

# Challenges of College English Teaching in the AI Era

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This article attempts to explore the multifaceted challenges existing in college English teaching due to the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including the demanding new competencies of college English teachers, proper motivation, participation, and ability to transfer skills to real-world contexts of college English learners, and the increasingly difficult educational processes.

*Keywords:* challenges, college English teaching, artificial intelligence (AI)

## Introduction

In the face of the various teaching reforms and challenges in English language teaching under the new artificial intelligence (AI) era, university English teachers should integrate the traditional methods of the cultivation of college students' English proficiency with new approaches under the background of increasing popularity of AI technologies. These approaches aim to promote English learners' abilities in memorization, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation, and to encourage efficient and personalized learning. It also seeks to achieve a genuine transformation in teaching content, teaching models, and learning methods.

While stimulating students' enthusiasm and ability to learn, teachers should continuously enhance their own sense of life value, change the power dynamics in teaching practices, and create an atmosphere of equality between teachers and students. By establishing a learning community, teachers can allow the sparks of inspiration, fleeting insights, and rich ideas from both teachers and students to collide intensely in a positive classroom atmosphere. This ultimately leads to a dynamic equilibrium of resonance, enabling students to experience valuable classroom learning and reap the rewards of life, while balancing technology and human interaction to make for the limitations of artificial intelligence.

## The Demanding New Competencies of College English Teachers

Traditional English teaching has long emphasized skill training while neglecting the transmission and cultivation of humanistic spirit and cross-cultural communication abilities between the East and the West. This has led to a series of problems, such as reduced student interest in learning, insufficient motivation, low learning efficiency, and the inability to apply what they have learned in practice. These issues are also at the heart of the crisis facing the foreign language teaching. In particular, college students in the new AI era, who are in a period of transformation, pose greater challenges to foreign language teachers. Teachers are not only required to continuously improve their professional competence and gain a thorough understanding of foreign cultural

knowledge, but also need to constantly explore and research ways to improve traditional language teaching methods. They must design teaching plans according to students' levels and needs to reflect the value of classroom teaching.

Today's college English classrooms are facing a new generation of college students who have grown up in the AI era. Traditional English teaching, which focuses solely on skill training, can no longer meet their needs. English educators face unprecedented challenges in terms of the diversity of teaching resources and the adoption of new teaching models. Ignoring these challenges or adhering rigidly to old methods will only lead to falling behind the times and being left in a passive position. Exploring new approaches in English classroom teaching can serve as a breakthrough point to transcend traditional teaching, highlight the connotation and characteristics, and achieve a diversified teaching model.

### **Ways of Transformation of the Role of College English Teachers in the AI Era**

#### **From Knowledge Transmitters to Learning Facilitators**

Under the background of artificial intelligence, college English teachers need to face the challenges of transforming their roles accordingly to adapt to the new era. In the age of information explosion coupled with AI technology, students have easier access to varieties of learning materials. Teachers should shift their focus from merely imparting knowledge to facilitating students' learning processes, which involves guiding students to think critically, solve problems, and engage in active learning.

The opinions of experts on the use of ChatGPT in college English teaching confirmed the benefits of artificial intelligence tools for language learning, but also pointed out that the problems brought by new technologies should not be underestimated, such as the potential to hinder the development of students' critical thinking and research abilities. It may expose students to incorrect information and biases in the text. Thus, emphasizing the crucial role of teachers in guiding students when they use artificial intelligence technology for foreign language learning becomes glaringly apparent.

Effective and efficient classroom teaching is an essential component in the implementation of foreign language instruction in the new age, with the goal of creating an environment conducive to foreign language learning in order to enhance students' proficiency. In this process, teachers are not only responsible for imparting linguistic knowledge, but also for providing students with communicative contexts to practice this knowledge and opportunities to showcase their learning achievements. The limited English classroom is, however, a significant platform for conveying infinite values. While the English knowledge and skills students acquire in the classroom are quantifiable and finite, values and the humanistic spirit have a lifelong impact. If the acquisition and teaching of English focus solely on its instrumental and practical aspects while neglecting the true meaning of English learning, one cannot grasp the essence of English learning or experience its true joy. College English textbooks are rich in humanistic information. If English educators can grasp this macroscopically and design the classroom systematically, fully mobilize students' enthusiasm for learning, and create a relaxed, pleasant, and harmonious learning environment, they will surely have a subtle yet profound influence on students' emotions, attitudes, personalities, critical thinking abilities, and values.

#### **From Classroom Managers to Capable AI Tool Users**

Behaviorism views teachers as the controllers of the classroom and designers of learning outcomes; humanism sees teachers as motivators, inspirers, and facilitators; constructivism regards teachers as mediators.

Whether it is the achievement of classroom teaching objectives or the effective realization of teaching outcomes, teachers with multiple identities and role perceptions are the key in classroom teaching. Breaking the traditional teacher-student role model and using AI tools to establish a lasting, stable, and harmonious relationship with the teaching environment, students, and oneself simultaneously is essential. Integrating one's personal philosophy, teaching goals, and students' needs organically, and engaging in effective dialogue in response to the multifaceted demands of classroom teaching, can effectively bring humanistic care into the classroom and continuously promotes exploratory practice.

The powerful capabilities and conversational working mode of AI make it possible for it to serve as an intelligent assistant for teachers, providing support in various aspects, such as teaching research, lesson preparation, training, and grading. On the other hand, it can also act as an intelligent partner for students, offering an interactive scaffold mediated by interpersonal relationships. This indicates that AI technology is not only a tool, but also a member of the community involved in English learning. Tools include textbooks, multimedia devices, AI technology, classroom discourse, and the text and symbols used in measuring teaching effect and learning result. After AI technology is integrated into teaching, specific stages of teaching implementation undergo corresponding changes, the learning environment for students is altered, and the role of teachers is also transformed. What really matters is the transformation of the role from traditional teachers to AI tool users. The school authority or college English teaching teams should spare no efforts to create a positive environment for the use of AI technologies and gradually cultivate teachers' awareness and ability to innovate in teaching through the application of AI technologies. Award system should be established for digital teaching innovation to recognize teachers who excel in digital teaching. Alternatively, they can regularly organize exhibitions, exchanges, and seminars on digital teaching to motivate teachers to innovate in this area and to enhance their confidence and courage in engaging in digital teaching and research.

### **From Sole Instructors to Collaborators**

AI can serve as a co-teacher, handling routine tasks, such as grading assignments and providing feedback. This allows teachers to focus on more complex and creative aspects of teaching, such as designing innovative lesson plans and fostering students' higher-order thinking skills. They can encourage students to work in groups, both online and offline, to complete projects and assignments. AI can support this process by providing collaborative tools and monitoring group progress. So, teachers have more time and energy to systematically and structurally process "fragments" of language knowledge, allowing knowledge to form thought, generate viewpoints, solve problems, and release energy, thereby transforming knowledge into wisdom. In this context, the release, collection, processing, derivation, and integration of information in the classroom become particularly significant. Students should not only learn language skills but more importantly, develop the ability for rational thinking, critical absorption, and creative exploration. The English classroom should be internalized as an intrinsic quality of students, fostering their sense of self-efficacy.

The adoption of hybrid teaching models that combine online resources with face-to-face instruction can optimize the learning experience. Teachers can use online platforms for pre-class assignments, while classroom time can be dedicated to discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving. Through classroom practice, teachers can achieve unexpected teaching efficiency by employing various methods, techniques, and strategies. This approach can address issues, such as monotonous teaching methods, insufficient classroom engagement, neglect of students' emotional factors, and the inability of textbooks to keep pace with current needs. It ensures that

students with high English proficiency do not feel “unsatisfied” and move beyond the limitation of mechanical repetition in language practice.

### Conclusion

Opportunities and challenges coexist for both college English teachers and students in this new era which calls for the capability of transforming the traditional teaching and learning as well as the radical change in educational methods, technological skills, and ethical considerations. In this new round of educational reform, how to apply artificial intelligence to teaching to create a new teaching ecosystem and cultivate the talents needed by the country in the new era is an important issue that every English educator needs to think about. Realizing the unshakable trend and overwhelming challenges, college English teachers will be urged to harness the power of AI to explore new possibilities and creatively bring positive changes to the traditional teaching contexts through continuous professional development, thus paving the way for the students’ future growth in the digital age.

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