



Incorporating ChatGPT in the ESL Composition Classroom: A Literature Review and Teacher Experimentation in a Sri Lankan Context

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ABSTRACT

ESL teachers especially in higher education where students have easy access to ChatGPT on their PCs and smartphones are faced with the dilemma on how to harness the sudden and numerous possibilities and potential of ChatGPT and possible harms to the way writing is taught and learnt. When viewed mainly as a threat, ChatGPT can become a taboo word whispered and its functions secretly shared among students and kept out of the teacher's realm. This is a review of the findings from recent research on ChatGPT in education and its impact on language education with a focus on teaching ESL writing. Articles were gathered through an online search for articles published up to 1st June 2023. The search was narrowed down to articles on education, higher education and teaching English composition. The practical suggestions from the literature were implemented and found to be practical and productive. This highlighted the need for integrating ChatGPT in ESL writing activities and for building teacher expertise in this regard.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of Artificial Intelligence based text generators is widespread more than ever before and further accelerated with the release of ChatGPT in November 2022. This rapid expansion has given rise to concerns on the impact it will have on fields such as publishing and education. This paper has chosen to examine the impact of ChatGPT in the area of language education especially ESL (English as a Second Language) in higher education with particular focus on writing and composition. As ChatGPT is a convenient text generator producing well organised texts meeting the standards of writing simply with instruction provided by the user, there is a high likelihood for students to become dependent on AI tools such as ChatGPT. This could be detrimental to students' initiative to learn and develop their English writing skills and creativity. Thus this paper aims to explore ways to regulate the use of ChatGPT among ESL writing students in order to convert its use to one which is beneficial and meeting educational objectives of ESL writing. Another concern is ESL teachers continuing with traditional forms of language education and failing to upgrade themselves on the potential of AI tools such as ChatGPT. With the widespread use of ChatGPT among students in higher education, an imbalance in AI awareness and proficiency between teachers and students can be created, further increasing the chances of 'misuse' or unproductive usage of this AI tool for education, with little monitoring or guidance by their teachers.

However, when examining the functionalities of ChatGPT, it shows that it has potential to be a powerful educational tool. As highlighted by Mhlanga (2023), this paper too 'argues that Chat GPT has a significant amount of untapped potential to improve the accessibility and quality of education.' With special yet relevant focus on ChatGPT and English composition teaching, this paper attempts to show the potential of ChatGPT

to ESL writing in higher education and ways to harness it.

1.1 Literature Review

Teubner et al (2023) highlight that 'The effectiveness of LLMs as a productivity-boosting tool will undoubtedly be contingent on a user's proficiency in utilizing it.' This observation applies to both teachers and students as consumers of ChatGPT in the ESL educational context. The effective use of ChatGPT to develop ESL writing will depend on the teachers' and students' awareness of its functionalities and the effective manipulation of them towards ESL writing development. This paper in fact, calls for productive collaboration between humans and technology. Liu et al (2023) highlight 'In such collaboration, humans provide domain expertise, creativity, and decision-making abilities, while machines provide automation, scalability, and computing power.' (p. 19)

Atlas (2023) provides guidelines on how expertise and decision making harness the potential of ChatGPT to meet educational goals in higher education. Atlas explores the impact of ChatGPT on developing English writing skills. Using expertise on grammar, punctuation, conventions of creative writing, the user is able to prompt ChatGPT in the following ways to get constructive feedback from it. Examples of prompts provided by Atlas (2023) are given below.

An example of a prompt to get feedback on the grammar and punctuation of a piece of writing (Atlas, 2023)

- "Please provide feedback on the grammar and punctuation of this essay on the topic of 'The importance of education'" (p.51)

An example of a prompt for creative writing (Atlas, 2023)

- "Write a script for a comedy about a group of friends on a road trip" (p.57)

The automation of getting the necessary product with minimal human effort and time, the scalability, that is, producing texts of varying lengths and difficulty levels and the remarkable processing or computing power of ChatGPT completing tasks in a matter of minutes are tangible benefits for its human consumers.

It is clear from the examples from Atlas (2023) that consumers can exercise their expertise, creativity and decision making skills to craft and implement their prompts through ChatGPT. To achieve the most productive outcome, users can incorporate the task context and intent, the motivation or purpose, the expected structure and key ideas as well as the appropriate action word such as 'write' or 'evaluate' (White et. al., 2023). The resulting texts, generated by ChatGPT, can become a source of composition that can be discussed in class as models or examples (AlAfnan et al, 2023).

The crafting of the prompt or instruction given to ChatGPT is an area under study and is identified as prompt or cue engineering. There, it discusses the ways to modify or 'engineer' the instructions to ensure the generation of a tailor made purpose built text meeting the required objectives. In doing this ChatGPT can be 'utilised to develop instructional content, enhance student engagement and interaction, and customise learning experiences' (Mhlanga, 2023)

The discussion on ChatGPT and its impact has started around the world and it is something that Sri Lanka and its education system, especially its higher education system, should take into consideration, given the considerable numbers of entrants to state universities reporting low English language proficiency (LEP). In LEP settings there is a tendency for technological supports to be misused simply as a means to an end without paying attention to the learning outcomes of the language activities particularly writing.

Further, Warschauer et. al (2023) highlight, 'By facilitating conversations about how to use AI in the classroom, we can better support second language learners' writing development and prepare these students for a world that increasingly values one's ability to understand and use AI.' (p.2) This highlights the importance of this integration in Sri Lankan education setting.

Moreover, referring to ChatGPT, Yan et al (2023) observed, the tool also showcased an automatic workflow which have significantly automated the workflow of writing, such as composing, assessment, and proofreading, as noted in applications such as Grammarly and Quillbot that could maximize the efficiency in composing writing. Thus integration has been observed to be assisting the composition process in the classroom rather than disrupting.

This paper is guided by the following questions.

1. How does the adoption of ChatGPT affect traditional teaching and learning of ESL writing?
2. How does the use of ChatGPT impact the learning outcomes of students?
3. How can composition teachers be equipped in the integration of ChatGPT?

2. METHOD

The research design was a literature review of articles published up to June 1, 2023 containing the key words ChatGPT, ESL Writing, Composition that appeared on the search engine Google scholar. After a process of filtering based on the main focus of each article, articles that discussed the impact of AI on education, higher education and English writing or composition were selected. The articles were then examined for insights they provided on challenging situations created in the educational setting by ChatGPT and their

recommendations on teaching learning practices to incorporate and circumvent those challenges. For the purpose of this research, the researcher limited the articles to a maximum of 11 research papers, distributing them among the themes of ChatGPT in Education, ChatGPT in Higher Education and ChatGPT in English Composition.

A subsequent search for articles discussing ChatGPT in the Sri Lankan education context, yielded two articles published in June and August of 2023 that specify clear guidelines on controlled incorporation in education and calling for the attention of decision makers and education practitioners to make way for the smooth inclusion of Generative AI in the education setting of Sri Lanka in both school and higher education. In this regard, the need to learn from best practices both international and local was also highlighted [Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (a); Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (b)]. Furthermore, a paper presented in June 2023 presented the findings of a survey conducted with 93 students revealing the growing use of ChatGPT among Sri Lankan ESL students (Samarasinghe & Prasangani, 2023). This paper further mentioned that the student participants were aware of the ethicality aspect of ChatGPT use.

2.1 Example of actual incorporation

In a composition class, for the topic paragraph organization, the research teacher found that when students were assigned writing tasks, there were instances unguided copying of ChatGPT text with no creative effort or incorporation of learning principles. This was a hidden practice not revealed or openly mentioned to the teacher. To prevent this from becoming a repeated occurrence, the teacher researcher brought ChatGPT out into a prominent place in the classroom, discussing it openly and openly mentioning it on the displayed PPT slides in activity instructions. This was done to leverage ChatGPT from being a secretive device used by some s to a tool recommended

by the teacher used by the whole class under the guidance and direction of the teacher to fulfil the lesson objectives.

Under the teacher's instruction the students used the prompt given by the teacher to generate texts using ChatGPT. This prompt included the writing theme, the required language features and purpose. After generating, the students were required to copy the text onto their books. This was done to ensure continuity of the ChatGPT text for later language activities rather than be a text that is quickly used and forgotten as it may be in the students' attempts at using ChatGPT for assigned writing tasks. The copied text was used in the follow up exercise which required the students to examine the generated text for the expected grammar feature and to understand its use and function within the sentence structure.

The students were asked to prepare an original text promoting a world famous city. Interest in this activity was created by a class discussion on places they like to visit using a song video on this city. The students were then required to refer to the previous ChatGPT generated passages to create the new one. In these ways the students were disengaged from the habit of simply generating a text to a required writing task by giving them inspiring context and instructions yet incorporating ChatGPT by allowing the use of previously generated texts as reference.

Taking another step to integrate ChatGPT, students were instructed to create their writing as a digital text that can be evaluated by ChatGPT. The detailed comprehensive analysis ChatGPT produced for a student's writing was discussed in the class. This functionality of ChatGPT may not have been familiar to the students who were mainly familiar with the use of it to generate texts or as they called it 'getting the answers from ChatGPT' to any ESL composition task. The necessary evaluation prompt was created by the teacher and students typed that instruction into ChatGPT as the teacher

dictated. This may have demonstrated to the students an instance of prompt engineering as they saw the instruction to be different to a writing prompt. Using these evaluation students were able to make improvements to their first draft.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature revealed that when adequate awareness of ChatGPT is coupled with teacher creativity ChatGPT can be effectively and efficiently integrated into the English composition classroom. Streamlining the integration with proper guidelines and models will make this an ethical, productive and feasible process. This fact was observable in the trial classroom application (see diagram) which showed that this integration can support grammar analysis and provide writing examples. Reinforcing the idea gleaned from the literature review on the value of learning from currently available best practices, there were clear parallels between the trial classroom application and the suggested lesson plan in referred literature. With clear guidelines on AI technology, the development and mainstreaming of feasible ways of classroom application such as improving prompt engineering, there is immediate potential for English composition teachers to start using ChatGPT as an educational tool and experience clear benefits.

The following is a summary of some of the key thoughts identified

AR-TICLE TITLE	KEY TAKEAWAYS
Welcome to the era of chatgpt et al. the prospects of large language models	'Productive use of ChatGPT is contingent on a user's proficiency in utilizing it'
ChatGPT for higher education and professional development: A guide to conversational AI	To generate feedback on grammar Produce models to follow

The Value of Open AI and Chat GPT for the current learning environments and the potential future uses	To create instructional content on grammar and vocabulary To provide individualised student tailored feedback
How chat GPT can transform autodidactic experiences and open education	'Universities should take a proactive rather than a reactive approach, and adopt AI technology in the realm of education, learning, and assessment.'
ChatGPT for Good? On Opportunities and Challenges of Large Language Models for Education	'In addition, a clear strategy within educational systems and a clear pedagogical approach ... to integrate and take full advantage of large language models in learning settings and teaching curricula.'
Can large language models provide feedback to students? A case study on ChatGPT	'ChatGPT is capable of generating more detailed feedback that fluently and coherently summarizes students' performance than human instructors'

4. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the ESL community needs to keep up with these rapid developments and invent suitable teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches. As suggested in the guidelines [Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (a); Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (b)] educators can find standardised ways to 'Use ChatGPT as a complementary tool' 'to aid ... under the supervision and control of human experts.' in order to enhance student Learning through AI [Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (b)]. This paper supports the view 'educators should utilize them in class and lead discussions with students about their advantages and disadvantages' [Perera & Lankathilake, 2023 (a)]. For instance, this can be done through a use of Chat GPT to generate unlimited model answers for language analysis on any live topic of students' interest followed by opportunities for creative composition practice building on the generated models. Preparation of teacher manuals and model lesson plans that demonstrate these possibilities and that are field tested and available for implementation in the classroom are needed.

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