



Ask a TESOL Leader: “Should I be worried about ChatGPT?”

by [Cynthia Wiseman](#)

Question: “How is ChatGPT being used in ELT? Should I be worried about my students using it?”

[ChatGPT](#) is generating a lot of buzz these days. Though [OpenAI](#), the company that developed this artificial intelligence (AI) neural network, has been working on this large language model for years, access to this latest iteration ChatGPT-4 just became available to the general public in November 2022. Since then, ChatGPT use has gone viral (pun intended). How are instructors and students using ChatGPT? And should we as instructors be concerned about it? Just out of professional curiosity, I created a [survey](#) for educators to see who is using ChatGPT, how they are using it, and what they think about it. So far, the results have been interesting!

First off, students are already using ChatGPT. English language learners, like their English-fluent counterparts, are finding ChatGPT helps them proofread their texts to express their ideas more accurately through its essay revision capability, for example grammar checks and citation suggestions. Some students are even using ChatGPT to generate a first draft of an assignment. Learners are also using it for practicing English conversation in chats on various topics. Having access to this powerful AI resource seems to motivate our students and helps lower their stress levels in reading and writing in English.

Teachers have also logged onto OpenAI and are using ChatGPT as aids in [lesson planning](#), quiz and rubric development, materials development, and [adaptation of text to different reading levels](#) to support individualized instruction. For the research required for professional development, instructors are finding ChatGPT to be a powerful tool in brainstorming ideas, summarizing research, and outlining and organizing an academic paper. In seconds, given the right prompt, ChatGPT can summarize the research on any topic, a task that might have taken an in-service teacher working on their master's a year to accomplish pre-ChatGPT.

Given all these advantages, what's the big deal? What should we be concerned about? The flip side of the advantages that come with the power and efficiency of AI are not yet clear. For many, plagiarism is a major concern. Some teachers have already received AI-generated texts that were essentially rewrites of the directions for the assignment. Other teachers in anticipation of these situations are proactively setting guidelines and directions for the use of ChatGPT, such as by inviting students to bring in AI-generated drafts as the first step in the writing process. As life-

long learners ourselves, we educators have some notion of what learning is. It takes emotional and mental engagement with the context, ideas, or other people to learn and produce knowledge. We believe that the efforts put into shaping and honing ideas and in rewriting and revising texts are essential to learning. Is crafting a specific prompt to feed into ChatGPT and reading through the output enough engagement for learning to occur? Will students who rely more and more on ChatGPT continue to develop cognitive abilities and critical thinking skills?

Though some English language instructors are leery of this new technology, others are ready to embrace it. Instructors will have to use ChatGPT themselves to understand how AI can be used to support teaching and learning. Educational institutions will have to provide guidelines, carefully revising plagiarism policies to clearly define AI-generated texts and define plagiarism to include the submission of such texts as one's own without citing the source.

Whether the concerns outweigh the benefits is still open for debate. But one thing is clear: ChatGPT, like the cell phone, the internet, and the personal computer before it, is here to stay. We can't turn the clock back, and so we have to find a way to harness this powerful technology.

What do *you* think? Please fill out the brief 5-minute [survey](#) and share your thoughts!

Do you have a question for the TESOL leadership? Email your question to tc@tesol.org with the subject line "Ask a TESOL Leader" and it could be featured in this column!

[Cynthia Wiseman](#) is a professor in academic literacy & linguistics at the Borough of Manhattan Community College at City University of New York. She has been exploring ChatGPT-4 after attending a conference session on AI and has used ChatGPT with students in her Introduction to Linguistics and Language and Culture classes. She has been an English language teacher and teacher trainer for more than 40 years, working in the United States and internationally. She served as a Fulbright Scholar in Vietnam at Pham Van Dong University in Central Vietnam and conducted a study on the use of the communicative approach in ELT in China while working there as a teacher trainer. She earned a doctorate in applied linguistics from Teachers College, Columbia University with a concentration on evaluation and assessment. Dr. Wiseman currently serves on the board of directors of TESOL International Association.