

- i. Greetings and News Updates
- ii. Members' Voices
- iii. Stories of Learning and Teaching Practices
- iv. LD SIG Grant Awardee Reports**
- v. Research & Reviews
- vi. Free Space
- vii. Looking Back
- viii. Looking Forward
- ix. SIG Matters

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BACK TO BASICS



Supported by a grant from the Learner Development (LD) SIG, I attended PanSIG 2024 in Fukui. The conference featured presentations which, supported by the JALT's various SIGs, allowed for a fascinating range of topics, interests and directions. Unsurprisingly, the conference featured a number of presentations directly or indirectly questioning generative AI's role and potential in the classroom. In the last 18 months, I have been interested in the research, policy changes and general responses to AI in the field of education. All of these were reflected in the PanSIG presentations, approached from many different starting points and backgrounds. I am particularly interested in the topic of student autonomous learning and motivation; both of which can be supported by AI. These different approaches and beliefs about generative AI in education led me to question my own relationship with technology and how it is reflected in my approach to it in the classroom.

I was born in the late '80's to an electrical engineering dad in a household with at least one personal computer as far back as I can remember. I was independently exploring the internet before I hit high school when I got my first internet-connected PC. I refer to myself as having grown up online and despite recent attempts to disconnect more often, technology is an ingrained part of my personal story. So, in November 2022 when ChatGPT was released to the public, I was not particularly surprised or shocked by its capabilities. Artificial Intelligence models were something I had long seen discussed through media like books and films. I accepted this as another great leap forward in the same line as the printing press, computers, the internet and finally smartphones. I was also unsurprised by the immediate backlash against the sudden widespread accessibility of AI.

“For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it... You give [them] not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing”

This is not a quote from a parent about their teen's over-reliance on their iPhone, but a discussion from Socrates as related by Plato about the proliferation of writing and literacy in Egypt, 370 BCE. I consider AI to be yet another leap forward in the human timeline and that it will, for a time, be a great disruptor to the systems we have so far developed.

Naturally, many of the presentations at PanSIG 2024 explored the emerging use of AI in the classroom with topics such as student and teacher opinions on its use, guidelines for preventing cheating,

how to support lesson planning, and the benefits or drawbacks for students. The JALTCALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) Forum in particular was dominated by lively discussions around the concerns and potentials surrounding AI, coupled with a sense of racing to catch up with such a huge, emerging innovation. Many questions and concerns were raised around how best to guide students, to what extent generative AI's use could help or hinder students, and what were its ethical uses in education. With my co-researcher, we had been exploring an ethical approach to using AI to develop writing skills through surveys and case studies.

In our research, *ChatGPT and Academic Writing: A study of EFL undergraduates* (Sadehvandi & Hook, 2024) we surveyed students to evaluate their familiarity with generative AI and translation tools and to what degree they were used. Students were tasked with creating an essay outline. The students then wrote an essay using this outline without any AI and compared it to an AI-generated essay prompted by the same outline. The students analysed the ChatGPT-written essay for vocabulary, grammar and format, and were then asked to write the essay a second time in class, using the same original essay outline. This allowed us to compare the two student-produced works and analyse if students made improvements. Students used a wider range of conjunctions, sentence patterns and topic-specific vocabulary but the largest improvements were made in format such as not starting a new line for each sentence.

Arciaga, Burri and Neff's *Teacher and Student Perceptions of the Ethical Use of A.I. Tools* (2024) tackled similar questions as our presentation. Namely, whether students have a functional understanding of generative AI and the possibility of its ethical use within the classroom. Arciaga et al. focussed on surveying students and teachers about hypothetical use cases and comparing student with teacher answers regarding what could constitute ethical use of AI. On many of the hypotheticals, teachers and students had similar opinions but did not always align. Students tended to believe that use of AI in higher-stakes activities such as tests and assignments was unethical, whereas teachers were more concerned with how students were using the tools to help or hinder their learning process. Interestingly, in our study, students were asked to reflect on the pros and cons of using AI in general. They demonstrated awareness of AI's effect on their learning, commenting that its use would hinder their ability to learn a language and develop skills.

Dennisson, Barr and Newbury (2024) in *Instructor and Student Perspectives of ChatGPT-Assisted Writing Tasks* collected feedback from students and instructors on ChatGPT corrective feedback. Students across several universities produced writing which was then submitted to ChatGPT for evaluation and recommendations, then were asked to submit a second piece of writing following the recommendations. This second piece of writing was then compared to the original, and in most instances showed improvements. Interestingly, though, students at a higher language fluency level showed fewer improvements, and in some cases ignored the recommendations which they perceived as making their writing piece worse. This research approached the question of whether AI could provide useful feedback for students and how the students felt about this feedback. The differences between this approach and our study can be seen in student responses according to proficiency level. Students at the upper end of proficiency in Dennisson et al.'s research rejected AI-proposed changes, while students at the lowest end of our study were not able to analyse the AI-produced work for comparison as it was too far above their level. In addition, as discussed in Nakamura, Okunuki, & Kashimura (2024)'s *Motivation, Learning Styles, and Engagement in EFL Learning Using ChatGPT*, the preferred learning environment and style were highly impactful on how students responded to AI-assisted learning.

Amongst all the presentations and focuses, what shocked me was the approach many educators and researchers were discussing in their research projects and through casual conversation. Time and again I heard presenters mention how students were encouraged to use ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, generate mind maps from a question, or give them some topics for their writing. I

can understand classroom teachers leaning towards this use of AI; brainstorming can often feel like pulling teeth, particularly in Japan where students are not practised in offering personal opinions in the classroom. However, it was not until I attended the LD SIG Forum that my discomfort with this approach to AI became clear.

The LD Forum included two poster presentations on the topic of “Stories”. The first discussed students’ explorations of minority stories and how students were able to shift from observing or wanting to “fix” someone’s problems to developing a personal connection and understanding the complexities of their experiences. The second discussion revolved around making space for students to share their stories in the classroom, often by sharing our own. For a language learner, the practical goals often focus on areas such as classroom grades, TOEIC scores, study abroad programs, or fluency. However, I have always seen the larger goal in language learning as an urge to communicate, not just by using the target grammar but by expressing our ideas and sharing our stories; expressing who we are as people.

I am in no way a technophobe. As mentioned, technology is an inseparable part of my growing up and present daily life. What so alarmed me about some Edu-tech researchers was their use of AI to not help improve a language skill, but instead to replace the fundamental goal of communication: to share your thoughts, ideas and opinions (in short, your story) with another. Since its introduction, AI has quickly become integrated in most areas of the internet and its effects can already be seen offline. For students growing up in this new generation, AI will become as much of their story as the internet is of mine. Prohibiting or ignoring it would be to close off a part of their lived reality, and these restrictions are quickly becoming an impossibility as seen by the inability of plagiarism checkers to reliably identify AI-produced materials. I believe that educators should train students in how to use AI to help them achieve their goals, like any other tool. To do this, we must make space for the students to develop the stories they want to tell and to sit with the complexities of the stories they want to hear.

It is fast becoming obvious that AI is here to stay, but that institutions are struggling to implement policies that do not hinder students’ development while remaining fair and ethical. But policies are like icebergs, inching slowly and resistant to individual influence. Students are already using AI in our classrooms, in small and big, inconsequential and deeply concerning ways. To flatly deny students access to tools which will be a major part of their lives going forward is to deny them part of their story. Instead, teachers need to be having these discussions in classrooms, not just about the use of AI but about ways to use it to help students learn, about the issues surrounding it as well as the possibilities. Particularly for students struggling with motivation or participation, AI can provide tailored one-to-one feedback from a free, timely, non-judgemental source. Nakamura, Okunuki, & Kashimura (2024) in *Motivation, Learning Styles, and Engagement in EFL Learning Using ChatGPT* found that students who preferred learning alone with high extrinsic motivation were particularly responsive to augmenting their learning using AI, and a highly personalised approach to its implementation in the classroom is necessary.

These are topics that require ongoing conversation with not only teachers who are pro- or anti-AI but also with the students themselves. I am grateful I was able to attend the PanSIG 2024 conference if nothing more than to confirm that others had the same questions, concerns, and hopes that I did and were working hard to find answers. In an increasingly online world, PanSIG 2024 and the Learner Development Forum proved that human connection and the sharing of stories is still as vital as ever.

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JALTCALL 2024 – Enhancing Motivation in EFL Students: The Role of AI and Online Linguistic Tools as Additional Teachers



During the pandemic, I started working as an online university teacher, and around this time, artificial intelligence or AI in language learning was being introduced, in particular ChatGPT. It is unavoidable that soon, university students will figure out all the opportunities provided by AI, prompting a debate about whether it impedes or benefits language learning. As motivating students is already a daunting task for second (L2) or foreign language (FL) teachers, controlling the negative impact of AI is an added challenge.

The development of new technologies has become an integral aspect in the pursuit of effective L2 and FL pedagogical practices. Particularly today, AI is increasingly becoming a part of the L2/FL classroom, including its role in examining motivation among L2/FL students. Schmidt and Strasser

(2022) predicted that in 2040, although there will still be a need for teachers, they will need to be data-literate and well-acquainted with AI technology, as the educational platform used in L2/FL classrooms will be a digital learning support system powered by AI. While this prediction underscores future trends, it prompts reflection on our current position as L2/FL teachers, and how these changes affect our methods of motivating students or their own motivation.

Motivation initiates L2/FL learning and sustains it through challenges (Dörnyei, 1998). Learners are said to be either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, or, as suggested by Reeve et al. (2004) amotivated, meaning both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are absent in the learning process. There are a number of extant issues with language learners that have been the focus of scholars and teachers long before the introduction of AI. Younger children, especially those attending English preschools, kindergartens, *eikaiwa* (conversation schools), or after-school programs, are often encouraged by their parents to learn English or pass language proficiency tests such as EIKEN (extrinsically motivated). The pressures involved in this can lead to resentment of the subject. Conversely, working adult students generally study English for personal and professional development (intrinsically motivated). However, they can be very critical of teaching strategies. In addition to these students, are university students in Japan (Benson, 1991; Brown, 2004; Kojima and Yashima, 2017). University students differ from younger students in terms of their motivation. These students connect their language learning goals with their future careers. Kojima and Yashima (2017, p. 37) noted that university students are motivated to study when they understand lectures delivered in English; thus, effective language teaching practices are crucial in this regard. However, overbearing workloads may result in such students seeking ways to cut corners, and AI certainly provides that. However, while all of these students have reasons to become demotivated, there may be ways to use AI for their encouragement.

The JALTCALL 2024 conference was held on May 17-19, 2024, focusing on the theme “The Impact of AI in Language Education,” providing insights into how university teachers in Japan are integrating AI into their classes. My attendance aimed to explore the connection between technological advancements and motivation in language learning. It was my first conference experience, made possible by receiving a grant from the JALT Learner Development SIG that allowed me to present alongside James Underwood and Blair Barr. During my presentation, I concentrated on the use of ChatGPT solely as a post-writing tool in traditional pen-and-paper writing activities. My ongoing research involved administering four writing activities to first year university students over a semester. Before returning their papers, I recorded students’ errors. They were instructed to input their essays exactly into ChatGPT with the specific prompt: “Can you correct the errors in: _____.” In subsequent papers, I examined whether they repeated the same errors or attempted to apply what they had learned from previous essays. In essence, the research aimed to determine whether students could learn from and pay attention to the corrections provided by ChatGPT.

One of my highlights of the conference was when Jim Ronald posed a question about whether I encouraged students to discuss the grammar errors flagged by ChatGPT with each other. This insightful feedback prompted me to incorporate “peer noticing” into my research, which I plan to present at future conferences. I promptly integrated this concept into my students’ penultimate writing activities. Discussing their errors with peers made the activity more engaging compared to the first writing activity, where they simply rewrote or marked errors flagged by ChatGPT. They were learning from each other. Additionally, to provide another opportunity to speak English in the class, I asked each student to share one thing they had learned from ChatGPT in that particular writing activity. However, whether there has truly been an improvement in their writing skills will only be determined once I have analyzed all their essays. I am hopeful that I can publish this research soon. Most importantly, I hope that this activity will encourage students to view ChatGPT as an additional language learning resource moving forward, rather than relying solely on it to generate their essays.

From attending the JALTCALL 2024 conference, I observed that the methods of how other teachers integrate AI and other online tools in the classroom enable students to become increasingly engaged in learning. Throughout the conference, I reminded myself to seek more ways to increase my students' motivation levels as they use AI to their advantage, rather than allowing it to simply replace their learning efforts. The presentations further underscored that introducing AI into a language classroom promotes active student involvement, leading to improved performance and increased talking time, with teachers serving as facilitators of learning. This relationship between intrinsic motivation and active engagement has been supported by recent studies (e.g. Wei, 2023) focusing on how students utilize AI platforms in their language learning process. While most of the presentations I attended were geared towards teaching strategies for advanced levels, I am confident that they could be adapted and applied to benefit my first-year university students, who have achieved either EIKEN Grade 2 or Pre-2nd proficiency levels.

The first presentation, titled "Generating discussion: Using ChatGPT to foster critical thinking skills," which was relevant to my own research interests, was given by Kathryn Jurns. The teaching method presented promoted self-regulated learning. Jurns' approach used AI, specifically ChatGPT, to develop students' critical thinking skills. Jurns allowed her students to explore ChatGPT's advantages and drawbacks by having them generate discussion questions for a given text using the tool, which they later analyzed. Since the conference, I have implemented this method in two ways. First, I cautioned my students that while ChatGPT can aid in language learning, it can also occasionally lead to confusion. For instance, in my research and JALTCALL presentation, I established how students were puzzled when ChatGPT changed "I like swimming" to "I enjoy swimming," as they thought "enjoy" sounded more natural. Secondly, I adapted Jurns' strategy slightly differently from her original intent. Instead of evaluating questions generated by ChatGPT, my students created reading comprehension questions and then used ChatGPT to check the grammar of those questions. Although these questions mainly tested their literal comprehension skills, the primary aim of the activity was for students to grasp the reading material better. I chose to integrate ChatGPT because during our initial attempts, their sentences were hard to understand. Using ChatGPT enabled them to formulate clear, understandable questions. Each group of four students was assigned one paragraph from a text and tasked with creating three questions within ten minutes. Afterward, each group presented their questions to the class. I called on one student per question and encouraged their peers to assist them. At the end of the lesson, I asked if they had understood the reading, and they nodded in affirmation. Previously, my reading lessons heavily relied on PowerPoint slides, where I did most of the talking. Now, I use PowerPoint solely to introduce new vocabulary items as a pre-reading activity. Importantly, students now appear more engaged with my revised approach to reading, inspired by Jurns' innovative teaching methods.

Another strategy that piqued my interest for adoption in my classes was Michael Hofmeyr's approach of promoting "play and learn" in an L2/FL classroom which he introduced through a workshop. One game Hofmeyr introduced to us is "Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes" (Steel Crate Games, 2015), a puzzle game designed to boost speaking confidence through digital gaming. Hofmeyr's idea involves one person assigned a task, with both this individual and the teammates engaging in continuous dialogue, describing each picture on a tablet until they successfully defuse the bomb. It is different from other guessing games, where players guess a picture through yes or no questions, or like charades, where one person acts out what is on their card without speaking until his/her teammates guess the correct answer. According to Hofmeyr, this game is intended for intermediate-level L2 students. I believe this activity should be regularly implemented in class as the process was quite challenging, even for us adult teachers. The game utilizes a manual with numerous pages of text, which may pose difficulties for Japanese students. Despite this challenge, it was undeniably enjoyable. Should I choose to adopt this activity for my Japanese students, whether

beginners or higher-level, I would need to make adjustments. For my first-year university students, I would need to select themes with easily describable images. However, the challenge lies in the availability of tablets in the classroom. Therefore, I am considering a similar game with a simplified manual, using printable pictures or exploring online games that utilize cell phones. Despite these alterations, the fundamental concept remains: “play and learn.”

Yoko Takano’s presentation entitled “Telecollaboration project improves college students’ intercultural communication skills” is both unique and intriguing. Takano initiated this project with a university in Sri Lanka. The main goal of the project was for Japanese college students to explore cultural differences and understand the concept of “World Englishes.” They interacted with Sri Lankan students using platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp. Their objective was to create presentation slides that reflect their respective cultures. Eventually, the Japanese students produced video presentations and shared these recordings with their counterparts in Sri Lanka. This opportunity allows Japanese students to naturally apply their English skills. Additionally, they discover that learning another language enables them to build international networks, facilitated by modern technology.

While the presentations just mentioned highlighted potential activities that promote engagement and motivation among students, I also attended a presentation called “The NGSL Project: 10 Years of Helping EFL Learners to Succeed”. This presentation introduced an online tool which can aid language teachers and material developers. The New General Service List (NGSL) Project, led by Charles Browne, is expanding with tools for language teaching, assessment, and the development of reading materials. The project has introduced new pedagogically-driven games, online placement and achievement tests, and text creation tools. It also collaborates with other text analysis software tools like AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2024). I have used AntWordProfiler along with the NGSL as a reference to determine word coverage in my subject texts in another research project. This tool is beneficial, as language teachers can adjust vocabulary items in texts according to students’ language levels. I found this NGSL project, as well as AntWordProfiler, helpful in promoting motivation in reading, especially when these tools assist with creating reading texts. Reading avoidance, an aspect of reading motivation (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1995), was found to be present among university students learning EFL in Japan due to long and difficult English passages (Mori, 2002). This means that text structure affects reading motivation, and the need to make text adjustments and simplifications can be facilitated using text analysis tools.

From the presentations I attended at JALTCALL 2024, I realized that AI and online learning tools should be used to encourage involvement among students, with teachers acting more as facilitators of learning. AI can be utilized to increase students’ speaking opportunities and enhance their reading comprehension. Students should also view AI and online language tools as additional learning resources outside the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, can treat AI and other linguistic tools as co-evaluators of materials used in the classroom to avoid overestimating what students can actually process, especially given their limited learning time. If these technological innovations could be used reasonably, not only will students’ motivation to learn another language improve, but language teachers will also become more creative, moving away from traditional norms of language teaching.

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