Is AI the future of language Education?

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Introduction

The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is rapidly evolving, positioning itself as a transformative force with immense potential to shape teaching and learning practices. Just as calculators and computers revolutionized mathematics and science, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools are poised to become integral to writing and other aspects of education (Meakin, 2024).

The rise of artificial intelligence

The past few years have witnessed explosive growth in AI tools across various domains, including language teaching and learning. These tools leverage advanced algorithms to assist with tasks ranging from content generation to personalized learning experiences. According to Fisher (2023), large language models (LLMs) are trained on extensive datasets of text and code, enabling them to understand and generate human-like text, translate languages, and create various types of content. While AI may appear intelligent by sorting, organizing, and presenting ideas rapidly, Luckin (2023) emphasizes that these tools lack true understanding or knowledge; they merely generate outputs based on statistical probabilities.

Adapting to change: Implications for teachers and learners

AI's capabilities compel educators to rethink traditional teaching approaches. If students turn to AI for quick answers, it signals a need to design lessons that foster critical thinking and problem-solving (Marche, 2022; Ross, 2023).

Teachers can choose to engage with AI to varying degrees, incorporating it as a learning tool or exploring its deeper applications (Nehme & Crabtree, 2023). For example, platforms like Eduaide.ai and ClickUp.ai offer innovative solutions for lesson planning, saving educators significant time.

However, AI does not render traditional resources obsolete. Teacher books with well-established lesson plans remain valuable, especially when adapted to include AI-based enhancements. Additionally, educators

can leverage AI to tailor learning experiences, using tools to simplify complex texts or provide examples catering to diverse learning styles (St. George & Svrluga, 2023).

Rethinking English language education

English language learners benefit uniquely from AI tools. AI can generate vocabulary lists, practice tests, and custom resources for various career paths, with apps like Career Copilot and LinkedIn AI Career Coach providing targeted guidance (Rozal, 2023). By integrating AI into the classroom, learners can create personalized materials and reflect on their use of technology in the learning process. For instance, reflective assignments requiring students to document their interactions with AI encourage accountability and critical evaluation (St. George & Svrluga, 2023).

Addressing challenges and ethical concerns

There are many concerns about the use of programs like ChatGPT to cheat or plagiarize (Chen, 2023; Shiffmann, 2023, Vaidhyanathan, 2023). Flipping the paradigm, the author's graduate and doctoral students in a 2024 Discourse Analysis course were encouraged to use ChatGPT with the proviso that they document its successes and failures. One non-native speaker of English instructed ChatGPT to academicize the paper she had written and, in doing so, she received insights into how she could improve her academic style by, for example, making more use of the passive voice.

However, despite its advantages, AI presents challenges. Hallucinations—instances where AI generates false or misleading information—are a significant concern, particularly in academic settings (Fisher, 2023). As an example in the same class mentioned above, another student used ChatGPT to include citations and references but found what turned out to be a hallucination. It was a current quote from an article by the author from the journal *System*, and was properly formatted in the references. However, both the citation and the reference were false—hallucinations created by ChatGPT which can, at times, seem like an eager-to-please child.

Educators must teach students to critically assess AI-generated content to prevent the spread of misinformation. Moreover, AI's perceived authority can lead to uncritical acceptance of incorrect answers, highlighting the need for human oversight (St. George & Svrluga, 2023).

The role of human intelligence

AI's rise underscores the importance of recognizing uniquely human capabilities. Schools must emphasize high-level thinking, critical assessment, and creativity while integrating AI literacy into curricula (Luckin, 2023). Tools like ChatGPT can assist in creating engaging language activities, from summarizing current

events to generating creative writing prompts. Yet, as Millard (2023) notes, no AI can replicate the personal connections and emotional support that teachers provide.

Practical applications in language learning

AI-powered platforms such as Mondly by Pearson offer adaptive learning experiences, fostering engagement and reducing anxiety. These tools use AI to understand learners' intent and context, providing personalized feedback. Flashcards, whether AI-generated or learner-created, remain an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, tools like QuillBot and Twee enable learners to paraphrase, simplify, and analyze complex texts, supporting deeper comprehension.

AI also enhances creativity in the classroom. For example, students can analyze AI-generated poetry or critique essays to refine their understanding of style and argumentation (Waxman, 2023). Visual tools like DALL-E inspire imaginative storytelling, encouraging learners to connect visual and verbal narratives.

Unlocking new opportunities

AI tools facilitate the development of customized assessments and interactive learning materials (Stošić & Malyuga, 2024). Apps such as Filmora provide co-pilots to assist in video creation, while Character. ai allows learners to engage in simulated conversations, enhancing their speaking and listening skills. However, these tools should be used cautiously, particularly with younger learners, to ensure responsible and ethical engagement. In one case, the app prompted a teenage boy to commit suicide (Al-Sibai, 2024).

Conclusion: Balancing innovation and tradition

AI is a powerful tool that, when used effectively, can enhance both teaching and learning. However, its limitations and potential risks necessitate careful integration into education. Educators must strike a balance between leveraging AI's capabilities and preserving the human touch that fosters meaningful relationships and deep learning. By teaching students to explore and critique AI tools, we can empower them to become independent, critical thinkers prepared for the future.

Full disclosure: This paper is based on the author's 2024 TESL Ontario presentation, *Rambling with AI: 17 points of interest along the road*. The presentation, with its 19 academic references and 17 app references was traditionally researched and constructed over several months but, for the purposes of this paper, and in keeping with the theme of the paper, ChatGPT was given the PowerPoint text and the instruction: *As an expert in teaching English as a second language, turn the following notes into an academic article.* The paper was then reviewed by the author and minor changes made and all references re-checked.

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Dr. Ken Beatty, writer and Anaheim University TESOL professor, has a PhD in computer-assisted language learning. He's worked in Asia, the Middle East, and North and South America, lecturing on language teaching and learning from the primary through university levels. Author/co-author of 149 readers and textbooks, he's given 500+ teacher-training sessions and 100+ conference presentations in 35 countries His research focus is on critical and creative thinking.