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Creating Interactive English Language Learning Using LLM in Higher Education

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Abstract

Large Language Models (LLMs) have influenced higher education, educational institutions, educators and students. Contributions of LLMs have been widely discussed in the literature, which include easing out mechanical tasks for educators leaving them with time to focus on higher skills and providing them with creative alternatives for classrooms. However, concerns over the use of LLMs have also been raised. Reportedly, these are thought to pose a threat to the traditional methods of teaching and learning, bringing in issues concerning human bias, discrimination, ownership, copyrights, consent, and privacy. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are struggling to manoeuvre in this shift. This work discusses the Linguistic Empowerment Cell, one of its kind in the Indian landscape, and how AI and LLM support can aid students in their English language learning and enhance their communication skills.

Keywords: Large Language Models (LLMs), English Language Teaching, Artificial Intelligence, Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction

With a surge in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the new LLM tools for academic purposes are changing by the hour. This emergence of LLMs marks a critical moment for higher education by introducing a paradigm shift, one that is reshaping pedagogy, research, and the role of academic institutions (Xu et al., 2024). AI assistants are reshaping the higher education landscape by transforming institutions and educators (Schön et al., 2023). LLMs have rapidly expanded tools, aimed at student support, teacher growth, and reimagining of academic assessment.

LLMs are increasingly used as tools for study assistance, offering personalised learning, pathways, real-time problem-solving and automated feedback for students (Xu et al., 2024). According to Wang et al. (2024), the systems can adapt to individual learning styles, provide targeted guidance on complex topics and act as tireless tutors, enhancing student engagement and learning efficiency. AI assistants provide indefinite support to add to the students' existing knowledge by

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building on their prior knowledge. Moreover, Schön et al. (2023) believe that "these systems are tailored to the students' learning patterns and pace. In this sense, AI serves as an Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS)". Few researchers feel that LLMs are boosting the output by easing out administrative and pedagogical tasks of teachers by producing course materials, helping them in creating outlines for lesson plans and most importantly, in achieving automatic grading of assignments, leaving them time to focus on higher-order tasks (Schön et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Several scholars have also raised ethical concerns about LLMs (Schön et al., 2023). These include discrimination since LLMs can learn human biases or discriminatory answers, depending on the inputs received. Other concerns include acknowledgement, such as ownership and copyrights, as the original sources are not shared or provided; and lastly, concerns like consent and privacy, since the data may include information shared with usage, restrictions or without explicit consent, leading to a breach in information leakage. LLMs are posing a threat to the traditional assessment methods as well. They generate human-like text but also present an opportunity to move towards a more 'authentic and process-oriented evaluation' (Bobula, 2024). Schön et al. (2023) believe that "AI provides research and writing support by assisting in summarising papers, extracting facts, and helping in understanding the conventions for writing assignments" According to Bobula (2024), this poses a disruption in educational assessment. Traditional plagiarism detection tools are also becoming ineffective against AI-generated content, forcing an unnecessary shift in assessment design. A step towards assessment that emphasises critical thinking, creativity and real-world problem-solving by using the higher-order thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy is less susceptible to automation. Bobula (2024) believes that evaluating students on their process, drafts, and reflections, rather than solely on the final output, can be a step towards rethinking and re-looking at the way we look at assessment.

2. LLMs and Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

The integration of LLMs has deep repercussions for the core identity and mission of a Higher Education Institution (HEI). Any HEI needs to navigate through these uncertain, fast-paced environments of AI. They need to adapt to the ever-changing background of AI systems quickly. The technology is forcing a revaluation of how institutions function as creators of knowledge, providers of credentials, centres of innovation, and drivers of social change. Idris et al. (2024) highlight both the possibilities and the significant challenges that LLMs pose for changing the traditional roles of HEIs. According to the authors, HEIs must ensure that 'micro-credentials' driven by LLMs meet established standards, account for new forms of certification, and do not diminish the value of traditional degrees. In addition, Idris et al. (2024) believe that HEIs should tread with rules under human supervision, as it ensures a responsible use of technology and that HEIs must be cautious to cross-check for any biases for underrepresented groups.

Within English language teaching specifically, a growing body of systematic reviews synthesises how generative AI is reshaping classroom practice. Crompton et al. (2024) review the use of AI in English language teaching and learning. They find that most of such research has so far been conducted in Asian higher education contexts, leaving other regions, including India, comparatively under-examined. Du and Daniel (2024) show that AI-powered chatbots are increasingly used to scaffold English-as-a-foreign-language speaking practice, reinforcing the relevance of AI-mediated interaction for the kind of language skill-building LEC offers.

3. A Case of Linguistic Empowerment Cell (LEC), JNU, India

To pursue studies in International Universities on a global level, students undertake an International English language proficiency test for non-native speakers, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which assesses their listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. This test is trusted by universities across the globe. Universities in English-speaking countries use IELTS scores for academic purposes to assess students' proficiency in English and admit them to various courses in their Institutions. Based on the scores, students are required to take basic courses to enhance their English for both academic purposes and communication skills. These courses are usually offered by language support centres in international universities. In the past decade and a half, Indian universities have been robustly hustling with such language support centres for their students as well. India presents a unique educational landscape due to its large student population, diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying access to technology. In a typical higher education classroom, students from different states of India come for studies with English as a medium of Instruction (EMI). The Linguistic Empowerment Cell (LEC) was an initiative in Indian higher education, dedicated to fostering linguistic inclusivity and empowering students from diverse backgrounds to excel in an English-dominated academic environment. Established in 2011, as per the *JNU Newsletter*, LEC "has been committed to ensuring that a student's Linguistic proficiency does not become a barrier to the cognitive and creative potential. This Cell was the first of its kind to be established in India at one of the most premier research universities, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The inception of this cell was a direct response to the diverse student population of the university, representing a wide spectrum of linguistic backgrounds, as it draws students from all corners of India" (JNU News Letter, 2012).

Many students, who completed their schooling in vernacular mediums, find the transition to an English-dominated academic setting extremely challenging. The linguistic disadvantage hinders the ability of students to comprehend lectures, participate in academic knowledge, share and articulate their thoughts in well-written forms. Founded on the guiding principle of 'linguistic empowerment as cognitive empowerment', LEC is a language intervention to bridge the gap for students with the requisite skills to excel within their respective

academic disciplines (JNU News Letter, 2012). It was a two-fold move that created a design for other Indian universities. Its success has demonstrated that an institutional commitment to language support is not '*remedial'* but '*essential'* for academic excellence and inclusivity in a country with immense linguistic diversity. This model, conceptualised by JNU, has served as a stepping stone and has been adopted by numerous institutions in Indian higher education.

Since the challenges that led to the creation of LEC are not unique to JNU, universities across India have increasingly recognised the need for structured language and writing support with different names but sharing the LEC core concept. For example, Ashoka University's Centre for Writing and Communication (CWC); Krea University's Centre for Writing and Pedagogy (CWP); National Law School of India University's Writing Centre; and Delhi University's Writing Centre at the Institute of Lifelong Learning, to name a few. This demonstrates a shift in Indian higher education; LEC being at the forefront has provided a model that has proved successful, with dedicated institutional support for essential language teaching, creating a truly inclusive and interactive academic environment in India where universities must actively empower their students to master the language of academic discourse. The Cell has manifested in a practical, unique approach that has resonated with these centres. Over the past decade, it has made a significant contribution to English Language Teaching (ELT), especially English for Academic Purposes (EAP), through its carefully designed certificate programmes and student-centric approach. LEC currently offers capacity-building courses in English for Academic Writing and Basic Communication Skills open to all JNU students. These courses in academic writing and communication skills provide a strong foundation. It also recognises that language for social sciences differs from that of natural sciences; therefore, a discipline-specific approach to English for academic purposes, catering to different disciplines, is vital. Writing is not only about language, but also about structuring arguments and ideas, thereby focusing on critical thinking. Moreover, it also aims to provide a supportive environment where students can overcome linguistic inhibitions without creating a judgmental space.

4. Interactive LLM Learning Environment

LEC offers its two foundational courses, Basic Communication Skills and English for Academic Writing, as two-semester, part-time programmes. The former course is structured around listening, speaking, reading, writing and presentation modules, and the latter moves from academic writing conventions through summarising, paraphrasing, discourse-level coherence, report and abstract writing, to referencing and citation practice. Both courses are now moving toward graded status and, from the coming semester, will be revised to four-credit courses. These courses using LLMs can transform into a dynamic, interactive and personalised journey for each student. The traditional approach to listening skills is primarily reliant on pre-

recorded audio materials; however, LLMs can enhance this experience by providing limitless customised audios for an enhanced experience. The content of these audios can be discipline-specific and tailored to the different levels of difficulty for the student. Moreover, a wide range of global and Indian accents can also be explored to help achieve a neutral accent and be understood. LLMs can also function as interactive tutors where students in groups can engage in a conversation with the AI chatbots to discuss an audio clip. This provides an enhanced and limitless supply of customised and engaging audio content. For instance, a student preparing for a discipline-specific seminar presentation could use an LLM chatbot to rehearse subject vocabulary through a simulated question-and-answer exchange, receiving immediate feedback on pronunciation, coherence and register before the actual presentation.

Moving from listening to speaking is a daunting experience for many students due to the fear of making mistakes. LLMs can create a non-judgmental environment for practice. For reading and comprehension, LLMs can generate text on topics which create interest among the students, especially in a particular discipline, as these classes cater to all disciplines of the university. The level of the text for reading can be challenging; therefore, LLMs can develop readings in which the complexity of the material grows with the student's proficiency. Interacting with the text can also help students enhance their vocabulary in context and build on prior knowledge. Moreover, LLMs can also develop the text according to the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), starting from basic to higher-order instructional objectives. Students can make mistakes and receive corrections from AI without the fear of being judged by their peers. LLMs can also be used to structure ideas for presentations. This empowers them to take control of their own weaknesses and work on targeted exercises to improve their skills by making them autonomous learners.

Reading and writing skills are closely related, and students often struggle in organising their thoughts and structuring their arguments in a coherent manner. The traditional approach to reading limits the exposure of students to readings, which sometimes can be beyond their level of understanding. This can be replaced by customising their experience with passages tailored to each student's proficiency level, interest and academic context. For writing, LLMs can act as a brainstorming partner, helping students outline their ideas logically for an introduction and moving towards the core content of their writing. Further, AI can assist students in understanding the errors in spelling and grammar; suggest better vocabulary, stylistic improvements and well-structured sentences. Also, AI can curate examples of both good and bad writing to develop critical writing analysis for students.

Establishing a clear and explicit policy in the system, syllabus and classroom, stating what is and is not acceptable use of LLM, is crucial. For example, it is important to understand the difference between using

an LLM to brainstorm ideas, check grammatical errors and suggest alternative paraphrasing for a sentence or explain a difficult concept, which can be acceptable, but not generating entire sentences, paragraphs or essays and submitting them as their own authentic work without acknowledging the original sources. LLMs can be used for creating interactive paraphrasing practice or dynamic summarising exercises, for example, the student takes a paragraph from a scholarly article and reframes the whole set in their own words. LLMs can be provided here with an original paragraph and an attempted paraphrase to compare the paraphrased version with the original and to confirm if the core meaning stays intact. Properly integrating quotes and maintaining an academic tone is also a crucial skill, especially in EAP for students pursuing higher education. Students can use LLM to review their drafts, especially to check the tone and highlight any instances of informal language like slang and contractions. It is important to make students aware of the fact that AI-generated content needs to be reviewed critically. Since LLMs produce incorrect information or fake citation therefore, it is vital to encourage students to evaluate the suggestions made by LLMs. For educators, LLM transparency in the classroom is important; we should be open to criticising its authenticity rather than using LLM as a deceptive device.

5. Conclusion

The rise of LLMs presents both transformative opportunities and significant challenges for higher education. Though these tools can enhance learning, they can also raise concerns about academic integrity and have a high risk of being misused. Although institutions of higher education need to integrate academic policies for the use of generative AI, it is important to encourage students to be transparent about their use of AI tools; therefore, a disclosure of how they have used it in their submissions is necessary. As teachers, educators and students run the potential risk of generating inaccurate and biased information. Using LLMs, students must be made aware that they are responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the work. They are submitting regardless of whether they have used an AI tool or not. Teachers and educators must rethink their assignment designs carefully. LLMs can be effective in generating interactive environments for students. However, the question regarding the misuse of LLM needs to be maintained. LLMs are most useful in breaking down large assignments into smaller steps, such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting or peer reviewing, giving students multiple opportunities to engage in and for the instructor to give feedback, but with caution. Moreover, LLM-generated interactive environments encourage students to engage with material directly and learn from one another. However, we must also not forget that LLM only replicates the real world but cannot replace the real world.

Creativity is a higher-order thinking skill which needs to be worked out by teachers and students alike in order to keep a natural balance. Therefore, an amalgamation of some assignments which can be designed to have students actively engage in LLM-generated

content, relevant for students, is alright instead of banning AI altogether. It is also essential to proactively educate students on how to use LLMs ethically and effectively as a learning aid by not limiting themselves to it entirely. This approach acknowledges the presence of LLM and teaches students to use it responsibly. This also includes an understanding of a potential bias and the importance of fact-checking and verifying sources. Creating a classroom environment for students to feel comfortable in discussing their use of AI should be promoted as an open dialogue. Therefore, preventing unethical LLM use and plagiarism in higher education requires a proactive and multifaceted approach. For the Indian context specifically, this points to concrete next steps: institutions can draw on the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on multilingualism to fund and formalise language-support cells like LEC across public universities, not only in well-resourced central universities; language centres can develop discipline-specific AI-use guidelines in consultation with faculty, on the model LEC has already piloted for academic writing and communication; and universities can invest in structured training for English language faculty so they are equipped to supervise LLM-assisted learning rather than treat it as an external threat to be policed.

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