

learning about ChatGPT and other generative AI technologies for language teaching and learning purposes.

Keywords: Online teacher communities, Social media, ChatGPT, Artificial intelligence, AI, Technology

Introduction

Language teachers worldwide faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the world has mostly returned to pre-pandemic normalcy, teachers in the post-pandemic era have faced a host of new challenges. One of these challenges include the introduction of ChatGPT, a generative artificial intelligence (AI) developed by OpenAI and released to the public in November 2022. Soon after its release, the education landscape witnessed a whirlwind of emotions, with teachers expressing both enthusiasm for its potential and concerns over its impact on teaching and learning (Alm & Ohashi, 2023; Al-Mughairi & Bhaskar, 2024). This was notably visible in online teacher communities. On Facebook, for example, teachers gathered and formed online communities where they discussed topics related to ChatGPT. Online teacher communities have been reported to be valuable during the pandemic when teachers were unable to leave their houses (Ito, 2023a; Trust et al., 2020), and it appears that these communities are continuously serving many teachers by providing them with the needed support in the post-pandemic era, where AI technologies like ChatGPT are becoming more prevalent than ever before. Considering that little is known about the ways in which teachers are actually deciphering how to navigate such tools (cf. Moorhouse et al., 2024), the current study aimed to examine how ChatGPT-focused online teacher communities can support teachers in the 21st century.

Background

Over the past decade, there has been a surge in the literature on the use of online teacher communities on platforms, like Twitter (e.g., Carpenter & Krutka, 2015) and Facebook (e.g., Kelly & Antonio, 2016). Teachers around the world have been participating in online teacher communities, which are open and available to anyone with Internet access, due to a multitude of reasons, including to explore innovative teaching ideas (Staudt-Willet, 2019), ask for professional advice (Ito, 2023b), openly discuss concerns and issues that were otherwise difficult to share within their own workplace (Hur & Brush, 2010), form friendships with other like-minded professionals (Carpenter

et al., 2020), and ameliorate their feeling of teacher isolation (Duncan-Howell, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic, which was a turbulent time for many teachers, seemed to put the spotlight on the importance and value of online teacher communities, leading to their rapid growth and popularity (e.g., Ito, 2023a; Trust et al., 2020).

While the benefits of online teacher communities have been well-documented in the literature, their flaws have also been noted. Teachers have complained about the low quality of posts shared within online communities, which at times contained mistakes or incorrect information (Hertel & Wessman-Enzinger, 2017) and spam messages (Carpenter et al., 2020). Additionally, some have experienced online harassment from other members (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). Despite their imperfections, online teacher communities still seem to offer numerous benefits to teachers, potentially serving as a key resource for educators to learn about AI technologies for educational purposes.

Methods

The main aim of the study was to examine teachers' uses and perceptions of a newly formed ChatGPT-focused online teacher community found on Facebook through a mixed-methods research design. Firstly, a public Facebook community which targeted teachers who were interested in discussing topics related to ChatGPT for educational purposes was observed in October 2023. The second part of the study was to examine the observed online teacher community through the eyes of actual teachers. Specifically, an online questionnaire was distributed to the members of the observed ChatGPT-focused online teacher community, and subsequently, semi-structured interviews with several of the questionnaire respondents were conducted. In all, 32 teachers, including 25 language teachers, responded to the online questionnaire, and eight questionnaire respondents, two of whom were language teachers, participated in the interviews. The open-ended questionnaire responses, interview data, and collected posts shared within the online teacher communities were analyzed using inductive content analysis (Selvi, 2023). The key findings obtained from the closed-ended questions included in the online questionnaire were also presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics (Baffoe-Djan & Smith, 2023).

Key Findings

In October 2023, there were a total of 479 new posts shared in the observed ChatGPT-focused online teacher community, averaging 15.5 posts per day.

The final week of October 2023 observed 83 initial posts, with an average of 22.3 likes, 16.1 comments, and 2.7 shares per post. In total, 63.9% of the initial posts ($n = 53$) were “asking a question” about ChatGPT in educational settings. Within this category, the posts were further divided into “problem solving” ($n = 31$), “asking for advice/opinion” ($n = 14$), “requesting a resource” ($n = 7$) and “finding a connection” ($n = 1$). The other 36.1% of initial posts ($n = 30$) were sharing information and resources related to ChatGPT, such as websites and apps ($n = 9$), experiences ($n = 7$), news articles ($n = 5$), videos ($n = 4$), opinions ($n = 3$), blog posts ($n = 1$), and online workshops ($n = 1$). The self-reported data revealed how the teachers were mainly joining the observed online teacher community to learn more about ChatGPT, see how other teachers are using ChatGPT in their classes, obtain ideas, fulfil their curiosity, and find a supportive community. Many teachers commented on the multiple benefits of utilizing a ChatGPT-focused online teacher community. For instance, one teacher commented how the community gives “access to different people’s perspectives, different people’s knowledge, their expertise, their experiences.” Overall, while advertisements and spam-related posts and the frequent number of shared posts were noted as common drawbacks, there appeared to be no major issues or concerns raised by the respondents.

Final Remarks: Connecting with this Year’s Conference Theme

The current exploratory study examined a ChatGPT-focused online teacher community on Facebook in the post-pandemic era, highlighting how such an online community can be a viable resource for language teachers trying to learn about ChatGPT for educational purposes. The language teaching landscape is constantly evolving, with various technologies emerging one after another, and teachers must navigate through these transitions throughout their long careers. The findings from the study seem to indicate how online teacher communities on social media platforms can play an important role in supporting teachers during periods of transitions by providing adequate resources, fostering a supportive environment, and facilitating professional growth.

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