SEDA Autumn Conference 2024

Session Title: Is Generative AI really helpful in overcoming language barriers for international students?

Session Type: Provocations (10mins)

Main presenter(s): Dr Francesca Tagliaferri, BPP University - School of Technology

Co presenter(s): N/A

Session Summary: Is the general level of academic writing becoming worse among students, or is the vast amount of AI-reviewed written material somehow raising the bar? Are markers now expecting a higher standard, aware that with AI proof reading there is no excuse for typos or poor grammar, or are we just encouraging laziness? And can this be a great opportunity or an additional challenge for non-native speakers?

Session Outline: The use of Generative AI tools such ChatGPT is regulated at varying level in education institutions. The general consensus is that, while students can't use them to produce original work, the use for proofreading pieces of coursework is allowed. Some academics strongly support it, especially in scientific subjects. It is after all preferable for the student to invest time in the actual work required to fulfil the coursework requirement, letting AI worry about presenting it in a linguistically correct way.

There are various possible consequences of this. The main worry is that we are raising a generation uncapable of producing any content of value without the support of these tools. However, there may be some positive effects – it is becoming rarer to come across poor grammar and spelling mistakes, and there may be some sort of peer pressure effect that ultimately raises the bar on student expectations. It may also be seen as an opportunity for international students and non-native speakers, allowing them to effortlessly bypass language barriers.

The session will begin with a snapshot of the current consensus by looking at university policies regarding Gen AI use for students. The aim of this part is to answer the question "what is currently considered acceptable?". We will then look at some practical cases, inspired by real examples gathered from both students and lecturers experience.

We will conclude with an outlook to emerging technologies – while these discussions are for now limited to written content, virtual presentations delivered by AI avatars are becoming a reality. Communication as we know it is being disrupted like never before, and higher education institutions need to be ready.

References: Nikolopoulou, K. (2024). Generative Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Exploring Ways of Harnessing Pedagogical Practices with the Assistance of ChatGPT. International Journal of Changes in Education, 1(2), 103–111. https://doi.org/10.47852/bonviewIJCE42022489

Hamerman, E.J., Aggarwal, A. and Martins, C. (2024), "An investigation of generative AI in the classroom and its implications for university policy", Quality Assurance in Education, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-08-2024-0149