



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS

Submission to

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

Inquiry into the use of generative artificial intelligence in the Australian education system

July 2023

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1. Introduction

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is the peak body representing State and Territory associations of educators dedicated to furthering the learning of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) by Indigenous, migrant-background and refugee children, young people and adults. Association members include EAL/D teachers, consultants, curriculum developers, teacher educators, other academics and researchers in school and preschool, tertiary, adult migrant, vocational education and training (VET) and community education settings.

The ACTA Digital Technologies Advocacy Group is dedicated to promoting quality education with and about digital technologies in different EAL/D settings across Australia. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training into the issues and opportunities presented by generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in light of our specific interest and expertise in EAL/D learners, particularly those with beginning levels of English language and literacies as well as, most relevantly here, digital literacies. In addition, many EAL/D learners are considered to be in positions of socio-economic disadvantage as a result of different personal, social and economic circumstances which impacts their access to learning opportunities within educational institutions and other contexts.

Therefore, the terms of reference we believe most directly concern EAL/D learners and their teachers and that are addressed most closely in this submission are:

#4. How cohorts of children, students and families experiencing disadvantage can access the benefits of AI;

#2. The future impact generative AI tools will have on teaching and assessment practices in all education sectors, the role of educators, and the education workforce generally

2. Background issues

Generative AI is defined as “a class of AI models and systems that are designed to generate new content, such as text, images, music, or even video, that mimics human creativity” (ChatGPT, 2023). Also referred to as large language models (LLMs), these systems can generate text; one of the best-known is GPT-3.5/GPT-4, which came to wide public awareness in late 2022, thanks to its easy-to-use interface. It can rapidly generate coherent and contextually relevant text, based on a given prompt or input for almost any topic and writing style (Pegrum, 2023).

Generative AI platforms have already changed (and continue to change) different domains of life, work and learning, undoubtedly creating both opportunities and challenges for people. Today, people engage in various daily activities where they do not necessarily interact or work with humans. The labour market is also changing significantly, due to the rapid adoption of AI by organisations. These trends are likely to continue.

In the future, success in many careers will require working with LLMs [Large Language Models] or GAI [Generative Artificial Intelligence] programs effectively. Students who lack the skills to use such models will be severely disadvantaged when they enter the workforce. To remain competitive in the workforce, students must learn how to effectively use LLMs, even if just effectively prompting them to get a good output and assessing the output's quality, accuracy, and originality. (Ahmad et al., 2023, p. 75)

AI education and AI literacies are becoming increasingly important in everyday life, learning and work. They are especially significant for EAL/D learners across all age groups. Recent research suggests considerable demographic differences in awareness and use of ChatGPT among this population: people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as those with lower household income and lower levels of formal education (which is also often typical of the EAL/D population) are less likely to know about the tool and to use it for different purposes (Pew Research Center, 2023). As a result, EAL/D learners, both adults and children, are most likely to miss out on:

- important language learning opportunities which have been widely documented in the research literature: oral and written conversational speaking practice; correcting errors in grammar; providing writing assistance; enriching vocabulary; development of fluency in pronunciation; personalised tutoring and feedback; enhancement of language learning motivation (Godwin-Jones, 2023; Woo & Choi, 2021).
- a valuable tool which can significantly assist their settlement experiences through translation and simplifying information (Mehr, 2017).
- opportunities to develop AI literacies, which involve the diverse skills, knowledge, understandings and attitudes required for meaningful, creative and critical use of generative AI for different purposes and in different contexts (Miao & Holmes, 2021; Ng et al., 2021; Pegrum et al., 2022).

A new kind of “digital divide” is in process. Already vulnerable EAL/D learners have poor access to AI tools and limited opportunities to engage in AI education and literacies. These populations are also more likely to be affected by negative impacts of AI, such as ethical use of the platforms, biases, misinformation, deep fakes, and job losses due to automation.

3. Areas of support

We wish to draw attention to six specific areas of support that are required to ensure that cohorts of children and adults from EAL/D backgrounds have access to the benefits of AI.

3.1 Awareness

There is a need to increase broader awareness, constructive attitudes and levels of confidence about generative AI, its benefits, possibilities, and applications as well as limitations, challenges and biases. Given emerging language and literacy levels of this group both in English and sometimes in home languages, information needs to be accessible, presented in various forms (e.g. brochures, posters, videos, invited presentations, etc.) and/or translated into home languages. These resources need to be easily accessible through community

centres, schools and online platforms. To promote such awareness, we recommend that different stakeholders with EAL/D expertise and experience are included in important decision making and initiatives.

3.2 Access

It is important to ensure access to generative AI amongst EAL/D communities. We recommend avoiding approaches which ban the use of generative AI in schools. This is particularly important for public schools which cater for the majority of EAL/D students in Australia. We also recommend increasing access, including financial support, to AI in local libraries and community centres.

An important aspect to consider is the cost of implementing the ChatGPT in education. This technology requires significant investment in terms of both hardware and software as well as ongoing maintenance and support. This may present a challenge for some educational institutions, particularly those in lower-income areas, and it is important to find ways to make the technology more accessible and affordable. (Su & Yang, 2023, p. 8)

3.3 Learning programs

Learning programs specifically tailored to the needs of EAL/D learners are essential for helping them to become confident and capable to access benefits and mitigate the risks of generative AI. Such programs need to focus on AI literacies which we define as a set of technical, linguistic and socio-cultural capabilities required for meaningful, creative, ethical and critical use of AI for different purposes and in different settings. These programs need to be age and sector appropriate.

We recommend that institutions, teachers and educational researchers with expertise in EAL/D approaches are included in shaping these programs, considering the needs and strengths of EAL/D students as well as the specificities of learning contexts.

One of the big challenges for the education profession over the next decade or so will be to ensure that these technologies are developed and adopted in ways that genuinely augment and enrich classrooms... Technology is not something that should be imposed on educators *without their input or consent* [emphasis added]. The need for greater educational input in the design, development and deployment of classroom AI technologies starts here. (Selwyn, 2023, p. 18)

3.4 Pedagogic resources

Educational institutions and teachers need to be supported in the implementation of learning programs dedicated to AI literacies in settings with EAL/D learners. Such support entails the development of relevant policies, syllabuses and teaching/learning resources. We recommend collaboration between industry, academia, policymakers, and the wider public to develop resources and guidelines for the deployment of generative AI with EAL/D learners.

AI becomes a fundamental skill for everyone, not just for computer scientists. In addition to reading, writing, arithmetic and digital skills, we should add AI to every learners' twenty-

first century technological literacy in work settings and everyday life... Age-appropriate learning artefacts and curricula need to be designed to scaffold K-12 students' [and adults'] AI conceptual understandings and stimulate their motivation and interest in learning AI. (Ng et al., 2021, p. 9)

3.5 Professional learning

Educators working with EAL/D cohorts need access to high-quality professional learning programs related to the use of generative AI in educational settings. We recommend that professional learning programs familiarise and develop teachers' expertise with AI tools and relevant pedagogies. It is particularly important to consider the changing role of EAL/D teachers given the enormous potential of AI for new and creative ways for learning languages.

[I]t is important to consider the role of human teachers in the integration of generative AI into educational practices. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that students receive high-quality education and foster positive learning experiences, and their perspectives and expertise are essential for ensuring that generative AI is used effectively and responsibly in education. It is also important to consider the potential impact of generative AI on teachers' roles and the teaching profession. While generative AI has the potential to facilitate and enhance teaching and learning, it is also important to consider how it may change the role of teachers and the skills they need to be effective in the classroom. (Su & Yang, 2023, p. 10)

3.6 Future research

There is an urgent need to support research exploring the use of generative AI by EAL/D learners and their teachers. Such research would enhance understanding about EAL/D learners' experiences, attitudes, innovative uses and challenges which, in turn, would allow the development of evidence-based research-informed policies, frameworks, approaches and practices for educational settings that specifically address their needs. Supporting research collaborations and partnerships between universities, government and educational institutions remains crucial for generation of new knowledge and pedagogical innovations associated with the use of generative AI in EAL/D settings.

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5. Contact details

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