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Engaging AI in Business English Listening and Speaking Teaching: A Case Framework

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Abstract: Business English Listening and Speaking (BELS) is a core course for Business English majors, yet it has long faced dual challenges: students' low engagement and learning difficulties, alongside teachers' struggles with effective instruction. The growing application of AI in education offers new momentum and direction for reforming this course. Through concrete teaching cases, this paper demonstrates how AI can deeply participate in and enhance all phases of BELS instruction—pre-class, in-class, and post-class. Before class, AI assists teachers in generating tailored audio materials for preview and helps students overcome vocabulary barriers. During class, AI serves as a conversational partner, providing speaking practice and real-time feedback. After class, AI delivers personalized tutoring based on individual proficiency levels. Furthermore, AI transforms the course evaluation system, enabling multidimensional, comprehensive, and dynamic assessment.

Keywords: AI; Business English Listening and Speaking; Teaching

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1. Background

In March 2007, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China officially approved the establishment of Business English as an undergraduate program. Since then, 391 institutions of higher education in mainland China have offered this major. Additionally, over 540 universities and colleges have incorporated a business-oriented track within their English major curriculum. The program aims to cultivate interdisciplinary talents with a solid foundation in English language proficiency, extensive business knowledge, and cross-cultural communication skills to meet the demands of international business in the context of globalization.

Business English Listening and Speaking (BELS) is a compulsory course for almost every Business English Major in China's colleges and universities. The course covers the integrated use of various language skills, such as listening and speaking. Students are supposed to experience the actual processes and requirements of business activities in class in advance. Through practical language use, they understand and master various business concepts and apply them to real business situations. It is a course that meets the demands of real work. However, the real situation is not as good as it is supposed to be.

In the current teaching practice, problems such as outdated teaching materials and boring traditional teaching models, focusing on listening but lacking in cultivating students' practical business communication abilities, wear down students'

enthusiasm and interest in class. As a consequence, students' performance is not satisfied. Phu et al(2024)[1] reveals that Business English learners most urgently need to enhance listening, speaking and writing skills, with special emphasis on oral fluency and accuracy. Authentic business situations—presentations, telephone calls, negotiations and small talk—should dominate classroom practice.

The advent of artificial intelligence has changed the landscape of education in recent years. The application of AI in education (AIED) has expanded rapidly, spanning fields from language learning to STEM education. The global AIED market reached US$1.82 billion in 2021 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 36 % through 2030. AI enables educators to have insights into students' learning preferences and strengths and offers authentic-like materials. After analyzing over 2,000 papers, Shan Wang et al(2023) [2] found that the most research in AIED has been conducted on adaptive learning and personalized tutoring. AI is capable of tailoring the learning process according to learners' knowledge levels, learning styles, emotional states, and interest preferences, thereby creating adaptive learning environments. This personalized method promotes a more profound interaction with the learning content, boosting students' motivation and passion for education.

Various researches have been made on adopting AI in education. Xu[3](2021) believes that by harnessing AI, educators can gain valuable insights into students' learning patterns and preferences. Muyideen Dele Adewale et al[4] (2024) did a systematic literature review, confirming AI's impact on academic performance within open and distance learning environments. Kyoungwon Seo et al[5] (2021) did a research participants envision adopting AI systems in online learning can enable personalized learner-instructor interaction at scale. Scholars [6](Dina Tbaishat et al, 2025) found out that institutions should enhance students' confidence and perceived benefits of GenAI through training and practical integration to improve learning experiences. Some scholars[7] (Muhammad Zaim et al, 2025) advocate strategic integration of generative AI for advancing EFL teaching in higher education. Huang and Zou[8](2024) have attested that satisfaction and enjoyment strongly affect students' adoption of AI tool or platform.

AI technologies definitely shed light on the teaching of BELS, but the problem is how to engage AI into the teaching to make students have interest and really believe that they are living in a real business world? In what way AI can be harnessed in teaching BELS? These questions are to be explored in this study.

2. Dilemma

We did an examination on mainstream Business English listening and speaking textbooks. Through comprehensive content analysis of ten representative teaching materials currently circulating in the market, we identify three predominant limitations.

First, existing textbooks demonstrate a pronounced tendency toward idealized scenarios. The designed business dialogues frequently employ oversimplified representations that fail to capture the inherent complexities of real-world business communication. For instance, in a unit about "Conference Calls" of a sampled textbook, participants engage in strictly turn-based speaking patterns, completely avoiding common real-world occurrences such as overlapping speech or technical disruptions like audio latency. Second, the materials exhibit marked homogeneity in linguistic diversity. Almost all of the listening content features exclusively Received Pronunciation or General American accents, thereby neglecting the various English varieties like Indian English or Japanese English. Most notably, the textbooks demonstrate severe content obsolescence relative to contemporary business practices. Even in textbooks published post-2020, a considerable proportion of content remains anchored to traditional communication modes like fax-based scenarios while failing to incorporate emerging digital business communication norms, such as Zoom meeting etiquette.

In current pedagogical practices in Business English aural-oral skills, a substantial number of teachers remain influenced by structuralist linguistics, disproportionately emphasizing formal accuracy in language production (Larsen-Freeman, 2003) [9] while neglecting the distinctive communicative-functional characteristics inherent to business discourse registers. This pedagogical approach results in a disjunction from authentic international business contexts and manifests

a pronounced input-output imbalance paradox (Swain, 2005)[10], whereby excessive linguistic input fails to translate into proportional communicative output.

The outdated teaching materials and rigid instructional methods have completely drained students' interest in BELS courses, resulting in minimal learning outcomes.

3. Research questions

We believe that artificial intelligence solutions may improve the current situation.

For the limitation of textbooks, AI-powered situational simulation systems can construct highly authentic business communication environments by systematically incorporating realistic interference factors like keyboard sounds and coughing in virtual meeting scenarios, when making the recording. To enrich the variety of English accent in teaching material, AI technology may synthesize comprehensive English accent libraries, exposing learners to diverse linguistic variations. How to acquire the latest business language usage patterns? One way to get it is to make use of web crawling and natural language processing techniques, which ensures real-time collection of contemporary business scenarios expression like cross-border e-commerce livestreams.

These technological applications not only remedy inherent textbook limitations but also promote a paradigm shift from static knowledge transmission to dynamic competence development in Business English instruction.

A specific case study will be presented. We try to find out answers to the following questions:

(1) How can AI be integrated into the whole stages of BELS pedagogy, including pre-class, in-class and post-class stages, and make teaching more efficient?

(2) How can AI help to improve the current evaluation system of BELS?

4. A case study

We use Unit 4 "Visiting a Factory" from a textbook called *Business English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking (Book 2)* published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. The unit teaches students how to introduce factories and understand different departments and workflows. AI will be fully integrated into the teaching process. Teaching objects can be explained from three perspectives, namely linguistic competence, business knowledge and cross-cultural competence. As for linguistic competence, students are supposed to accurately pronounce and utilize factory-related terms, extract key information from audio recordings despite industrial background noise, and deliver at least 3-minute process explanations using signposting phrases; For business competence, students will conduct a 5-minute guided factory tour (reception→production→QC), demonstrating logical sequencing and professional terminology and being able to respond to various client queries. For cross-cultural competence, students will customize tour content for different cultural priorities, identify and avoid culture-specific sensitivities, and demonstrate correct body language.

4.1. Pre-class: AI for preparation

During the pre-class preparation phase, AI helps in two key ways. It adds up-to-date materials about factories to supplement the textbook as well as tests students' existing skills, helping teachers adjust lessons to fit their needs.

Specific instructors input prompts into ChatGPT, like "Generate a 3-minute dialogue about a factory tour in the automotive industry with B2-level vocabulary, in which speakers are from different cultures." to create authentic listening materials. The reason that we choose the aotomotive industr lies in the fact that the auotmobile is a booming industry in China and EV is a hot topic for both domestic and foreign clients.

Based on this listening material, leveled tasks are designed for students.

First, students are required to listen to these materials and master some professional expressions in them before the

class. AI application like Quizlet AI can be used to identify if students are able to understand and spell those words and phrases. Students practice pronunciation via Speechify's instant feedback on stress patterns. The results from these two AI tools help teachers to decide whether specific vocabulary explanation or pronunciation guides are needed.

Second, comprehension questions generated by ChatGPT need to be solved, like "Why do people have to wear helmets?", "What is a hydraulic press used for?" or "What is the procedure for visiting a factory?"

Leveraging AI in the pre-class stage by generating a factory tour dialogue that integrates both business knowledge and cross-cultural awareness, helping students grasp unit vocabulary (including definitions, spelling, and pronunciation), understand standard factory visit procedures, and experience intercultural communication. Through analyzing students' performance on AI-powered interactive exercises (e.g., fill-in-the-blanks, pronunciation checks, and comprehension questions), teachers can identify knowledge gaps and adjust classroom instruction to focus on key challenges such as frequently misused technical terms or cultural misunderstandings, thereby enabling more targeted and effective in-class teaching. This AI-enhanced preparatory approach ensures students arrive better prepared for practical application during lessons.

4.2. In-class: AI for interactive, real-time skill development

In traditional Business English listening and speaking classes, group discussions and pair work are commonly used output activities designed to help students practice target vocabulary and simulate business scenarios. However, these activities often face challenges such as low student engagement, silence, or even students reverting to their native language, while the teacher, unable to monitor all groups simultaneously, struggles to ensure effectiveness. The integration of AI can significantly improve this situation.

During the output phase of the lesson, students can engage in real-time dialogue with ChatGPT, structured as a many-to-one conversation (multiple students interacting with one AI). For example, the teacher projects a scenario on the screen: "You're a Canada client visiting a battery factory", and students take turns asking the AI questions such as "What's your monthly output?" or requesting quality inspection reports. Students are encouraged to vary their requests, and roles can later be reversed—students act as factory hosts while the AI plays the client, prompting them to respond to inquiries. The teacher can further input prompts to have the AI introduce culturally specific questions, ensuring active participation and critical thinking while minimizing passive silence.

After the dialogue, AI tools evaluate lexical accuracy, politeness strategies of students and AI can assess students' pragmatic competence. For instance, by transcribing the conversation, the AI can evaluate the appropriateness of language use, for example, suggesting "We kindly ask you to wear the helmet" instead of the overly direct "You must wear the helmet". Besides, AI may highlight fillers like "um" and "like" and pronunciation errors. All these provide instant, actionable feedback, enhancing both engagement and learning outcomes.

In the listening practice segment, video editing software can be used to add background noise to audio materials, challenging students to identify errors in AI-generated transcripts. This activity can be conducted as a team competition to energize the classroom atmosphere and boost student engagement.

In classroom teaching, AI can be leveraged to design interactive speaking activities and diversify listening exercises, while providing students with immediate, comprehensive feedback on both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence—effectively serving as a student's conversational partner and a teacher's instructional assistant.

4.3. Post-class: AI for continuous assessment and personalizing tutoring

For the post-class assignment, teachers can have students work in pairs to film a 5-minute factory tour video dialogue incorporating cross-cultural elements. The videos can then be evaluated by ELSA Speak across three dimensions (fluency, lexical accuracy, and stress/intonation) to automatically generate personalized "improvement checklists". Simultaneously, Grammarly can refine the dialogue scripts for linguistic precision. After reviewing class-wide performance data, the teacher can identify and address the most common issues in the following lesson. Students then revise and re-record their

videos, comparing their before/after scores. Finally, AI tailors follow-up exercises to individual needs. For example, AI tool may give pronunciation drills for students with articulation issues while targeted vocabulary practice for those with lexical gaps, creating a closed-loop improvement cycle.

In the post-class phase, AI serves a dual function: it identifies individual student weaknesses to generate personalized practice exercises, while simultaneously aggregating performance data for instructors. Teachers then analyze this data to pinpoint common challenges across the class, enabling them to strategically adjust instructional focus in subsequent lessons.

The whole teaching procedure is shown in **Figure 1.**

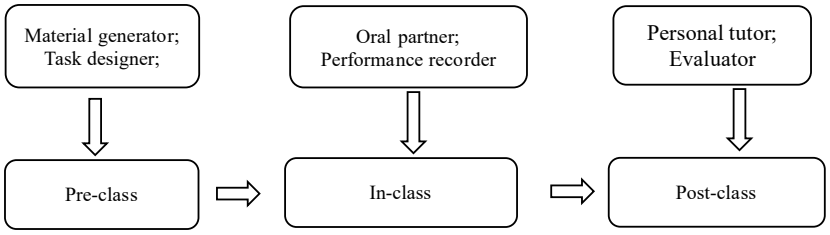

Figure 1. AI's role in the whole teaching procedure

5. Challenges and limitations

Despite AI technology's advantage, it is not flawless. The greatest challenge lies in data security. Educational platforms need to process and store large amounts of students' voice data and personal information in real time. In the event of cyberattacks or system failures, serious information leaks could occur. Besides, current speech recognition technology still has significant limitations, which are particularly prominent among non-native learners with regional accents. The system often fails to accurately identify the pronunciation characteristics of these learners, leading to biases in evaluation results. Furthermore, because the entire educational system is heavily dependent on hardware infrastructure, network delays or server failures can interrupt classes and directly jeopardize the continuity of education.

From the perspective of teacher adaptation, there are numerous barriers to the introduction of AI. Research shows that Chinese EFL teachers felt enjoyment, excitement, and motivation, but they also grappled with anxiety, stress, and frustration when using AI in L2 classrooms (Shen&Guo[11], 2024). Many veteran teachers, accustomed to traditional lecture-style education, face obvious difficulties in adapting to the blended teaching model. These issues manifest in two forms: challenges related to operating new technologies and distrust in the evaluation results generated by AI. More fundamentally, there is a significant gap between the traditional summative assessment approach and the formative assessment adopted by AI, forcing teachers to undergo a fundamental shift in their educational mindset. Educational institutions therefore need to establish a comprehensive teacher training system that goes beyond mere technical operation training and focuses on reforming educational philosophies and assessment methods.

6. Conclusion

The incorporation of AI technologies into BELS instruction delivers substantial benefits for both learners and educators. For students, these intelligent systems facilitate language skill development and business acquisition through customized learning pathways and immediate performance assessments. For instructors, AI adoption significantly enhances pedagogical effectiveness and classroom management efficiency. This paper shows how AI is integrated into the whole teaching process and evaluation by a case study. In each stage of teaching, AI works as an assistant for teachers. Nevertheless, data safety and the easy availability should be considered by instructors. Instructors also need to change those old teaching mindsets and try to take advantage of AI tools, maintaining them as supplementary rather than substitutive elements in the educational process.

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Disclosure statement

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