University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola
Faculty of Education – Bitola

TEACHER
International Journal of Education

Vol. 25
Bitola, May, 2023

Publisher
Faculty of Education–Bitola
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CIP - Cataloging in Publication,
National and University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski"–Skopje.

TEACHER: Journal of the Faculty of Education–Bitola /
[Editorial Board Acad. Grozdanka Gojkov ...] Year XXI, No. 1 (2023) -.
- Bitola: Faculty of Education, 2023 -. - 29 cm., 113 p.

Unspecified

ISSN 1857- 8888 (online)

University “St. Kliment Ohridski“ – Bitola, North Macedonia
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The journal has no commercial nature.

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eISSN: 1857-8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.25.11

ENGLISH TEACHING JUST GOT AN UPGRADE: HOW AI IS REVOLUTIONIZING TESOL

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Abstract

The field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is ever-evolving, and as such exploring the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language teaching and learning is becoming increasingly important. AI-powered language learning tools, such as chatbots, are changing the way students learn and practice English. As these AI-powered chatbots gain momentum, educators worldwide discuss their potential implications on the process of language teaching.

By examining the potential use of chatbots such as ChatGPT, this paper aims to contribute to the limited available literature on AI and TESOL and provide valuable insights for teachers on the benefits and challenges of incorporating AI in their daily work. Discussing the ways chatbots can enhance ESL/EFL classes, as well as the ways they can hinder the learning process, due to issues related to academic dishonesty, this paper highlights both the advantages and the disadvantages of such emerging technologies, as well as AI's practical use in a classroom, in hopes to improve the language learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)*

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to significantly impact the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in various ways. Or so ChatGPT says when asked "How AI can impact TESOL?"

By providing immediate feedback and explaining nuanced notions within seconds, such language models can certainly alter the way we use language, and thus, the way we teach it, as well. AI technologies continue to develop rapidly, and according to recent reports (Educause, 2019), AI use in education is projected to have grown by a staggering 43% in the period between 2018 and 2022. The report predicts that AI use in teaching and learning will, undoubtedly, continue to grow in years to come. Contact North's insights, as cited in Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) support these claims stating that "there is little doubt that the [AI] technology is inexorably linked to the future of higher education".

The application of AI in education (AIEd) has been studied at length for the past 30 years, according to Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019). According to Russel & Norvig (2010), as cited by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), AI originated in the 1950s when a two-month workshop

was organized by John McCarthy at Dartmouth College. In the proposal for the workshop, McCarthy introduced the term "artificial intelligence" for the first time in 1956. Defining AI as “Computers which perform cognitive tasks, usually associated with human minds, particularly learning and problem-solving”, Baker and Smith (2019), also note that AI should not be seen as only technology only, but as an umbrella term that envelops different types of computer learning.

Though there is an abundance of available research to do with AIEd, with recent developments in powerful chatbots such as ChatGPT, the pedagogical aspects of teaching, especially teaching English to speakers of other languages, need to be reexamined on a broader scale. And although there are significant advantages to using AI to aid in education, there are also new ethical concerns and potential hazards that arise as a result of its implementation.

As with any technology or tool, the use of AI models like the aforementioned ChatGPT in academic settings also raises the potential for academic dishonesty. One of the most significant concerns is the possibility of students using AI models to generate or plagiarize content for assignments, papers, or exams. Since AI models like ChatGPT are designed to generate text, they can easily produce content that resembles original work, making it difficult for educators to detect plagiarism.

2. Methodology

This paper follows the qualitative research design that involves a review of existing literature related to the use of artificial intelligence in English Language Teaching and the possible applications of AI in TESOL.

The sources of the literature review include various academic journals, books, and online articles. The review focused on identifying the current trends in AI application in ELT, and the advantages and disadvantages of using AI in teaching. In terms of its validity, this paper aims to include a comprehensive review of materials from a wide range of sources from reputable and diverse authors and publications.

In addition, the paper provides some examples of how AI can be used in different aspects of TESOL, such as conversation, vocabulary, and writing practice. The examples on the researcher’s own experience in teaching ESL.

Overall, this paper aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the potential benefits of AI in TESOL and provide insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating such technologies.

Note: The author declares that no funding was received for the data presented in this paper and that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially bias the conclusions.

3. AI in Language Teaching: Literature Review

As technology advances, AI applications are being developed and implemented in various aspects of language education. By reviewing some of the notable studies published thus far, this paper aims to examine the current state of research on AI in language teaching, focusing on the noted benefits, challenges, and potential future directions for the integration of AI into language teaching and learning.

In a 2018 online webinar on “The Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Either Friend or Foe?” organized by Learning

Technologies SIG, multiple researchers presented their findings in the field. In a brief presentation, Prof. Gilbert Dizon discussed two recent studies that examined the use of Amazon's AI – Alexa in regard to Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. The first small-scale study mentioned, focused on four such students, at one university. The study found that Alexa's ability to understand L2 utterances was moderate, but EFL learners generally had positive views towards its use it being used in classes. The second, larger-scale study had 21 participants and aimed to research the differences between Alexa's and students' intelligibility of L2 speech. It also investigated whether the interaction with Alexa promoted improvements in learners' pronunciation skills. The findings showed that indeed, learners improved their L2 pronunciation through their interaction with Alexa.

A more recent, 2022 blog post by Brent Warner, discusses the potential of AI for language learning and the influence it can potentially have on ELT. Warner's focus is on ChatGPT – the most advanced AI language model to date, developed by OpenAI. Warner claims that ChatGPT's ability to create human-like responses to text-based inputs, could potentially make it a powerful educational tool for language learners. For example, he states that learners could practice their writing and reading skills by having "conversations" with the ChatGPT model in English.

British Council (2023) notes ChatGPT's potential use for automation for certain tasks teachers have could be transformative. Furthermore, according to them, AI has the potential to transform ELT by providing personalized learning experiences and improving the accuracy and efficiency of language assessments. Yet, they also highlight the potential challenges of successfully incorporating AI into the day-to-day teaching process. They mention concerns to do with privacy and data safety and the need for additional teacher training to ensure that AI-powered tools are used as intended.

Jiang's 2022 study on artificial intelligence in the EFL context also notes the same possible benefits to EFL, by using some of the six dominant forms of AI application, including Automatic Evaluation Systems, Neural Machine Translation Tools, Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITSs), AI Chatting Robots, Intelligent Virtual Environment, and Affective Computing (AC) in ITSs.

A small 2018 study by Shin, put such findings into practice and found that using Artificial Intelligence through the Flipped Learning model had a positive impact on students' self-efficacy. The experimental group in the study, the author notes, showed statistically significant improvement in their speaking ability compared to the control group.

4. AI into Practise: How to use ChatGPT when Teaching

In combination with other teaching methods, ChatGPT can be a valuable tool for teachers to supplement their language teaching and provide students with additional practice opportunities.

4.1. Conversations

ChatGPT can be used as a conversational partner for students to practice their speaking and listening skills. This AI model can respond to students' questions and prompts, providing them with an opportunity to practice real-life conversations. Furthermore, ChatGPT can alter its writing style to fit different levels of knowledge. This, in turn, means that even students with lower language levels can potentially use it as a conversation tool. In addition, the model can

quickly define and translate any unknown words, which makes in extremely useful when trying to ensure full vocabulary understanding.

4.2. Writing Practice

By using ChatGPT to get additional writing practice, teachers can effectively provide students with personalized feedback and help them further improve their writing skills. ChatGPT can generate a multitude of writing prompts and can provide feedback on students' written responses within seconds. The model can analyze students' writing and provide suggestions for improvements, in terms of sentence structure and grammar, helping them improve.

Students can also work on bare-bones ChatGPT-generated essays, adding necessary descriptions, improving sentence structure to make it sound more human-like etc.

4.3. Vocabulary Practice

ChatGPT can also generate a plethora of varying vocabulary practice exercises. By imputing specific, target vocabulary words or phrases, teachers can use this AI to generate sentences or paragraphs that incorporate those words, allowing students to practice their understanding and usage in context. In addition, the model can create quizzes within seconds, including a variety of questions such as multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and other similar vocabulary-testing activities.

5. Conclusion

The possible integration of AI in TESOL offers a plethora of exciting possibilities to revolutionize language teaching and learning, as we know it. The use of AI-powered tools, such as ChatGPT, can provide students with much-needed personalized and engaging learning experiences that can help them improve their English language proficiency. By leveraging AI, teachers can offer their students more opportunities for practice, especially when in regard to vocabulary, writing, and conversation practice, and more meaningful feedback. Though AIEd offers an abundance of benefits, it is essential to recognize the possible challenges that can arise, such as issues related to academic dishonesty and the need to balance the use of technology with more traditional pedagogical approaches.

While the research in the particular area of ESL and AI is still limited, the initial studies available thus far indicate that AI can positively impact student outcomes. However, it is important to note that the adoption of AI must be done thoughtfully, with careful consideration given to the specific needs of the learners and the context of the classroom.

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