PROMPT ENGINEERING AS A NEW SKILL FOR FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract. *The rise of AI chatbots has been revolutionizing English language teacher preparation by changing the ways in which teachers develop and adapt teaching materials. This article investigates prompt engineering as an emergent skill that allows teachers to design effective instructions to the AI systems rather than using the AI chatbots simply as black-boxed technical artifacts. This emerging concept is interpreted through the frameworks of TPACK and digital literacy, illustrating the integration of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge.*

Four major prompting competencies including task specification, the provision of learner context, the improvement of generated outputs and critically assessing the generation results are described with detailed discussion.

This paper recommends the implementation of prompt engineering into current teacher education programs as opposed to a stand-alone course. Additionally, problems of both inequality of access to AI-based tools, the tendency toward teacher dependence on generated content, and the difficulty in recognizing the lack of variety in AI-based English language generation due to different L1 backgrounds of English language learners, is also explored.

Keywords: *prompt engineering, English language teaching, artificial intelligence, teacher education, TPACK, digital literacy, large language models.*

Ask a group of pre-service English teachers today how they prepared last week's worksheet, and a fair number will mention typing a request into ChatGPT, Claude, or a similar system rather than opening a textbook or a grammar reference. This is a genuine change in how classroom material gets made, and it did not come with a manual. Earlier software for teachers — gap-fill generators, flashcard makers, quiz builders — worked through menus: click a topic, pick a level, press generate. A chatbot works through conversation. The information the teacher provides is, in effect, the entire specification for what comes back, and a poorly defined specification often produces unclear and less effective outputs. This is true of most, but not all, school subjects: much of what we need in a language lesson - a dialogue at the appropriate level, a text within a known lexical range, feedback that addresses a

lexical error without making the student flinch - involves an accuracy that's missing from requests like these. Give trainee teacher, or for that matter, experienced-but-novice, "a reading text about travel," and a piece of something will emerge; ask for a CEFR A1 reading text about travel in approximately 100 words from a vocabulary restricted to a target list, with an accompanied pair of multiple-choice questions, and you are far more likely to get a text, a lesson, than if no specific parameters are offered for any dimension of the request at all. It's the disparity between these results, with which most anyone training for a career teaching English will be familiar, that this paper addresses.

It makes sense to begin with Mishra and Koehler's TPACK model (2006) as it defines teaching with technology as trying to reconcile three things that a teacher needs to know at any given moment: the content (subject matter), pedagogy (methods of teaching it), and technology (the device with which it is being taught). Writing prompts fall right within this Venn diagram; one has to know B1 content vocabulary if one wants a usable B1-reading passage about a general topic written by a chatbot. One has to know what kind of comprehension exercise works for a given class if one is trying to test comprehension with a B1 piece (pedagogical knowledge) and one has to know that specifying the CEFR level in the prompt results in much more consistent output than just asking for it to be "easy" or "simple" (technological knowledge). If one can't reconcile one of those three, there is a significant amount of editing to do.

A second useful lens comes from how digital literacy is being redefined. Older definitions centered on finding and judging information that already existed somewhere online. That definition no longer covers what teachers are doing when they sit down with a chatbot, because the material does not exist until the conversation produces it. Godwin-Jones (2024) describes this as a kind of shared authorship between the human and the system, where the usefulness of the exchange depends on how clearly the human side states what it wants. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), in a broad review of AI use across higher education, note a related gap: the people actually teaching with these tools are rarely the ones involved in designing or evaluating them. That gap is one reason prompting cannot be left as something teachers pick up informally — it needs to be taught with the same deliberateness as any other classroom skill.

Core Prompting Competencies for English Language Teachers.

Effective interaction with AI systems depends on several prompting habits that can be developed through teacher education. Four core competencies are particularly important for English language teachers.

Task Specification.

The first competency is the ability to define tasks clearly and precisely. Giving a general request like "Give me a grammar exercise" leaves it up to the AI on the complexity, the skill level and the types of materials that could be given to practice on the requested feature. Providing a prompt that indicates language level, target grammar, activity type, product would require better coordination from the user.
Therefore, developing precise prompts requires both technological understanding and pedagogical knowledge.
Contextual Scaffolding.
The second competency involves providing sufficient information about learners and the learning context. AI-generated materials become more relevant when teachers specify learners' language levels, backgrounds, curriculum requirements, and learning goals. As Godwin-Jones (2022) notes, AI systems remain dependent on user input and function as supportive tools rather than replacements for teachers.
Iterative Refinement.
The third competency is the ability to improve AI-generated results through continuous revision. Similar to classroom feedback processes, teachers need to evaluate outputs, identify weaknesses, and modify prompts to achieve more appropriate results.
Critical Evaluation of Output.
The final and most important competency is the critical evaluation of AI-generated content. AI outputs may appear accurate while containing factual, cultural, or pedagogical problems. Therefore, teachers must review and adapt generated materials before classroom use. As Warschauer and Grimes (2008) highlight in relation to automated technologies, such tools should support rather than replace teacher judgment. Prompt engineering, therefore, cannot substitute teachers' professional knowledge but can enhance their ability to work effectively with AI.
How to Integrate Prompt Engineering in Teacher Education?

As discussed earlier, prompt engineering doesn't need to be a full university course on its own; rather, it's skills-based instruction that can be integrated into the existing university's methodology and materials-design course(s) of the teacher education program. As a class activity, we can also invite teacher trainees to generate instructions to a selected real teaching materials such as materials to be taught in class, rubric of the assessment, questions of comprehensions test, and to compare and contrast between the outcomes generated by using these different instructions and the original.

By doing so they will be able to feel the need to communicate clearly and accurately with AI for designing teaching and learning materials.

They can also be provided with practical skills on developing instructions with guidelines such as checklist for generating instructions to AI, on evaluation for correcting any errors found in the produced texts or images, as well as on ethical use of AI as part of our responsibility in this emerging technology. During their teacher practicum, teacher trainees are also expected to justify their pedagogical choices, instead of simply accepting materials produced by AI without critical review. Through prompt engineering practices, teachers can develop their skills together with their existing pedagogical knowledge and classroom management.

It should not be assumed that prompt engineering is just another name for a new technical skill, but a complex blend of instructional design, technological literacy, and pedagogical judgment. In the preparation of AI-assisted learning resources it is still necessary for teachers to know their learners, plan pedagogical goals, and analyze AI output from a pedagogical perspective. Teacher education programs should not expect the teachers to gain these new skills alone with a rapid growth in these AI tools within teachers' professional lives, but offer them a context to practice prompt creation, analyze AI generated resources, and think critically about their pedagogy. More research is needed, however, that examines how training in prompt engineering affects teachers' practices, and that considers an appropriate approach to integrate prompt engineering training with teacher expertise.

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