

EFL TEACHER TRAINEES' ATTITUDES TOWARD INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education has not been any news for some time. AI-powered learning tools found their way to all aspects of education, and foreign language education is no exception. The day-to-day use of AI-powered learning tools has increased exponentially, especially during the covid-19 pandemic, which induced national lockdowns with schools closed. The situation swiftly shifted education into distant, hybrid or blended learning modes and opened the door to more complex inclusion of technologies into both teaching and learning. In many cases, IA powered tools (with their ability to provide learners with individually tailored materials and support autonomous language learning) proved to be precious teaching aids appreciated by many teachers and learners. However, some recently conducted research studies showed a relatively high level of reluctance towards intelligent tools among many teachers and learners.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the attitudes of a multi-national group of university students who study English as a foreign language towards using AI-powered tools for learning English. Two hundred eleven future teachers of English from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland responded to a 20-item online questionnaire (Survio). Their anonymity was ensured.

The results showed that students' attitude toward using AI in language education is more reserved than their attitude towards integrating ICT and digital technologies in general. The significant majority of respondents stated they lacked even the basic information about AI principles. Moreover, they were not particularly interested in the topic (they are not planning to search for more details actively). In this context, it is not surprising that nearly half of respondents were not aware they were already using AI-powered tools (e.g. online browsers and translators). A clear correlation was identified between the lack of information and a negative attitude towards AI. Thus, the negative attitudes of respondents were essentially based on prejudice (rooted in fear and lack of trust towards AI). However, most respondents believed that integrating AI would positively impact language education. In addition, nearly no respondents expected AI to replace human teachers in the future. No significant differences were found between the results from different countries. The study's findings pointed out to some inconsistencies in respondents' attitudes, the reserves in teacher training and the need for further study of the issue.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, teacher training, language education, teaching and learning English.*
