

Case Study 18: University of Hertfordshire

Using AI to Build Confidence in Language Teaching

What issue were we trying to address and why?

Students studying on the Practical teaching modules of the MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages spent many hours preparing lesson plans and materials for their practical teaching sessions and I wanted them to see if they could utilise digital tools to facilitate their work and enhance their planning.

Also, as students appeared to be using AI with different levels of confidence, I wanted to provide them with a more equitable learning experience whilst at the same time encouraging them to consider the AI outputs critically.

Identifying student language needs and designing and/or identifying relevant material to address these needs forms an important element of the future careers in the field of English Language Teaching of these teacher trainees. Considering all these factors, I therefore designed one assignment worth 30% of the module marks which required my 13 students to use AI and produce a 750-1000 word research paper. They were asked to “evaluate the extent to which you find AI to be a suitable tool to help you carry out a student language needs analysis. Then using an AI tool generate material for classroom use at B1 level and evaluate its suitability”.

What we did

The instructions further guided them to ensure they used their own knowledge of their first language as well as relevant academic sources to carry out the evaluation, to clearly reference the AI tool they used, and to provide the entire dialogue with the AI as an appendix.

To help them with their evaluation, the students were asked to consider the following questions:

- How accurate is AI in its descriptions?
- How much did you have to refine your prompts to improve its outputs?
- To what extent is the needs analysis appropriate?
- Do you recognise the errors it provides in your L1?
- What does literature suggest?
- To what extent would you be able to use the exercises it provides in a class of B1 level students in your chosen context?
- Would you need to do any further work to make the exercises more suitable? If so, what would that work be?

To help train the students in writing helpful prompts and responding to the AI, I ran a 3-hour face-to-face practical session sharing some of the positive elements as well as the pitfalls I had identified and then enabling a hands-on experience whereby the students were

prompting the AI of their choice as I was circulating and guiding them/responding to questions as needed.

I ran a further two online sessions which students could opt into for further practice and queries. The specific evaluation criteria and the guided practice sessions, supported students to effectively interact with AI, refining their prompts to improve outputs.

Who was involved

Subsequent feedback indicates that 10 of the 13 students would use an AI tool to identify learner errors and produce learning materials but all expressed reservations.

Measures of success

Measuring the success of this form of assessment needs to consider more than the use of the AI as the students' academic writing skills also play a crucial role. In terms of student results, those who integrated findings from the AI dialogue with evidence from reading, who made claims which were elaborated on and supported with academic sources and who critically evaluated the AI outputs were the most successful receiving marks over 60%. Generic evaluations which appeared to be completely separate to the interaction with the AI and which showed little to no criticality were not successful.

How do you plan to develop the intervention/activity?

Positive student feedback includes that use of the AI reduces teacher burden and saves time.

Cautious feedback advises users not to depend on AI solely but to use it carefully, for example, taking professional judgement or personal experience into account, being selective and adapting outputs as needed. Students also warned of fake links and the onerous task of verifying the AI responses. It was also felt that the AI lacks cultural perspective and so although it can assist teachers, it cannot fully replace their work. Student feedback thus highlights the potential benefits and limitations of AI, prompting them to consider its role as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for human judgment and cultural insight.

In order to develop this activity further, I plan to incorporate the use of AI into the teaching practice module from the start of the academic year. This will enable the students to practise working with an AI tool at a more leisurely pace and with no assessment attached until later in the programme when they will have had more training opportunities in engaging with the AI and evaluating its usefulness and effectiveness.

To maximise the potential for student success, I will also consider the students' need for appropriate study skills work in academic writing and criticality.

I believe that this case study offers academic staff insights into how integrating AI into teaching modules enhances both technological and pedagogical skills in students, promoting a balanced, critical approach to using AI in education.

By requiring students to evaluate AI tools for language needs analysis and lesson material creation, the study encourages them to combine digital skills with pedagogical knowledge. This dual focus helps enhance their digital literacy as well as improve their ability to critically assess technology in educational contexts.