dominant language ideologies (Canagarajah, 2013). EFL learners tend to value grammatical correctness and cohesiveness, but they also need to gain communicative flexibility and understanding of the context. AI-generated language may support accuracy, but at the same time may negatively affect linguistic individuality given the tendency to accept AI-polished texts without questioning or examining them.

Another issue emerging from this tension concerns authorship. When students simply correct minor mistakes using AI, they claim ownership of their language. However, when AI performs demanding writing steps such as composing sentences, restructuring paragraphs, or writing from a scratch, authorship becomes a critical issue. In this scenario, students might start questioning themselves if the final version reflects AI's contribution or their knowledge of English. Teachers may also feel reluctant to attribute this work to students.

***AI-mediated discourse in the Saudi EFL context***

The Saudi context is an ideal context to investigate AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration due to the status of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, English is connected to employability, internationalization, and digital transformation in the country, especially under Saudi Vision 2030 which has created wider opportunities for English to support national development goals. To meet high standards of market and labor requirements and due to academic accreditations, undergraduate English classrooms in Saudi Arabia have become a context where students need to negotiate their academic identities, linguistic authorship, agency, and professional potentials. Therefore, AI is now beginning to shape how students access feedback, prepare responses, organize their writing, and evaluate the quality of their linguistic contributions (Abdelhalim, 2025; Abduljawad, 2024; Alkhateeb, 2025).

Why does this context matter? AI does not enter classrooms as neutral without any context implications. In fact, AI is being brought to classrooms that already have established traditional linguistic behaviors, teachers' responsibilities, two-way student-teacher expectations, and feedback sources. In EFL contexts, teacher is still a visible source of linguistic authority, from whom students still expect corrective and evaluative feedback. However, when students deal with other sources of feedback and evaluation, they may engage in negotiating mutable authorities, including teachers, machines, textbooks, and presumably, AI. Some students prefer to privately ask AI questions rather than do so publicly in the classroom. Therefore, this situation may reduce visible classroom participation and increase individual engagement with technology.

***Research gap***

Despite extensive research on generative AI in EFL, several gaps still exist. First, most of the studies on AI address its usefulness, writing support, feedback efficiency, and learner attitudes (Abduljawad, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2025; Werdiningsih et al., 2024). These studies are insightful to offer a better understanding of how AI operates in EFL educational settings. Yet, they examine AI as a learning or teaching tool rather than as a tool that may affect discourse, reshaping classroom interactions, feedback experiences, authority dynamics, and language ideologies.

Second, little attention has been paid to exploring students' views on the relationship between teacher authority and AI authority. Usually, feedback is considered an aspect that requires authority and expertise. However, with the rapid advancement of AI, students now receive immediate feedback and evaluation from other sources. Therefore, there is a need to examine whether students view AI as a source of linguistic authority, whether teacher authority still maintains its power, and which source of feedback is received more confidently by students.

Third, more attention should be given to how AI can simultaneously support learner independence and AI dependency. While AI provides individualized language support,

students may rely on it too much at the cost of their individual linguistic choices. Issues of authorship and standardization also need further examination because they relate not only to academic integrity, but also to voice, legitimacy, and what is considered "good English."

### *Theoretical framework*

This study uses a theoretical framework based on SFL and CDA. It assumes that generative AI is not only a tool that supports learning, but also a part of classroom discourse. In other words, AI can influence how classroom language is produced, evaluated, and shared. Table 1 below summarizes the theoretical bases of the study.

**Table 1: Theoretical bases of the study**

| Dimension | Theoretical link | Focus in the present study |
|---|---|---|
| Participation structure | Classroom discourse; SFL tenor/mode | How AI changes student participation and classroom interaction |
| Teacher authority | CDA; classroom discourse | How students perceive the continuing or changing role of the teacher |
| AI evaluative authority | CDA; interpersonal meaning | How students perceive AI as a source of correction and judgment |
| Feedback and repair | Classroom discourse; SFL interpersonal meaning | How AI changes correction, reformulation, and feedback practices |
| Learner agency | Autonomy and agency theory | How AI supports student independence and decision-making |
| Dependency | Critical AI literacy; CDA | How students may rely on AI validation |
| Language standardization | CDA; language ideology | How AI shapes views of correct, polished, or legitimate English |
| Authorship | CDA; voice and legitimacy | How students understand ownership of AI-assisted language |
| Critical AI awareness | AI literacy | How students evaluate and question AI-generated output |

## **4.** METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

This study used an explanatory sequential design to examine Saudi undergraduate EFL students' perceptions and experiences of AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration. This design was considered suitable because it identifies general discourse constructs in students' perceptions and explains these constructs through the participants' responses (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

***Research context***

The study was conducted with undergraduate students in English Departments at four Saudi universities. These students were selected because English majors regularly opt for different language courses such as reading, writing, speaking, grammar, translation, and subject-matter courses. These courses require performing related tasks that may challenge students' cognition. Therefore, they use AI tools for different purposes, including understanding difficult ideas, correcting errors, rewording sentences, learning vocabulary, translating texts, and preparing for classroom participation.

***Participants***

Two-hundred and fifty Saudi undergraduate EFL students majoring in English participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for the interviews. Although this may limit the generalizability of the findings, it is commonly used in educational research, especially when access to participants depends on institutional norms and teachers' cooperation (Dörnyei, 2007). Twenty participants were selected from amongst those who completed the survey for the interviews.

***Research instruments***

The study followed two data collection phases: quantitative and qualitative. In the quantitative phase, participants completed a questionnaire exploring their perceptions across nine dimensions of discourse reconfiguration based on the theoretical frameworks of SFL and CDA. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured online interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and views on using AI. Together, these two instruments aimed to explore students' perceptions of how AI technologies reconfigure classroom discourse.

***Questionnaire***

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by the researcher based on the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature (Fairclough, 2003; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Long & Magerko, 2020; Schneider & Oliveira, 2025; Walsh, 2011; Walter, 2024). Since the study focused specifically on discourse reconfiguration rather than effects of AI or general technology acceptance, it was not necessary to use an existing questionnaire. Instead, the questionnaire was designed in accordance with the theoretical framework of the study.

Responses to the 36-item questionnaire were sought using the five point Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) covering nine dimensions: participation structure, teacher authority, AI evaluative authority, feedback and repair, learner agency, dependency, language standardization, authorship, and critical AI awareness. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions that facilitated the participants to briefly add any comments about any dimension they wished.

***Semi-structured interviews***

The study used semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into students' experiences of AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration. This method helped explore aspects of discourse reconfiguration that may not have been fully covered in the questionnaire (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

### *Validity and Reliability*

Content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through review by three applied linguists. After this the questionnaire was piloted with a group of twenty Saudi undergraduate EFL students. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each questionnaire dimension was found to be between .78 and .86, while overall reliability of the questionnaire was .91. Values above .70 were considered acceptable, while values above .80 were considered good (Dörnyei, 2007; Pallant, 2020).

### *Data collection procedures and ethics considerations*

Questionnaire data was collected in two stages. First, an electronic version of the questionnaire was shared with Saudi undergraduate EFL students through course instructors in English Departments at four Saudi universities. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. Participants were further informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any penalty. After the questionnaire responses were collected, twenty students were selected for semi-structured online interviews. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for further analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

The questionnaire data were analyzed using statistical software. All questionnaire items were coded into numerical values based on the five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics comprising means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to show students' perceptions across the nine questionnaire dimensions. Reliability of each dimension was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine relationships between selected constructs, especially AI's evaluative authority, teacher's authority, learner agency, dependency, authorship, and critical AI awareness. One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether students' perceptions differed according to their frequency of AI use.

Interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was used because the study aimed to identify common patterns in how students experienced and perceived AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis steps were: creating initial codes, grouping the codes into themes, reviewing and refining the themes, and selecting relevant excerpts to support the findings. The analysis was guided by the SFL and CDA theoretical perspectives used in the research design.

## 6. RESULTS

Table 2 below summarizes the Cronbach's alpha values.

**Table 2 :Reliability Coefficients for questionnaire dimensions**

| Dimension | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Participation structure | 4 | .82 |
| Teacher authority | 4 | .79 |
| AI evaluative authority | 4 | .86 |
| Feedback and repair | 4 | .84 |
| Learner agency | 4 | .81 |
| Dependency | 4 | .78 |

| Dimension | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Language standardization | 4 | .83 |
| Authorship | 4 | .80 |
| Critical AI awareness | 4 | .85 |
| Overall questionnaire | 36 | .91 |

***Descriptive Statistics of questionnaire dimensions***

The mean scores (3.46 to 4.18) for all dimensions were within the high range according to the interpretation scale adopted in the study and summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for questionnaire dimensions**

| Dimension | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Feedback and repair | 4.18 | 0.63 | High |
| AI evaluative authority | 4.07 | 0.68 | High |
| Learner agency | 3.96 | 0.71 | High |
| Language standardization | 3.91 | 0.69 | High |
| Participation structure | 3.84 | 0.74 | High |
| Teacher authority | 3.82 | 0.72 | High |
| Critical AI awareness | 3.76 | 0.70 | High |
| Authorship | 3.58 | 0.77 | High |
| Dependency | 3.46 | 0.81 | High |

As is evident, feedback and repair received the highest mean scores (M = 4.18, SD = 0.63), followed by AI evaluative authority (M = 4.07, SD = 0.68), learner agency (M = 3.96, SD = 0.71), and language standardization (M = 3.91, SD = 0.69). Dependency had the lowest mean score (M = 3.46, SD = 0.81), despite which it still fell within the high-level range. The mean score of participation structure was (M = 3.84, SD = 0.74) which indicated that students mostly agreed on the influence of AI on their participation in English classes. Descriptive statistics results for items pertaining to participation structure are summarized in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Participation structure**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI changes the way I participate in English classroom activities. | 3.89 | 0.82 | High |
| I sometimes use AI before asking my teacher a question. | 4.02 | 0.79 | High |
| AI allows me to participate in learning privately without speaking in class. | 3.91 | 0.85 | High |
| Using AI reduces my need to discuss language problems with classmates. | 3.54 | 0.91 | High |

Responses from interview showed that some students used AI to prepare for class discussion, while some others used it before consulting their teachers. For instance, one of the participants stated, "sometimes I prefer asking AI because I do not want to make a mistake when I answer in the class discussion." Another participant said, "I consult AI before I answer any question because this helps me to arrange the ideas."

*Teacher's Authority*

High mean scores (M=3.82, SD=0.72) were obtained for teacher's authority and the findings are summarized in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Teacher's Authority**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| My teacher remains the main source of reliable feedback even when I use AI. | 3.91 | 0.80 | High |
| AI has changed the role of the teacher in English learning. | 3.76 | 0.84 | High |
| I need my teacher to confirm whether AI feedback is suitable. | 3.88 | 0.78 | High |
| Teachers should guide students on how to use AI-generated language. | 3.74 | 0.86 | High |

Students' responses repeatedly considered the teacher as a truthful, reliable source to evaluate the appropriateness of their AI-generated works to classroom context. For example, one student said, "AI gives me very quick feedback, but I do not know if the teacher knows it is acceptable." Another student said, "If the teacher says something different from AI, I listen to the teacher."

***AI's Evaluative Authority***

The dimension of AI's evaluative authority had a relatively high mean score of 4.07 (SD = 0.68) as summarized in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: AI's Evaluative Authority**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| I usually trust AI when it corrects my English. | 4.12 | 0.76 | High |
| AI feedback often sounds more confident than human feedback. | 3.98 | 0.83 | High |
| I sometimes accept AI suggestions without questioning them. | 3.87 | 0.88 | High |
| AI makes me feel that there is one best way to write or say something in English. | 4.31 | 0.71 | Very high |

AI-generated feedback was perceived as preferable by students as it was considered clear, prompt, and reliable. For example, one student stated, "AI gave excellent corrections, and I trust it." Another student mentioned, "When I write my sentence in AI, I get a very good sentence better than my sentence."

***Feedback and Repair***

The feedback and repair dimension had the highest mean score (M = 4.18, SD = 0.63) as summarized in Table 7. This means that students strongly agreed that AI changed how they corrected and improved their English.

**Table 7: Feedback and repair**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI changes how I correct my English mistakes. | 4.24 | 0.69 | Very high |
| AI gives me feedback faster than classroom feedback. | 4.38 | 0.64 | Very high |
| AI makes corrections feel like a continuous process. | 4.06 | 0.77 | High |
| I use AI to reformulate sentences, not only to correct grammar. | 4.03 | 0.81 | High |

Data from interviews showed that students often used AI for direct, superficial tasks, such as grammatical correction, structural rewriting, and sentence explanation. The input and prompts were usually "correct this," "improve my sentence," and "write this in the correct way ." One student said, "I used AI to improve my sentence many times." Another said, "Now I used AI to check my homework before, I give it to the teacher."

***Learner Agency***

The mean score of learner agency dimension was high (M = 3.96, SD = 0.71) as shown in Table 8. Students generally agreed that AI gave them more control over their English learning.

**Table 8: Learner Agency**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI helps me make more independent decisions about my English. | 4.03 | 0.78 | High |
| AI gives me more control over my learning process. | 3.98 | 0.82 | High |
| I use AI suggestions selectively rather than copying them directly. | 3.86 | 0.85 | High |
| AI helps me compare different ways of expressing the same idea. | 3.97 | 0.80 | High |

Interview participants found independence for themselves in completing their academic tasks through using AI. One student said, "AI helps me learn and no need to wait for the teacher to explain to me." Another added, "AI gives me another way to write more sentences then I choose."

***Dependency***

The dependency dimension received a high mean score (M = 3.46, SD = 0.81) as summarized in Table 9. It was the lowest mean score among the nine dimensions of the questionnaire, but the findings suggested that students still relied on AI.

**Table 9: Dependency**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| I feel unsure about my English without checking it with AI. | 3.49 | 0.93 | High |
| I depend on AI before submitting English tasks. | 3.62 | 0.88 | High |
| I sometimes use AI even when I could solve the problem myself. | 3.41 | 0.96 | High |

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI may reduce my confidence in my own language ability. | 3.32 | 0.91 | Moderate |

Interview responses reflected variant levels of dependency between students. One participant said, "Sometimes I have to check the writing with AI before I give to the doctor." Another participant stated, "I use it a lot, but I try not to copy everything."

***Language Standardization***

The language standardization dimension received a very high rating (M = 3.91, SD = 0.69) as shown in Table 10. Most participants agreed that AI influenced the way they viewed formal and correct English. Similar patterns were also observed across several questionnaire items in this dimension.

**Table 10: Language standardization**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI makes me prefer more formal English. | 4.02 | 0.77 | High |
| AI makes "good English" seem synonymous with polished, error-free language. | 4.10 | 0.73 | High |
| AI sometimes removes my personal style from my language. | 3.64 | 0.88 | High |
| AI makes English learning feel more focused on correctness than communication. | 3.88 | 0.82 | High |

Participants generally expressed positive attitudes towards AI-generated language. Some participants referred to texts produced by AI as "academic," "formal," "professional," or simply, "better." For example, one student said, "AI helped me make my language to be academic." Another participant noted that he kept asking AI to change his sentences to sound better, until he felt that the final version fully reflected his own voice. A similar view was expressed by other participants, who reported that AI often made their writing sound clearer and more polished.

***Authorship***

The authorship dimension received a high mean score (M = 3.58, SD = 0.77) as summarized in Table 11. Students reported some uncertainty about ownership when AI substantially changed their language and created explicit voices for their ideas.

**Table 11: Authorship**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| When AI rewrites my sentence, I still feel the final sentence is mine. | 3.44 | 0.92 | High |
| I sometimes feel uncertain about whether AI-assisted language belongs to me. | 3.71 | 0.87 | High |
| Students should disclose when AI strongly changes their English work. | 3.68 | 0.84 | High |
| AI use makes authorship in English learning more complicated. | 3.51 | 0.89 | High |

Interview responses about authorship showed that students distinguished between minor AI corrections and major AI rewriting. One participant put it this way: "I feel I did the homework if AI just corrects the grammar." Another student said, "The idea is my idea, but the words are from AI."

*Critical AI awareness*

The critical AI awareness dimension received a high mean score (M = 3.76, SD = 0.70) as shown in Table 12. Students generally shared similar awareness about AI-generated output. They agreed that AI output should be checked and evaluated before submitting it to instructor.

**Table 12: Critical AI awareness**

| Item | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| I check whether AI feedback is appropriate for the classroom context. | 3.74 | 0.83 | High |
| I know that AI can produce inaccurate or unsuitable language. | 3.88 | 0.79 | High |
| I compare AI feedback with teacher feedback when possible. | 3.69 | 0.86 | High |
| Students need training to use AI critically in English learning. | 3.73 | 0.84 | High |

Interview results showed that students critically examined and evaluated AI-generated outcomes differently. One participant stated, "I know AI can make errors, and thus I make sure that the answer is suitable." In contrast, another said, "I normally trust AI more than my answers." These variant responses were pervasive throughout the interview phase.

***Correlation Analysis***

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between selected questionnaire dimensions. The results (Table 13) showed significant positive relationships among several constructs.

**Table 13: Selected Correlations among questionnaire dimensions**

| Variables | r | p |
|---|---|---|
| AI evaluative authority and dependency | .52 | < .01 |
| AI evaluative authority and authorship | .46 | < .01 |
| Feedback and repair and AI evaluative authority | .58 | < .01 |
| Language standardization and authorship | .44 | < .01 |
| Learner agency and critical AI awareness | .41 | < .01 |
| Teacher authority and critical AI awareness | .37 | < .01 |

Feedback, repair, and AI evaluative authority indicated the highest correlation ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). A moderate positive relationship was also observed between AI's evaluative authority and dependency ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). In addition, significant correlations were observed between AI's evaluative authority and authorship ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), language

standardization and authorship ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), learner agency and critical AI awareness ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), and teacher authority and critical AI awareness ($r = .37$, $p < .01$).

***Differences according to AI use frequency***

One-way ANOVA was carried out to explore whether students' perceptions varied based on the frequency of AI use. To identify frequency of use of AI, students were divided into three groups: low-frequency users, moderate-frequency users, and high-frequency users, results are summarized in Table 14.

**Table 14: ANOVA of AI-use frequency**

| Dimension | F | p | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participation structure | 5.82 | .004 | Significant |
| AI evaluative authority | 7.46 | .001 | Significant |
| Feedback and repair | 6.91 | .002 | Significant |
| Learner agency | 4.38 | .014 | Significant |
| Dependency | 8.17 | .001 | Significant |
| Language standardization | 5.04 | .007 | Significant |
| Authorship | 4.76 | .009 | Significant |
| Teacher authority | 2.11 | .123 | Not significant |
| Critical AI awareness | 2.84 | .060 | Not significant |

ANOVA results showed significant differences among the AI use groups in terms of structure of participation, AI assessment authority, feedback and repair, learner agency, dependency, language standardization, and authorship. However, no statistically significant differences were found for teacher authority or critical AI awareness.

***Interviews Themes***

Five major themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews.

**Table 15 Interview Themes**

| Theme | Description |
|---|---|
| AI as a private discourse partner | Students used AI privately before public classroom participation. |
| AI as an evaluative authority | Students used AI for correction, judgment, and reformulation |
| Teacher as contextual validator | Students viewed teachers as necessary for confirming classroom suitability |
| Agency with dependency | Students reported both independence and reliance on AI validation |
| Standardized English and blurred authorship | Students associated AI with polished English and uncertain ownership |

## 7. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and interprets them within the theoretical framework of SFL and CDA. It specifically examines how

Saudi undergraduate EFL students viewed generative AI as reconfiguring EFL classroom discourse.

***AI-mediated interaction and reconfiguration of participation***

Findings showed that students perceived generative AI as changing the way they participated in EFL classroom tasks and activities. Questionnaire results indicated very high scores for the participation structure dimension, and the interview data further confirmed that students frequently interacted with AI before submitting their work and joining classroom discussions. This suggests that AI introduced a more private layer of participation, in which students engaged individually with AI tools as part of their learning and participation process within classroom discourse.

This observation supports the idea that classroom discourse is no longer limited to the pattern of traditional interaction through the teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback loop (Sinclair & Coulthard,1975). However, AI-supported learning added a new (discourse) layer to the traditional pattern because part of the interaction now takes place privately between students and AI before, during, or after class time. As a result, students' participation is increasingly shaped and mediated by their interactions with AI.

From an SFL perspective, integration of GenAI caused changes to the mode and tenor of EFL classroom discourse. The mode became more hybrid as students' participation was influenced by AI platforms. At the same time, the tenor also shifted because students were no longer interacting only with teachers and peers, but also with AI (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). As a result, AI may reshape the traditional classroom discourse structure from a student- teacher model into a student- AI - teacher model

***AI as a source of evaluative authority***

The dimension of AI's evaluative authority in the questionnaire appeared as one of the strongest dimensions. This dimension received a high level of certainty when AI provided corrections, reformulations, and feedback. Interview findings further supported this result. Many students viewed AI feedback as clearer, and linguistically more accurate than their language. These findings suggest that students hold the belief that AI is not merely a supportive tool, but rather a good source of linguistic evaluation and judgment, indicating that classroom discourse is being strongly shaped by AI-evaluative practices (Walsh, 2011). However, when students begin to rely on AI-generated feedback and corrections, evaluative authority may tend to be gradually redistributed, or shifted towards AI.

The importance of this issue lies in the nature of AI authority which is shaped by AI feedback characteristics, and in the potential for this authority to increase students' trust in it (Bearman et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023). However, this feedback is not completely neutral since it still carries assumptions about what counts as correct or appropriate language use. As a result, the AI authority becomes partly influential because of the persuasive language it uses.

***Teacher Authority was reoriented, not replaced***

Despite AI being perceived as an efficient source of feedback and evaluation, findings also showed that teacher authority remained highly relevant. They still needed to give final approval concerning the appropriateness and accuracy of AI output. In addition,

teachers are identified as facilitators to guide students to critically deal with AI-generated feedback.

This finding shows that AI redefines the role of the teacher rather than doing away with it in EFL classrooms. He or she remains an authority figure whose primary responsibilities include validating students' work and guiding them in the effective use of technology for writing and reading. This argument is further supported by research showing that teachers recognize the benefits of AI, but with some reservations regarding students' judgment and pedagogy (Abdelhalim, 2025; Alkhateeb, 2025; Alsalem, 2024).

As far as CDA is concerned, the authority of teachers is redistributed rather than weakened. It is perceived as a means of controlling the legitimacy of language enabled by AI, rather than controlling students' work.

***Feedback and repair became immediate, continuous, and individualized***

The highest mean score was found for feedback and repair. The students believed that AI helped them correct their errors, construct new sentences, and obtain feedback. Interview responses showed that many students used direct prompts such as "correct this," "make it academic," "help me improve my sentence," and "rewrite in better English."

This finding shows that feedback and correction became more visible and immediate in student-AI communication, unlike with traditional feedback provided by teachers. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether AI helps enhance students' performance, but how it reshapes feedback as a discourse practice. Feedback is no longer limited to being a teacher-mediated activity; instead, it becomes an ongoing process of learner–AI interaction that often takes place even before the teacher provides feedback.

***Learner agency and dependency developed simultaneously***

The results of this research indicated that AI supported students' learning agency. Many participants stated that AI helped them gain greater control over the learning process, ask questions privately, compare different expressions, and make independent decisions. This finding is consistent with previous studies on learner autonomy (Mercer, 2012; Benson, 2011).

The findings also revealed signs of learner dependence on AI. Although dependency received the lowest mean score among the measured dimensions, it remained relatively high. Participants reported reliance on AI to verify their work and English accuracy. The correlation between AI's evaluative authority and dependence suggests that increased trust in AI may strengthen reliance on its validation. In other words, agency and dependency can develop simultaneously in AI-mediated learning.

***AI strengthened views of standardized English***

The language standardization dimension received a high mean score. The responses of the interviews indicated that participants believed that AI influenced their perceptions of proper English.

This finding shows that AI does not only correct language errors but also presents its own model of what "good" English should look like. In most cases, AI-generated responses indicated that students adopted a form of English that is coherent, formal, polished, and grammatically accurate. Although this may support EFL learners in improving their language production through producing "ideal" structures, it may also reinforce the idea that legitimate English must always be standardized and error-free. This may add a burden on students when they are required to produce their own language.

From a CDA perspective, this relates to language ideology. Conceptions of language are not neutral; rather, they are socially constructed and politically shaped (Canagarajah, 2013). Language ideology therefore includes beliefs about what counts as proper, legitimate, correct, or standard language, as well as how language should be learned and used.

***Authorship became blurred and negotiated***

The result indicating AI's significant influence on language may have negative impact on students' concept of authorship. Students' claim of authorship appeared to depend on the extent of AI involvement. If AI's help was limited only to surface forms, they would attribute full authorship to themselves. Many students, however, felt the text no longer reflected their authorship when AI wholly generated the language and composed the structures.

These findings suggest that authorship in an EFL context is not simply a distinction between authentic and AI-generated works. Rather, authorship has become a negotiated issue involving students' ideas, AI-generated language, teachers' expectations, and final judgment. Many students felt that the ideas were theirs, while the language partly belonged to AI. This influences ownership, voice, identity, and legitimacy of language use in EFL contexts.

***Critical AI awareness was present but inconsistent***

Critical AI awareness dimension received a high mean score. This means that students evaluated AI outcomes independently. Interviewees reported checking whether the feedback provided by AI conformed to the teacher's expectations and classroom tasks. However, some participants stated that they often trusted AI-generated responses because they appeared linguistically perfect.

This indicates that students' critical AI awareness is present but inconsistent. Some students demonstrated the ability to question and verify AI-generated outcomes, while others showed weaker AI awareness and tended to accept AI responses without questioning either the content or the appropriateness to classroom tasks and context. This finding supports ongoing calls for developing AI literacy and critical AI literacy skills among learners (Long & Magerko, 2020; Schneider & Oliveira, 2025; Walter, 2024).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Findings in the study suggest that AI-mediated communication shifted from a binary relationship to a triadic relationship, including the teacher, AI, and student. This three-partner relationship reconfigures Saudi EFL classroom discourse. AI serves as a private mediator, providing students with feedback, corrections, restructuring, and evaluation.

This triadic relationship is the key finding of this research, as the results show how AI fundamentally changed classroom discourse structures. In particular, it changed how students access feedback, prepare for participation, understand correctness, negotiate authority, and experience authorship. The study, therefore, contributes to AI in EFL research by shifting attention from AI outcomes to social and linguistic discourse reconfiguration in EFL classrooms.

This study therefore, concludes that AI is reshaping Saudi EFL classroom discourse by creating a three-way relationship between students, teachers, and AI. Students use AI privately to prepare, check language, and receive feedback before participating in class.

While AI becomes a source of correction and evaluation, teachers still play an important role in validating AI output and guiding students to appropriate language use.
Overall, AI increases feedback promptness, supports learner independence, and changes how students experience participation and authorship. However, it may also create dependency and make students feel that English must always be corrected or optimized before use.

## 9. Recommendations

The study recommends that AI use should be openly addressed in Saudi EFL classrooms because contemporary students are AI-oriented users. Teachers should guide students on when AI use is appropriate and on how to evaluate AI-generated outputs critically and responsibly. The findings also imply that teachers should not view AI as a threat to their authority. Instead, they can use their authority to guide students in interpreting, questioning, adapting, and ethically using AI-generated language. Additionally, EFL teachers should move beyond correction and polishing by encouraging students to think about audience, purpose, meaning, and classroom context. Furthermore, the study highlights the need to teach authorship clearly, especially the difference between AI support and AI substitution in language output generation. Formally, Saudi universities should also develop practical AI-use policies for EFL classrooms, with clear examples of acceptable and unacceptable AI practices. Finally, university policies should reinforce that abusive, or dishonest use of AI may be considered an academic offence. In such cases, teachers should have the right to evaluate the student's work accordingly and adjust grades based on university policy.

## 10. Limitations of the Study

The main limitations of the study are that it relied on students' perceptions rather than direct and natural classroom observation, used convenience sampling, and included only 20 interview participants. It also did not target a specific generative AI tool, nor did it compare different AI platforms. Finally, the study did not attempt to measure language development or achievement because of its focus on how AI reconfigures classroom discourse.

## 11.Directions for Future Research

Future research may use direct and natural data , such as recordings and observations, to describe AI-mediated discourse reconfiguration. Following studies may also investigate Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of AI use, especially their roles in monitoring, legitimizing, and guiding students' use of machine-generated language. Additionally, longitudinal research is also needed to understand how repeated AI use affects students' confidence, independence, participation, authorship, and English proficiency over time. Finally, future studies may examine AI policy discourse in Saudi universities, particularly how institutional policies treat AI in relation to innovation, integrity, control, responsibility, and learning outcomes.

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