Chapter 4

Demystifying the Unknown:
ChatGPT and Foreign Language Classrooms in the Voices of EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Since its introduction, artificial intelligence (AI) has had inevitable effects on education including foreign language learning. ChatGPT, as the most advanced form of AI, has brought about many concerns and opportunities for both language teachers and learners. This chapter tries to probe more deeply into the concerns expressed over the use of ChatGPT in foreign language classrooms in the voices of teachers with an emphasis on finding ways to address those concerns. The results of the inductive analysis of interview data revealed a new concern in addition to the previously identified concerns, i.e. threats to teachers' and students' creativity. It is concluded that ChatGPT, with all its differences, can be regarded as a disrupter of a constant, traditional routine rather than a disrupter of education itself and that, to deal with it, like any other new technology, the only way ahead of teachers is adaptation and changing threats into opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Open AI's newest chatbot called ChatGPT has swept the world of education since its release in December, 2022 (and March 2023 for ChatGPT-4). ChatGPT, in full chat generative pre-trained transformer, is an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot developed by the Microsoft-supported company OpenAI, which as a cutting-edge AI

large language model (an advanced machine learning model) is not only capable of natural language processing or understanding natural language but also generating coherent, human speech-like, and contextually relevant replies and interactions in a chat-like or conversational way based on what it has learned from training data and the prompts the interactor has given to it. Upon its introduction, ChatGPT created many concerns among educators regarding its misuse in scientific research integrity (Cotton et al., 2023; Shiri, 2023) and education (Rospigliosi, 2023) to the extent that ChatGPT-4 has been banned from some educational settings and institutes all around the world. In this regard, foreign or second language classrooms seem to be a special case as grammar accuracy, writing, correction and edition, paraphrasing and proofreading are important tasks and assignments in language classes and ChatGPT has the capability to be used (and/or misused) for these purposes. In addition to the abovementioned activities, ChatGPT can also be threatful to students' development of critical thinking, creative thinking and higher order thinking skills as the necessary requirements of many writing, speaking, reading and listening activities and tasks (Putra et al, 2023). There are also concerns about students' cheating and misconduct. There are also worries about chatbots taking the place of foreign language teachers (Brown et al., 2020).

In contrast to these concerns and worries, some other studies have emphasized the use of earlier AI-powered chatbots and ChatGPT as being beneficial to language learners in triggering language learners' interest and lowering their anxiety and shyness (Fryer et al., 2017; Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Gallacher et al., 2018; Kohnke, 2022), helping their thinking skills (Rusandi et al., 2023), providing them with a range of conversational practices and a variety of expressions, questions and vocabulary not available from human interlocutors and adjusted personalized linguistic input and immediate feedback, (Huang et al., 2022; Kuhail et al., 2023), helping in creating an authentic, interactive language-learning environment (Chiu et al., 2023) and as a result, enhancing their engagement and language skills and capabilities (Kohnke, 2023; Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Kohnke, 2022).

These controversies over the use of chatbots and ChatGPT have created a vague situation wherein teachers may not feel assured about the effects of the new technology. Taking into account these different ideas, debates and concerns and considering the emerging literature on the effect of ChatGPT on education in general and language teaching and learning in particular, this chapter tries to probe more deeply into the topics of AI and generative language models including ChatGPT in foreign language classes by including the voices and concerns of foreign language teachers and trying to find answers to those concerns.

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