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From Human Art to Artificial Intelligence and Back: Practical Considerations from Academia[2]

Extended summary

University is not only the place where knowledge, skills, and professional competencies are gained; it is an intellectual hub where critical thinking is cherished and basic human values honed. Language, art, and culture are the areas of human activity which define us as social beings. This paper investigates the cognitive-affective, pragmatic, and ethical aspects of using AI tools in art students' learning of English for specific purposes (ESP), a course of crucial importance for their future careers and international cooperation. It implies contextualised language usage through specially created materials, activities, and opportunities. The aim of our research was to test the educational potentials, i.e., advantages and/or disadvantages, of using AI tools for developing art students' communicative competence in higher-education ESP courses.

Conceptualised as a multilayer process in five stages, the research relied on a mixed-methods approach and was conducted in the academic year 2023/2024, and at the very beginning of 2024/2025. The participants in the research (N = 192) were students of the Faculties of Dramatic Arts and Applied Arts of the University of Arts in Belgrade, while in the last stage of the research they were joined by the students of two other art faculties.

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Stage 1 was a Multi-Criteria Analysis of AI tools. A checklist with twelve criteria we agreed upon helped us assess and select the following AI tools for the experimental stage: *Twee, Perplexity, TTS Maker* and *Ginger Software* for dramatic arts, i.e. *Twee, Skybox AI Blockade Labs, TTS Natural Reader* and *Ginger Software* for applied arts. The semi-structured interview in *Stage 2* showed us that students of the experimental group found AI useful, attractive, and pragmatic, but also requiring good balance when used by both students and teachers. Additionally, we wanted to check if the students' awareness of the AI-enriched tasks would create bias, namely, a difference in their approach to the experimental stage. The empirical method applied in *Stage 3* showed that the students of the experimental group and the control group were equally motivated to participate in the activities. The impact of technology itself was also measured by comparing the effects of the AI-enhanced activities with those of typical language tasks. Based on the Stage-1 MCA checklist, four criteria showed results in favour of AI-enhanced teaching, four criteria produced assessment similar to traditional language learning, and four criteria reflected better values for standard language tasks. The teachers' increased engagement in lesson planning, activity design and classroom management certainly added to the variety and dynamics of these lessons. In the semi-structured interview of *Stage 4***,** the participants confirmed that the implemented activities were truly engaging, motivating, and beneficial. However, despite considering them recommendable, they do not see the rapid advancement of AI tools as an advantage. Some say that students should be taught how to use AI tools in ethical ways, rather than overuse or misuse them. Once more, voices were heard that AI tools cannot fully replace "the human factor" in education, because "the teacher's knowledge and experience are of crucial importance".

In *Stage 5*, the main focus of this paper, students of Music and Fine Arts joined their colleagues from the Faculties of Applied and Dramatic Arts in a survey, expressing their attitudes (N = 23) on the use of AI in the world of art, education and life in general. In the cognitive domain, their answers confirm our previous findings on the usefulness and effectiveness of AI tools, with ChatGPT being the favourite choice of many, though some have had little experience or show no interest in such tools. While finding certain applications acceptable for everyday purposes or helpful in education (e.g. for browsing, essay writing or checking grammar), including ethical considerations, students show both an inclination and reservations towards the use of AI. What added depth to the findings was the students' testimony in the affective domain. As in the previous stages, most of these young artists show a disinclination towards AI regarding the emotional and inspirational, i.e., a genuinely human contact with art. Their reasonable fears and well-grounded argumentation corroborate the theoretical considerations from the beginning of the paper.

Leading us from human art to artificial intelligence and back, this academic research accentuated the relevance of the subject for further classroom discussions, especially in foreign language courses for artistic purposes. To us as reflective practitioners, it also indicated where additional instructional reinforcement was needed. Given the number of respondents in this research, particularly in Stage 5, further research could address the same questions with larger populations of art students or accomplished artists.

Being cultural diplomats, keepers of tradition and bearers of change, artists have given the world new forms and styles, new sounds and colours – the distinctive features imparted to it thus far only by an unmistakably human touch. Where artificial intelligence is taking us –remains to be seen. This study confirms that, if carefully balanced and applied with prudence, AI may be seen as a good helping hand in the world of art, education, and life in general.

Keywords: art students, interaction, artificial intelligence (AI), higher education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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