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CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND
TRANSFORMATIONS***

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AI-POWERED CHATBOTS AS TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN EFL CLASSROOMS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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The question of how artificial intelligence is reshaping language education is no longer theoretical — it is something many of us encounter in our classrooms every week. AI-powered chatbots such as ChatGPT and Claude have moved from being a curiosity to becoming tools that our students use regardless of whether we invite them to or not [1]. As a teacher of Business English and History of the English Language, I have found it more productive to understand these tools deeply rather than resist them. This paper reflects both on current research and on practical observations from higher education, with the aim of exploring where AI chatbots genuinely help — and where they fall short.

It would be a mistake to treat AI chatbots as simply a newer version of language learning software. Unlike earlier rule-based systems, today's large language model tools — built on architectures like GPT-4 — respond dynamically, adapt to context, and generate language that feels surprisingly natural [3]. For language learners, this matters enormously. What strikes me most in the recent literature is the consistency with which researchers highlight three qualities: personalization, accessibility, and immediate feedback [7]. These are precisely the things that are hardest to deliver in a group classroom setting, especially in Business English, where students come with vastly different professional backgrounds and vocabulary gaps. A chatbot does not grow impatient when a student asks the same grammar question for the third time — and that, in practice, counts for a great deal.

In Business English instruction, one of the most persistent challenges is giving students enough speaking practice in professional contexts — negotiations, presentations, formal correspondence. AI chatbots have proven genuinely useful here. Students can simulate a job interview or a client meeting at midnight before an exam, without waiting for a teacher or a language partner. Research supports what many of us observe informally: learners who practice speaking with AI tools tend to arrive at class less anxious and more willing to take communicative risks [6]. Writing feedback is another area where the technology has surprised me. When students draft formal emails or reports and run them through an AI tool, the quality of revision improves noticeably — not because the AI writes for them, but because it gives them a mirror. They see their errors explained in plain language, immediately, without embarrassment. For History of the English Language, chatbots serve as patient explainers of complex etymological or phonological concepts — students can ask follow-up questions in their own words and receive responses calibrated to their level, something a textbook simply cannot do [4].

None of this means the picture is straightforward. The most pressing concern I encounter is not cheating in the traditional sense, but something subtler: students who stop struggling. The productive discomfort of not knowing, of searching for the right word, of constructing an argument — these are precisely where language acquisition

happens. When a chatbot smooths over that discomfort too quickly, learning is lost even when the output looks polished [2]. There is also the question of what AI cannot replicate: the cultural intuition, the humour, the human negotiation of meaning that happens in real conversation. In Business English especially, communication is never just about correct grammar — it is about reading a room, adjusting register, managing relationships. No chatbot teaches that [5]. Digital inequality remains a structural reality — not every student has reliable access, and designing AI-integrated tasks without accounting for this risks widening existing gaps [2].

AI chatbots are neither a revolution nor a threat — they are a tool, and like any tool, their value depends entirely on how thoughtfully they are used [1]. In my experience, the most effective approach is to treat them as preparation for class rather than a replacement for it: students use AI to practice, draft, and explore, and then bring that work into the human space of the classroom for real discussion, critique, and refinement. What is needed now is not more enthusiasm about AI, but more honest, practice-based research — particularly from non-anglophone educational contexts like Ukraine — on what these tools actually produce in terms of long-term language development [7].

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