

STUDENT INTERACTIONS WITH EDUCATIONAL AI CHATBOTS IN LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: INSIGHTS FROM USAGE AND PERSPECTIVES

Questo studio esamina l'uso di un chatbot educativo IA in un corso di inglese commerciale con 142 studenti in un'università della Germania meridionale. Dall'analisi delle interazioni sono emerse quattro categorie di utilizzo: richiesta di esempi, guida strutturale, feedback e valutazione. Un sondaggio su 73 studenti rivela un'elevata usabilità e fiducia nel chatbot, ritenuto efficace per migliorare le capacità di scrittura. Tuttavia, sebbene il chatbot abbia aiutato dal punto di vista linguistico, sorgono preoccupazioni riguardo al fatto che alcuni studenti si concentrino sulle correzioni superficiali piuttosto che su miglioramenti concettuali più profondi, evidenziando la necessità di strategie che incoraggino un utilizzo più sostanziale dello strumento.

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Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed language learning by providing tailored experiences and personalised feedback. AI-powered chatbots simulate real-life conversations, enabling extended practice in speaking, writing, and listening without fear of face loss. However, challenges such as standard language bias in AI (Payne et al., 2024) require critical examination in educational settings. Recent studies have examined the influence of AI-powered chatbots on L2 writing, including individual and collaborative processing of AI-generated feedback on overall writing quality (Yan, 2024), L2 writers' revision strategies (Ziqi et al., 2024), and engagement with corrective feedback provided by ChatGPT (Yan & Zhang, 2024). However, students' engagement with chatbots specifically designed for pedagogical purposes remains underexplored. This exploratory study examined human-AI collaboration in a language-for-specific-purposes setting, focusing on student interactions with a

chatbot to develop business writing skills and their perceptions of its use.

Methodology

Mizou, a GDPR-compliant AI chatbot that allows educators to create tailored chatbots, was used in its paid version during a compulsory in-person B2 level Business English course for 142 second-semester Business Administration students at a German university during the summer term of 2024. The students completed writing tasks, including business emails, with the option to use Mizou. The tasks were completed in class under instructor supervision to ensure independence from external AI tools. Students were explicitly instructed to avoid using AI while writing their texts.

The chatbot was programmed to provide feedback without completing tasks, as configured by the instructor. For this exploratory study, the corpus comprised students' interactions with three

Category	Example
Requesting Examples	'Examples of the beginning of the Body of an Email'; 'Give me an example of how to describe the delivery service package'; 'Can you give me an example for the professional Tone';
Asking for guidance in terms of structure and content	'What should I write for point 2?'; 'How do I express regret'; 'How is the best way to apologize?'; 'what mistakes should I avoid?'; 'can i offer a replacement and discount'; 'is it good to tell the costumer [sic] that she should send us the product back so we can investigate it?'
Asking for feedback (e.g., on their texts and corrections)	'what could still be made better?'; 'Tell me about grammer synthax and language'; 'is that okay?'; 'Bitte gebe mir ein Feedback'; 'Can you check grammar and vocabulary for me?'
Grade and word limit	'What would be the grade'; 'Grade'; 'rate my essay in case of content, grammar fluently and check the word limit'

Table 1

Categories of chatbot use

task-specific Mizou chatbots, accessed 345 times in total. All comments, questions, and commands from the interactions were analysed.

Results

Four distinctive categories of chatbot use were identified. Table 1 shows that some students asked generic questions, while others posed tailored, context-specific ones, indicating deeper engagement and potentially eliciting more precise chatbot responses.

The number of text versions each student uploaded for Mizou's feedback ranged from 1 to 7, though most students uploaded their text only once, often without providing any instruction.

Some students were economical with their language, giving one-word instructions such as "Grade" or "Example" instead of full requests. Others adhered to interpersonal conventions, incorporating greetings such as "Hi there help me starting with my writing", expressing gratitude with phrases like "Thanks for the help" and using an emoji: "Thank you. you too 🍀". Some even reassured the chatbot with comments such as "Ok, calm down" after receiving suggestions. Additionally, some students used language typical of human interaction, such as, "What do you think about this?" and "Okey got it go on". While the students' communication was generally conducted in English, some instances of translanguaging were noted. For example, a student wrote, "How can i say that she become [sic] a retouren Schein for the Post", indicating a struggle with e-commerce terminology. The chatbot successfully understood the students'

request and provided assistance without any difficulties.

Student perceptions and attitudes

At the end of the course, 73 students participated in an anonymous survey administered through Moodle. The survey consisted of 17 questions designed to gather feedback on their experience with Mizou.

Students were asked two general questions about AI to assess their openness and frequency of use. A large majority (85%) indicated that they enjoy using AI for their studies. However, their actual frequency of use varied, with around 22% using it very frequently, 37% frequently, 26% occasionally, 12% rarely, and 3% very rarely.

Most respondents (93%) found Mizou easy to use. Students generally viewed Mizou as a valuable tool to improve their Business English skills, with over half rating it as very useful or useful. Additionally, most students regarded Mizou as effective in providing detailed feedback on their writing, rating it very effective (21%) or effective (55%). Meanwhile, 22% felt neutral about Mizou's feedback, and a small percentage (3%) rated it as ineffective. Notably, no respondents found it very ineffective.

Students identified several specific features of Mizou as particularly useful. Overall feedback, i.e. providing a broader evaluation of their writing, was valued the most (62%). Grammar correction and sentence structure improvement were also appreciated, with 57% of students

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The use of Mizou encourages me to practise writing more frequently	4%	32%	47%	14%	4%
2. Mizou helped me make good progress.	5%	55%	32%	8%	0%
3. I would recommend using Mizou to other students for writing practice.	18%	58%	19%	4%	1%
4. Using Mizou reduces my fear of making mistakes in my writing.	5%	32%	59%	2%	2%

Table 2
Student Perceptions of the Chatbot's
Usefulness for Writing Practice

recognising their benefits. Additionally, a notable number of students found vocabulary suggestions (44%) and the ability to receive instant feedback (40%) helpful.

When asked about their trust in Mizou, the responses suggest that while many students generally trust the chatbot (27% almost always; 45% often), they also engage critically, demonstrating selective trust (25% sometimes; 3% rarely). This critical engagement is desirable in educational contexts that encourage critical thinking, as it fosters reflective learning.

Regarding motivation to write based on feedback from Mizou, respondents generally did not feel demotivated, yet a strong positive motivation is absent for most. A small portion of students (4%) reported feeling much more motivated, with 27% feeling more motivated. The majority (62%) remained neutral, while only 7% felt less or much less motivated. Most students expressed a positive interest in working with Mizou in the future (19%

strongly agreed and 5% agreed). Meanwhile, 21% were undecided, and a smaller proportion (7%) expressed reservations.

Table 2 table shows a generally positive view of Mizou for writing practice. Most students believe the tool aids their progress and would recommend it, though opinions vary on its impact on reducing fear of mistakes. Many feel motivated to practise more, while a notable portion remains neutral.

Regarding receiving feedback from Mizou vs. human feedback, the responses show that 42% of participants feel neutral about Mizou's feedback compared to human feedback. 30% feel more comfortable, while 7% are much more comfortable. On the other hand, 21% feel less comfortable, and no participants reported feeling much less comfortable. Overall, the results are mixed, with a slight preference for comfort or neutrality towards Mizou's feedback.

Regarding feedback preferences, over a third of respondents somewhat prefer receiving feedback from a human instructor, with a smaller group strongly preferring human feedback. In contrast, 22% somewhat prefer feedback from Mizou, while only a few strongly favour it. About a quarter of respondents expressed no preference between human feedback and Mizou. Overall, there is a general preference for human feedback, although many respondents also appreciate Mizou's feedback or remain neutral.

Students were invited to comment on their chatbot experience. Many praised its effectiveness in improving writing

Some students focused on quick fixes, avoiding deeper dialogue that could support their writing skills development.

Chatbot interactions often required students to process lengthy responses, serving as covert reading tasks that may support language development

skills, providing structured and immediate feedback (e.g., “helped me to get feedback at any time”), being easy to use, and providing grammar assistance. One student appreciated that “Mizou is not judging like a human could do”, while another expressed a preference for human feedback, stating, “it’s okay but I prefer a human being - it’s just personal”. However, some students mentioned technical issues, such as slow performance and non-functioning links, and noted the repetitive nature of the feedback, with one commenting, “It was okay, but often the replies are quite the same - I missed some deepness”.

Discussion and conclusion

Students used the chatbot to explore different writing aspects, including seeking examples, guidance on structure and content, grammar checks, better phrasing and syntax improvement. Engagement levels varied; some students interacted minimally with the chatbot, while others engaged intensively, demonstrating a proactive approach by requesting further feedback after making revisions. These findings highlight key differences in how students use AI for writing, suggesting varied level of writing autonomy and learning strategies.

The findings indicate that some students value iterative learning, using the chatbot as a tool to refine their skills. In contrast, some students focused on quick fixes, avoiding deeper dialogue that could support their writing skills development. Future research should investigate the factors that influence learners’

willingness to engage deeply with the chatbot, including motivation and perceptions of AI tools, particularly regarding academic integrity.

Chatbot interactions often required students to process lengthy responses, serving as covert reading tasks that may support language development. Future studies should examine how the quality and types of student questions evolve with increased engagement with educational chatbots, with particular attention to variations across proficiency levels. This includes investigating the impact of chatbots on students’ reading skills, and exploring students’ pragmatic behaviour in human – machine interactions. It is essential to explore how educational chatbots can be optimised for different educational contexts while also identifying the conditions and learner behaviours that support effective use.

References

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