

LEVERAGING AI IN ESL COURSE BOOK DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The development of English as a Second Language (ESL) course books for young learners often presents significant challenges, particularly in sourcing texts that engage children both linguistically and culturally. Prior to the advent of ChatGPT, the author, a teacher educator, worked diligently to assist student teachers in creating mini-course materials through manual editing and refinement. However, the introduction of ChatGPT has markedly transformed this process, enhancing the ability to adapt texts, lower their difficulty levels, integrate essential grammar items, and pinpoint engaging content. This paper aims to share the author's experiences in developing materials for ESL classroom tasks. It begins with an overview of the study's context and a review of relevant literature. Following this, the paper outlines the strategies employed with student teachers for material production without the aid of AI. Lastly, it details the processes utilized to integrate ChatGPT into material development. The presentation aims to illuminate the innovative aspects of this approach and underscore the advantages of AI-assisted course book creation.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, Course Books, Prompts, Student Teachers.

Introduction

Those engaged in preparation of English as a Second Language (ESL) Course Books for Young Learners are fairly familiar with the difficulty of finding texts that stimulate children linguistically and culturally. Prior to the availability of AI-based tools, material producers used to work meticulously writing, and re-writing drafts of the content which is prepared usually through a collaborative effort before sending them to the printer. But even after such diligent efforts, it is common knowledge that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers tend to complain that the text books don't address local needs.

Background to the Study

Sensitising prospective teachers undergoing teacher education programmes to the dearth of appropriate materials have necessitated the inclusion of materials production in the syllabus. The investigator, a teacher educator by profession in 2010, provided tasks for own student teachers which included rewriting of a prescribed course book material to suit learner needs. But twelve years later, the arrival of ChatGPT brought about a remarkable change in the process of familiarizing student teachers with creation of suitable teaching materials. What follows is an attempt to share the proposed strategy for sensitizing the present generation of student teachers to exploit ChatGPT both for creation of appropriate materials and also for sensitizing to the possibilities of producing text types.

Problem

Developing the ability in student teachers to produce specimen teaching materials for ESL classrooms prior to the arrival of ChatGPT had been a challenge as many were found to lack the ability to use the English language creatively. The materials produced by the student teachers though satisfactory,

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lacked fineness. Today at a time when many teachers tend to see ChatGPT as a threat to the very process of education (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023), the investigator a teacher educator argues in this paper that a discreet use of ChatGPT can help sensitize student teachers to the nuances of the language. In brief, this paper tries to show how ChatGPT produced materials can refine a given text, lower its difficulty level, and create interesting text types.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the possibility of shifting from the traditional dependence on manual and collaborative production of specimen ELT materials to creation of ChatGPT based materials. So the following specific objectives have been listed:

- Review the nature of student created materials for teaching English.
- Refine the student created materials using ChatGPT.
- Explore creation of different types of texts based on a given content using ChatGPT.
- Identify the advantages of the materials produced using ChatGPT.

Brief Review of Studies

Teaching ESL students can be particularly challenging when prescribed Course Books fail to match the linguistic competence of the target group. While serving as a teacher educator, the investigator noted that certain texts were found to be difficult for transaction in the classroom. With a view to addressing this issue, practice in materials production based on Learning Outcomes were introduced as part of the teacher education curriculum. Baradaran & Safarazi (2011) proposes a way of going ahead. To them scaffolding is thought of as using steps in a process, modelling the steps, and then giving students the opportunity to try it themselves. And to them, such a strategy should be prepared with the mindset of gradual release after a student has reached a predetermined point in his writing which is, controlled by the instructor. This can serve as a guideline for educators keen on developing the ability in student teachers to create specimen ELT materials.

A systematic review of research on the use of artificial intelligence in English language teaching and learning by Sharadgah, & Sa'di (2022) found that there is a promising future for AI in ELT. Idapalapati (2024) drawing on studies on the use of AI for ELT found that the usefulness of a technological application is dependent on the resourcefulness of the user, which in turn is oriented by their understanding and perception of the technology. And according to Kerr, interesting texts can be generated with GPT-3 when the prompts are crafted in careful detail, but this requires creative human imagination. Crafting such prompts requires practice, trial and error, and it requires knowledge of the intended readers.

This study draws on the potential of the AI-based tool ChatGPT for creating materials but researchers like Hockly (2023) and Yeo (2023) cautions that users must be aware of the tool's limitations and know how to use them critically. In short an awareness of functions of the tool and how to interact with by constructing appropriate prompts and responses are crucial.

Methodology

This is an empirical, analytical and qualitative study aimed at exploring the scope for creating new text types using the AI-based tool namely ChatGPT. Following a review of the student created content, the investigator feeds the same into ChatGPT with a Prompt for creating improved versions and new text types focussing on difficulty level and element of interest. Finally, a review of the materials produced from a pedagogical perspective is attempted.

The study particularly focuses on the poem 'Women' by the American Poet Laureate, Louise Bogan prescribed for study in the Standard IX Kerala Reader, English. The poem was selected owing to the reason that the vocabulary and syntactic structure of the poem was found to be particularly difficult for transaction in the Standard IX English class as it did not match the linguistic ability of the learners.⁽¹⁾ This resulted in a failure to realize the very objective of teaching poems namely to read and enjoy. Such a situation necessitated student teachers to produce a revised version of the poem capable of communicating the message of the poem. Hence, student teachers were assigned the task of producing simplified versions of the poem by maintaining the aesthetics of the original poem by Louise Bogan.

Discussion and Findings

The original text based on which the first refining task given to student teachers was on the poem entitled 'Women' by Louise Bogan in the academic year 2009-2010. (Appendix I) The first version is by a student teacher who had joined the BEd course after a Post Graduate Degree in English Language and Literature in 2009(Appendix II). The second version is by a practising primary school teacher who had joined the BEd course in 2009. (Appendix III). A review of the language use in the poems created by the two student teachers without the assistance of AI-based tools revealed the following drawbacks:

*The version in Appendix 2 by Ms.I has inconsistent verb forms and ambiguous referents. (2) The repetitive structure and absence of imagery are aesthetic flaws.(3)

* The version by Ms.J in Appendix III has inconsistent use of Conjunctions and improper use of articles. (4) Lack of cohesive imagery and repetitive structure and tone are aesthetic flaws.(5)

The flaws identified cannot be treated as a grave mistake because the student teachers are native speakers and use English only for academic purposes. Further, they have not been trained in creative writing.

In order to improve upon the two versions fourteen years later (2023), with the launch of ChatGPT, the investigator prepared prompts for revising the two versions. The prompt was as follows: Revise the given poem improving language use and aesthetic quality.

The ChatGPT revised version of the poem by Ms.I is included in Appendix IV and of Ms.J in Appendix V.

A review of the ChatGPT versions will reveal that language use and aesthetic quality have been significantly enhanced through careful word choices, imagery, and rhythmic flow. The first poem, 'Women', has been elevated by incorporating vivid imagery and a more lyrical tone, emphasizing the contrast between the constraints imposed on women and their inherent resilience. Phrases like "caught in a whirlwind of tasks" and "flowing, unwavering, unto the last" deepen emotional resonance. In the second poem, improvements include more vivid sensory details, such as "the koel's sweet song" and "the monsoon's fervent rush," which enrich the imagery and create a more immersive experience. The structure has also been modified to create varied line lengths and rhythms, enhancing the overall reading experience. Each revision aims to evoke a stronger emotional impact while maintaining the original themes, ultimately crafting a more polished and engaging presentation.

One of the topics for study in the current syllabus of the BEd Course in English particularly in universities in Kerala is Writing Skills and four types of writing namely Persuasive, Narrative, Expository and Descriptive. Prior to the arrival of ChatGPT specimen passages of the four kinds of writing were either prepared by the teacher educator or downloaded from free sites on the Internet. But now a mere prompt on ChatGPT can help generate the four kinds of writing. The four kinds of paragraphs generated using ChatGPT based on the content of the poem 'Women' is included in Appendix VI.

From hindsight the study revealed that ChatGPT generated material can help learners grasp aspects related to language use. These include:

- The use of language in different contexts and how the same idea can be expressed differently depending on audience and situation.
- Provide feedback that can guide learners to improve their language skills by identifying grammatical and syntactical errors.
- Expand the language repertoire of learners by introducing new vocabulary and phrases.
- Expose learners to various writing techniques.
- Provide cultural insights as language is closely tied to culture thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the context.
- Help learners clarify complex language points related to syntactic structures.

The study has shown how through an incorporation of ChatGPT into language learning it is possible to create an interactive and dynamic learning environment, making language acquisition an engaging and multidimensional process. This in a way underscores the findings of a recent study (Wang,2025) which affirmed the remarkable impact of ChatGPT-4 on English communication and its beneficial effect for language learning.

Implications of the Study

The study suggests that integrating AI tools like ChatGPT in language education can lead to improved language proficiency by providing personalized learning experiences and immediate feedback. By allowing learners to explore various forms and styles of text, the study implies that ChatGPT can foster critical thinking and creativity in language use, encouraging learners to engage more deeply with the material.

Scope for Further Study

Future research could involve longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of using ChatGPT on language acquisition compared to traditional methods. Investigating how best to integrate ChatGPT into existing educational curricula could help educators leverage AI tools effectively. Further studies could focus on how learners at various proficiency levels interact with ChatGPT, aiming to understand its impact on beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners.

Limitations of the Study

The study has the obvious limitation of focussing only on reproduction of different text types using a single given content. Moreover, no attempt was made to incorporate quantitative methods to measure improvements in language skills, such as vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and writing fluency, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of ChatGPT's impact.

Summing up

The study demonstrates that the incorporation of ChatGPT for materials production and proper student training, can serve as a good feedback tool in large-size writing classes and aligns with the findings of a recent study by Mahapatra (2024). Perhaps the greatest advantage is that ChatGPT helps learners become attuned to the nuances of language use and its potential for enhancing existing texts. More significantly this approach allows users to generate different forms of the same text by crafting appropriate prompts, such as asking for a different generic form for a given poem. Though the study has affirmed the scope of ChatGPT for improving student language use, the investigator would like to conclude by quoting the words of Javier and Moorhouse (2023) in their study of secondary school language learners on the productive and critical use of ChatGPT: "As generative AI tools are an emerging technology, studies must look at the benefits and pitfalls of using them in language teaching and learning".

Notes

- The classroom here refers to the typical English classroom in Government-run schools in Kerala State.
- The phrase "When they should enjoy, they don't do" and "When they should rest, they don't do" is awkwardly constructed. The use of "do" in these lines is unnecessary and creates confusion. In the line, "Which is absent in men," it is unclear what "which" refers to.
- The repetition of "busy" in the line "They are busy; busy / Always busy" is stylistically simplistic and can detract from the poem's aesthetic quality. Further, the poem fails to utilize strong imagery and figurative language that would draw in the reader emotionally. Phrases like "the barriers of their life" and "screams and cries" are generic.
- In the line "They use against themselves the benevolence / That does no one any good," the phrase could be considered unclear or awkward due to its structure. And it should be "wielding an axe" for proper article usage if referring to a general tool.
- The imagery in the poem is somewhat disjointed. For example, "tight hot cell of their hearts" contrasts with the nature imagery in the following lines but lacks a strong connection between these two themes. Further the aesthetic quality is affected through the somewhat monotonous tone and can feel repetitive due to the similar sentence structures and themes throughout.

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Appendix I

Women

Women have no wilderness in them,
 They are provident instead,
 Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts
 To eat dusty bread.

They do not see cattle cropping red winter grass,
 They do not hear
 Snow water going down under culverts
 Shallow and clear.

They wait, when they should turn to journeys,
 They stiffen, when they should bend.
 They use against themselves that benevolence
 To which no man is friend.

They cannot think of so many crops to a field
 Or a clean wood cleft by an axe.
 Their love is an eager meaninglessness
 Too tense or too lax.

They hear in any whisper that speaks to them

A shout and a cry.
As like as not, when they take life over their door-sill
They should let it go by.

-Louise Bogan

Kerala Reader, English, Part 1, Standard IX, Govt. of Kerala, Dept. of Education, 2010.p.61

Appendix II Women

They are tamed and
Careful in planning
Satisfied within the
Barriers of their life

They are busy; busy
Always busy
They haven't time
To see the beauty-
Outside the barriers
Outside the limit.

When they should enjoy, they don't do
When they should rest, they don't do
But they 'do' the kindness in apt time
Which is absent in men.

They are free from farming
And cutting down the woods
And free from receiving
Love from others.

They can hear
Only shouts and cry
They don't care all these shouts
And will flow
Unto the last.

-Ms.I

Appendix III Women

Women have no taste for wilderness
They'd rather play safe
Happy in the tight hot cell of their hearts
To eat stale food.

They do not hear the Koel singing in the forest
They do not hear
The monsoon gushing down the culverts
Shallow and clear.

They wait when they should set forth
They never bend like a reed in the wind
They use against themselves the benevolence
That does no one any good.

They cannot think of practical things
Taming the land for crops or wielding the axe
Their love is eager but meaningless
Either too tense or too lax.

They are always apprehensive
Fearing every shout and whisper
When they should grab life with both ends
They just let it slip.

-Ms.J

Appendix IV

ChatGPT revised poem of Ms.I

****Women****

They move with grace,
Mindful in their crafting,
Content within the confines
Of lives quietly lived.

Caught in a whirlwind of tasks;
Always busy, ever striving—
They barely glimpse the beauty
Beyond the walls they've built,
Outside the limits that bind them.

When joy beckons, they turn away;
When rest calls, they press on.
Yet, in the stillness, they offer kindness—
A gift often missing in men's hands.

They are free from tilling the earth,
From felling trees in the dusk,
And yet, they seek love's embrace,
A treasure so often withheld.

Instead, they hear only the cries and the shouts;
Yet these echoes are met with indifference,
As they surge forward, resilient
Flowing, unwavering, unto the last.

Appendix V

ChatGPT revised poem of Ms.J

****Women****

Women shun the wild expanse,
Choosing instead the comforts of the familiar,
Content, it seems, within the heated confines
Of their guarded hearts,
Nourishing themselves on stale remnants of life.

They do not hear the koel's sweet song
Floating through the trees,
Nor the monsoon's fervent rush,
Trickling through the culverts,
Shallow and clear, a melody lost.

They linger when they ought to venture forth;
 Unlike the yielding reed that bends with the breeze,
 They wield their own kindness like a shield,
 But its weight serves only to bind them.

Practicality eludes their thoughts—
 The soil waits to be tamed,
 The axe remains untouched.
 Their love, though eager, often falters,
 Too tightly wound or slack in its embrace.

Always on edge,
 They fear every shout and whisper,
 When boldness should urge them to seize life,
 They let precious moments slip through their fingers.

Appendix VI

For text types generated using ChatGPT based on the content of the poem 'Women'.

1. Expository Writing: Expository writing aims to inform and explain. In this style, the focus is on presenting facts, ideas, and information in a clear and concise manner.

Women are often described as having a unique wilderness within them. This inner wilderness represents their emotions, thoughts, and complexities. They possess a sense of providence, a natural inclination to take care of others and themselves. It's like they have a secret garden within their hearts, where they find contentment in the simplest of things, like eating plain, dusty bread. This poem paints a picture of how women, in their own way, navigate life's challenges with resilience and strength.

2. Descriptive Writing: Descriptive writing aims to create vivid and sensory-rich images in the reader's mind. It focuses on painting a detailed picture using sensory language.

Picture in your mind's eye a hidden wilderness within every woman. It's a mysterious, untamed landscape, filled with emotions and secrets. This wilderness is like a tightly sealed, hot cell nestled within their hearts, where every feeling, every thought resides. Imagine women savoring the taste of simple, dusty bread, finding contentment in its humble sustenance. The poem also invites you to visualize scenes of nature, from cattle grazing in red winter grass to the sound of clear, shallow snowwater flowing under culverts. It's a world rich in sensory experiences.

3. Persuasive Writing: Persuasive writing seeks to convince the reader of a particular point of view or to take a specific action. It often employs emotional appeals and strong arguments.

Consider the idea that women possess a unique and valuable inner wilderness. This inner world, filled with empathy and nurturing instincts, is a precious resource. It's a reminder that we should appreciate and respect the strength and resilience women bring to our lives. The poem suggests that women sometimes hold back from pursuing their dreams and ambitions, emphasizing the importance of encouraging them to embrace life's journeys and bend with the winds of change. It's a call to honor and support the women in our lives.

4. Narrative Writing: Narrative writing tells a story, often with characters and a plot. It aims to engage the reader through storytelling.

Once upon a time, there was a mysterious wilderness that existed within every woman. This inner landscape was a place of both beauty and complexity, a realm of emotions and thoughts hidden from the world. In this hidden garden, women found solace and contentment, much like the comfort of eating plain, dusty bread. As the story unfolds, we encounter scenes of nature, from cattle grazing in red winter grass to the soothing sound of snow water trickling under culverts. Within this narrative, we discover the struggles and triumphs of women as they navigate life's challenges, and we learn the importance of embracing life's opportunities as they arise.

