

Leveraging ChatGPT for adult ESL education

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Summary: This resource review explores the integration of ChatGPT, an AI tool, in adult ESL education. It highlights ChatGPT's 24/7 availability, support for educators in lesson planning, and its ability to create real-life scenarios for effective language learning. The review emphasizes ChatGPT's role as a supplement to traditional teaching methods, enhancing the learning experience while acknowledging its limitations, such as the inability to fully grasp cultural nuances.

Keywords: ChatGPT, adult ESL education, AI in teaching, language learning, lesson planning, real-life scenarios, educational technology, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), pedagogical tools

Introduction

In the dynamic world of adult English language education, instructors are constantly seeking innovative ways to enhance teaching and learning experiences while still maintaining some semblance of work/life balance. Enter ChatGPT, a groundbreaking AI tool that promises to revolutionize the way we approach language teaching. [ChatGPT 3.5](#) is currently available to use at no cost. [ChatGPT 4 \(also called ChatGPT Plus\)](#) is priced at \$20/month at the time of writing. This resource review delves into how ChatGPT serves as a powerful ally for educators, focusing on three key areas: support for instructors in lesson planning and activity design, real-life scenario generation with flexible learning materials, and 24/7 availability and consistency. But first, let's take a moment to understand ChatGPT and how it works.

ChatGPT, a Large Language Model, uses a complex algorithm to generate language responses that are coherent and contextually appropriate. Essentially, ChatGPT learns from a vast array of data, including books, articles, and websites. This allows it to predict word order and construct sentences in a manner that closely mimics human speech. This AI model doesn't 'understand' language in the human sense but rather recognizes and replicates patterns in the data it has been trained on – basically, it plays a high-stakes game of fill-in-the-blank.

For ESL teachers, understanding ChatGPT's foundational mechanism is crucial. It's not just a static database of information but a dynamic tool that generates language based on the input it receives. While it can converse in several languages (with varying degrees of fluency), its proficiency in English, backed by extensive training data, is where it truly shines. Teachers should note, however, that like any AI technology, it functions best under the guidance of an educator who can direct its use effectively and ensure that

its output aligns with pedagogical goals and enhances the learning experience.

It's important to be aware that ChatGPT is completely unstructured in terms of output requests. To receive information, an educator needs to input a prompt or question. A specific query is much more likely to elicit a useful response. For example, the prompt Identify target vocabulary and provide me with an example dialogue tailored to high-beginning adult English language learners visiting a doctor's office during flu season. will garner a more useful response than a prompt such as Give me a lesson plan on going to the doctor's office.

Support for instructors in lesson planning and activity design

ChatGPT acts as a valuable assistant for instructors, easing the process of lesson preparation and designing classroom activities. Under your guidance, this tool can craft teaching materials suitable for all skill levels, from beginners to advanced students. By tailoring these materials to specific educational needs, ChatGPT streamlines lesson planning. It also enhances the engagement and effectiveness of classroom activities. For example, when tackling complex subjects like consumer economics, ChatGPT can develop a comprehensive lesson plan. This plan includes a variety of activities such as reading, writing exercises, dialogues, and math problems, all aligned with CCRS, ELPS, or even IELCE competencies. ChatGPT's innovative method of content creation offers fresh teaching strategies that align well with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), providing a diverse range of instructional techniques to accommodate all learners. These strategies cater to different learning styles, making lessons more interactive and enriching the learning experience for students.

When creating prompts for activity design, I prefer to follow a specific format so that ChatGPT can meet my needs quickly and thoroughly. I've found the following prompt template (Figure 1) effective:

When: Generate a 20-minute speaking & listening activity.

Who: This lesson is for NRS level high-beginning ESL students.

What: The activity will be called Visiting the Doctor's Office.

How: Create a dialogue between a patient and a doctor discussing symptoms during flu season, incorporating a 5-item vocabulary list relevant to the situation.

Standards: ELP2, ELP7

This prompt directs ChatGPT to produce an activity that is manageable yet challenging for high-beginners, incorporating practical vocabulary and an everyday scenario that encourages students to speak and listen actively. Based on the prompt, ChatGPT created the vocabulary list and sample dialogue below (Figures 2 and 3).

This is a good start to a dialogue activity for a medical visit. However, minor revisions are necessary – including to the definitions of the vocabulary words. Depending on context, some words used in the definitions are likely above level for this student population. The goal of using ChatGPT to craft an activity is to save educators' time and precious energy. Queries are not likely to produce a perfect response, but when a prompt is constructed carefully, ChatGPT should produce something which can be quickly tailored to serve learners' needs.

Real-life scenario generation and diverse educational resources

ChatGPT stands out in developing real-life scenarios for student role-play activities, such as ordering food or asking for directions. This makes language

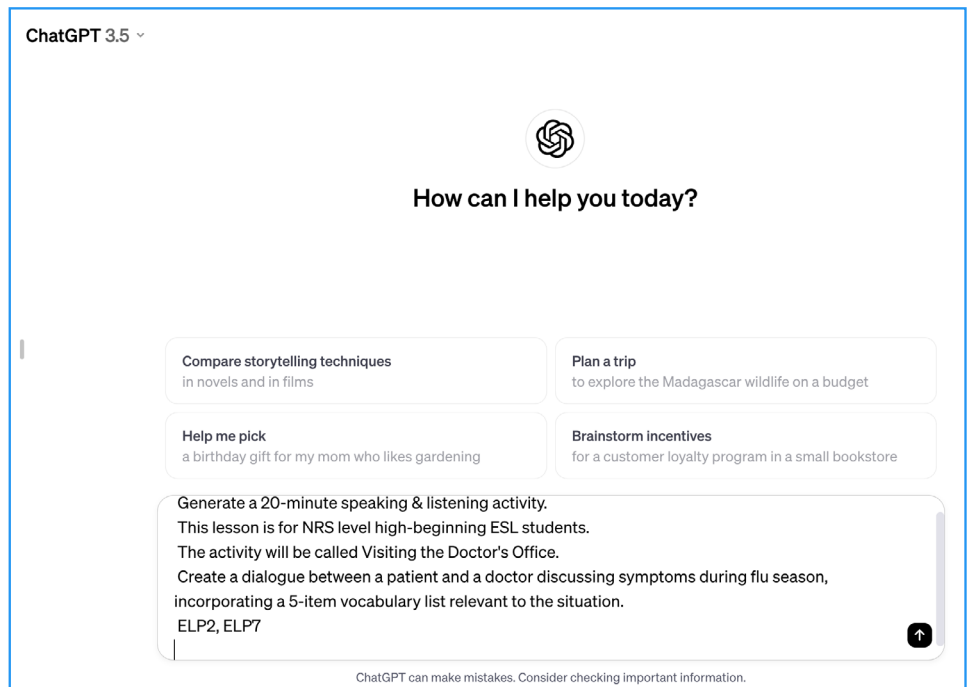


Figure 1: Example ChatGPT prompt

Vocabulary List:

symptoms (noun)	the physical or mental features that indicate a condition or illness <i>The main symptoms of the flu include fever and cough.</i>
fever (noun)	a temporary increase in body temperature, often due to an illness <i>If you have a fever, you should rest and drink plenty of fluids.</i>
cough (noun)	a sudden, noisy expulsion of air from the lungs <i>A persistent cough can be a sign that you need to visit a doctor.</i>
prescription (noun)	a piece of paper on which a doctor writes the details of the medicine or drugs that someone needs <i>The doctor gave me a prescription for flu medication.</i>
contagious (adjective)	a disease that can be spread from one person or organism to another, typically by direct contact. <i>The flu is highly contagious, so stay home if you're feeling ill.</i>

Figure 2: Vocabulary list generated by ChatGPT

Dialogue Script:

Patient: Hello, doctor. I've been feeling really unwell for a couple of days.
 Doctor: I'm sorry to hear that. Can you tell me more about your symptoms?
 Patient: I have a high fever, my whole body aches, and I can't stop coughing.
 Doctor: It sounds like you might have the flu. Have you been resting and drinking plenty of fluids?
 Patient: I've tried to rest, but I feel so sick. And yes, I'm drinking a lot of water.
 Doctor: Good. I'm going to prescribe some medication to help with the symptoms. You should also stay home from work or school because the flu is very contagious.
 Patient: Thank you, doctor. How soon will I start to feel better?
 Doctor: If you take the medication and continue to rest and drink fluids, you should start feeling better in a few days. Make sure to go to the pharmacy with this prescription and call me if your symptoms worsen.
 Patient: Will do. Thanks for your help, doctor.

Figure 3: Dialogue script generated by ChatGPT

lessons more applicable and approachable, encouraging students to practice English in everyday contexts. For teachers, ChatGPT is a valuable ally, offering an array of educational content including short stories, news articles, and even song lyrics. This diversity revitalizes teaching and helps maintain student interest and participation. Additionally, ChatGPT aids in creating assessments and quizzes that align with these scenarios and help teachers evaluate student progress or tailor future lessons to address learning gaps.

Acknowledging the cons is essential for a balanced review of ChatGPT's use in adult ESL education. One significant concern is that ChatGPT cannot fully grasp cultural nuances and sensitivities like human teachers do. For example, explaining colloquial expressions is a challenge; the expression pull someone's leg is common in English, whereas a Spanish equivalent would be to pull someone's hair. ChatGPT can translate these words effectively, but it can't understand the cultural context in which the language will be used, so it may provide incorrect guidance. This can lead to misunderstandings. There's also a risk that students might rely too much on AI, which could affect their critical thinking skills. Many wonder if teachers could also come to rely too heavily on the tool, but because output is directly tied to the quality of an educator's inquiries, that risk is minimized. Finally, ChatGPT sometimes provides inaccurate or inappropriate responses. As an example, when asked to produce an image of employees in the workplace, it sometimes defaults to white males dressed for office work. Additionally, when asked to cite its sources, it may reference works that do not exist. This means teachers need to check its content carefully before using it in class. These points underline ChatGPT's role as a

supportive tool, not a replacement for trained educators in language teaching.

24/7 availability and consistency

ChatGPT's always-on availability is a game-changer in education. It acts as a reliable support system, responding to student inquiries and aiding language practice at any hour of the day or night. This constant availability is a significant advantage for adult learners with varied schedules. For teachers, it means a reduced workload after class hours. Thus, we can focus more on lesson planning and less on addressing out-of-class questions and last-minute homework panic queries. With ChatGPT's support, educators can rest assured that students have access to continuous learning support without the need for extended instructor office hours.

In conclusion, ChatGPT has emerged as a versatile and invaluable tool for adult English language instructors. Its round-the-clock availability ensures consistent support for students, while its ability to assist in lesson planning and activity design lightens the workload for educators. Moreover, its capability to generate real-life scenarios and diverse learning materials makes English learning more practical, engaging, and enjoyable. As we integrate this AI technology into our teaching practices, we must remember that it is a supplement—not a substitute—for the indispensable human elements of teaching. In the hands of a skilled educator, ChatGPT can truly enhance the educational journey for adult English language learners, making the educational experience more effective, personalized, and enjoyable.

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