

Analysis of Ethical Dilemmas and Avoidance Strategies in the Application of Artificial Intelligence in International Chinese Language Education

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into International Chinese Language Education (ICLE) heralds a paradigm shift, offering unprecedented opportunities for personalized learning, resource accessibility, and pedagogical efficiency. However, this technological advancement is not without its perils. This paper provides a comprehensive conceptual analysis of the multifaceted ethical dilemmas emerging from the application of AI in the ICLE domain. It eschews quantitative analysis in favor of a deep theoretical exploration of the inherent challenges. The core ethical predicaments are identified and categorized into four principal domains: (1) algorithmic bias and the perpetuation of cultural hegemony, which risk marginalizing linguistic and cultural diversity; (2) data privacy infringements and the potential for pervasive learner surveillance, which compromise learner autonomy and security; (3) pedagogical dehumanization and the erosion of the educator's humanistic role, threatening the socio-affective dimensions of language acquisition; and (4) the opacity of AI systems, leading to critical issues of accountability and transparency. In response to these challenges, this paper formulates a corresponding framework of proactive avoidance and mitigation strategies. These strategies advocate for the cultivation of algorithmic fairness through diverse data stewardship, the establishment of robust data governance protocols grounded in ethical design, the reaffirmation of humanistic pedagogy through a "human-in-the-loop" model, and the enhancement of systemic transparency and accountability. The paper concludes that a technologically deterministic approach is untenable. Instead, a critically reflective and ethically grounded integration of AI is imperative to ensure that its deployment in ICLE serves to enrich, rather than undermine, the fundamental humanistic goals of language education and intercultural communication.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence (AI); International Chinese Language Education (ICLE); Ethical Dilemmas; Algorithmic Bias; Data Privacy; Humanistic Pedagogy; AI Ethics; EdTech Governance.

1. Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed the inexorable rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative force across virtually every sector of human endeavor. In the field of education, AI is no longer a futuristic concept but an increasingly embedded reality, promising to

revolutionize teaching and learning through adaptive platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated assessment tools. Concurrently, International Chinese Language Education (ICLE) has experienced exponential growth, driven by global economic, political, and cultural dynamics. The convergence of these two powerful trends—the AI revolution and the global ascendance of Chinese language learning—creates a fertile ground for innovation. AI-powered applications, from chatbot conversation partners to sophisticated writing feedback systems, are being developed and deployed to cater to the diverse needs of millions of learners worldwide[1].

The potential benefits of this synthesis are undeniable. AI can provide learners with instant, personalized feedback, access to vast linguistic corpora, and immersive, simulated environments for language practice. It can democratize access to high-quality instruction, transcending geographical and temporal barriers. For educators, AI offers the potential to automate laborious tasks such as grading and curriculum personalization, freeing them to focus on higher-order pedagogical functions like fostering intercultural competence and critical thinking.

However, beneath this veneer of technological optimism lies a complex and often overlooked landscape of profound ethical challenges. The uncritical adoption of AI in ICLE risks importing and amplifying systemic biases, compromising learner privacy on an unprecedented scale, and gradually eroding the essential human element that lies at the heart of language education. The algorithms that power these educational tools are not neutral arbiters of knowledge; they are socio-technical artifacts, shaped by the data they are trained on and the values of their creators. When applied to the nuanced and culturally sensitive domain of language education, particularly one as rich and diverse as Chinese, the potential for ethical missteps is substantial. Despite the rapid proliferation of AI tools in the language learning market, a systematic and critical examination of their ethical implications within the specific context of ICLE remains conspicuously underdeveloped in academic discourse. Much of the existing literature tends to focus on technological capabilities and pedagogical efficacy, with ethical considerations often relegated to footnotes or general platitudes. This paper seeks to address this critical lacuna. It moves beyond a purely functionalist perspective to undertake a deep, qualitative inquiry into the ethical dilemmas inherent in the application of AI in ICLE[2].

The central thesis of this paper is that a proactive, principles-based ethical framework is not merely an ancillary consideration but a prerequisite for the responsible and sustainable integration of AI into the ICLE ecosystem. By first systematically identifying and deconstructing the primary ethical dilemmas, we can then construct a coherent set of avoidance and mitigation strategies. This paper will, therefore, be structured as follows: Section 2 will establish a conceptual framework, briefly reviewing the landscape of AI in language education and delineating the unique characteristics of ICLE that heighten ethical sensitivities. Section 3 will form the core of the analysis, offering a detailed exposition of four major categories of ethical dilemmas: algorithmic bias and cultural hegemony; data privacy and surveillance; pedagogical dehumanization; and accountability and transparency. Section 4 will then respond directly to these challenges by proposing a multi-pronged strategic framework for ethical governance and practice. Finally, Section 5 will conclude by summarizing the key arguments and positing a vision for a future where technological innovation and humanistic educational values can coexist in a synergistic, rather than antagonistic, relationship[3]. This study is intended to serve as a foundational resource for educators, policymakers, AI developers, and institutional leaders navigating the complex ethical terrain of AI in global language education.

2. Conceptual Framework: AI, Ethics, and the Uniqueness of ICLE

To adequately analyze the ethical dilemmas at the intersection of AI and ICLE, it is first necessary to establish a conceptual foundation that integrates three distinct but interrelated domains: the functional role of AI in language education, the core tenets of AI ethics, and the specific pedagogical and cultural context of ICLE.

2.1. The Integration of AI in Contemporary Language Education

The application of AI in language learning is an evolution of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). However, unlike earlier rule-based systems, modern AI, particularly machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP), introduces capabilities of a different order of magnitude. Current applications can be broadly categorized. Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) provide adaptive learning paths, adjusting content difficulty based on real-time performance analysis. Speech Recognition and Generation tools offer pronunciation practice and feedback, simulating conversational interaction with native-like proficiency. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems analyze learners' written texts for grammatical accuracy, syntactic complexity, and lexical richness, providing instantaneous feedback. Furthermore, AI-driven content platforms curate and recommend learning materials-videos, articles, and interactive exercises-tailored to individual interests and proficiency levels. The common thread uniting these technologies is their reliance on vast datasets of language use, from which they learn patterns, make predictions, and generate responses. It is this data-driven nature that is both the source of their power and the locus of significant ethical concern.

2.2. Foundational Principles of AI Ethics in Education

The burgeoning field of AI ethics provides a critical lens through which to evaluate these technologies. While a universally codified set of laws remains elusive, a broad consensus has emerged around several core principles that are particularly salient for the educational context. **Fairness and Non-discrimination:** This principle demands that AI systems do not create or perpetuate unfair biases against individuals or groups, particularly those from marginalized communities. In education, this relates to ensuring equitable access and avoiding algorithmic penalties based on demographic attributes such as accent, dialect, or socio-economic background.

Transparency and Explainability (XAI): This refers to the need for AI systems to be comprehensible to their users and stakeholders. An AI's decision-making process should not be an inscrutable "black box." For pedagogical purposes, learners and educators should be able to understand why a particular piece of feedback was given or a specific learning path was recommended.

Accountability and Responsibility: When an AI system causes harm-be it through biased assessment, a data breach, or pedagogical error-clear lines of responsibility must be established. This principle addresses the challenge of attributing agency and liability in a complex network of developers, institutions, educators, and the algorithm itself[4].

Privacy and Data Governance: This principle underscores the right of individuals to control their personal data. In an educational setting, this involves ensuring that the vast amounts of learner data collected by AI systems are used ethically, stored securely, and not exploited for commercial or other non-pedagogical purposes. Informed consent is a cornerstone of this principle.

Beneficence and Non-maleficence: Derived from medical ethics, these principles dictate that AI should be designed to do good and, above all, to do no harm. This requires a holistic assessment of the potential impacts of an AI tool on learners' cognitive, social, and emotional well-being.

2.3. The Unique Context of International Chinese Language Education (ICLE)

Applying these general ethical principles to ICLE requires an appreciation of its specific characteristics. ICLE is not merely about the transmission of linguistic code (vocabulary and grammar). It is intrinsically linked to the transmission of culture, values, and worldviews. This imbues the endeavor with unique sensitivities.

First, the linguistic diversity within the Chinese language itself is immense. The notion of a single, monolithic "Chinese language" is a simplification. It encompasses numerous regionalects (often referred to as dialects), accents, and socio-linguistic variations. An AI system trained predominantly on Putonghua (Standard Mandarin) as spoken in a specific region may inadvertently classify other valid forms of Chinese as erroneous, thereby devaluing linguistic diversity and reinforcing a centralized linguistic norm.

Second, ICLE involves a profound element of intercultural communication. The goal is not just for a learner in another country to speak Chinese, but to understand the cultural contexts, pragmatic norms, and historical consciousness that underpin its use. This is a deeply humanistic and interpretive task that resists easy quantification and algorithmic modeling. An over-reliance on AI could privilege literal translation and grammatical correctness at the expense of developing crucial intercultural communicative competence.

Third, the global learner base of ICLE is exceptionally diverse, comprising individuals from a vast array of cultural, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity presents a significant challenge for creating one-size-fits-all AI solutions and amplifies the risk of algorithmic bias. An AI's "world knowledge," derived from its training data, may contain cultural assumptions that are alien or even offensive to certain learners[5].

Therefore, the ethical dilemmas in this domain are not generic technology issues. They are deeply contextualized problems that arise at the intersection of data-driven technology and the humanistic, culturally-rich enterprise of teaching and learning the Chinese language on a global stage.

3. Ethical Dilemmas of AI in International Chinese Language Education

The integration of AI into the ICLE framework engenders a series of complex ethical dilemmas that warrant meticulous examination. These can be systematically analyzed across four interconnected domains: algorithmic bias, data privacy, pedagogical integrity, and systemic accountability.

3.1. Algorithmic Bias and the Perpetuation of Cultural Hegemony

The promise of AI is personalization, yet its mechanics can lead to homogenization and bias. This paradox is a central ethical challenge. AI models are a reflection of the data upon which they are trained[6]. If the training data is not sufficiently diverse or representative, the resulting model will inevitably encode and perpetuate the biases present in that data.

In the context of ICLE, this manifests in several pernicious ways. Firstly, there is the issue of linguistic bias. Most large-scale NLP models for Chinese are trained on massive text and speech corpora that overwhelmingly represent Standard Putonghua, often with a northern accent bias. When such a model is used in a pronunciation-tutoring app, it may consistently penalize learners who are being taught by a teacher from Taiwan, Singapore, or southern China and who have acquired a perfectly intelligible and valid regional accent. The AI, in its algorithmic certainty, flags deviation from the trained norm as an error. This not only frustrates the learner but also implicitly delegitimizes vast, living variations of the Chinese language, reinforcing a form of digital linguistic imperialism.

Secondly, and more insidiously, is the problem of cultural bias. Language is a carrier of culture, replete with idioms, allusions, and pragmatic conventions. An AI chatbot or content

recommendation engine trained on mainland Chinese internet data will naturally reflect the cultural norms, social values, and even political ideologies prevalent in that data. For a global audience, this can result in a highly curated and monolithic representation of "Chinese culture." For instance, an AI might generate sample sentences or select reading materials that exclusively present a particular historical narrative or a specific set of social customs, while ignoring or marginalizing others. This can lead to the subtle propagation of a single cultural perspective, a form of digital cultural hegemony that runs counter to the ICLE goal of fostering nuanced, critical, and pluralistic intercultural understanding. The AI risks teaching a flattened, essentialized version of Chinese culture, stripped of its internal complexities, debates, and diversities.

3.2. Data Privacy Infringements and Learner Surveillance

AI-powered educational platforms are data-intensive by nature. To achieve personalization, they must collect and analyze vast quantities of learner data: every spoken utterance, every written character, every correct and incorrect answer, the time spent on tasks, and even, with emerging affective computing, biometric data related to frustration or engagement. This creates a significant ethical dilemma concerning privacy and surveillance[7].

The first layer of this problem is the lack of informed consent. Learners, often eager to access a new learning tool, may agree to lengthy and opaque terms of service without fully comprehending the extent of data collection or how their data will be utilized. This is particularly problematic for younger learners or those in educational systems where the use of a specific platform is mandatory. The data collected for pedagogical improvement can easily be repurposed for commercial ends-sold to third parties, used for targeted advertising, or to build consumer profiles.

The second, more troubling layer is the potential for pervasive surveillance. An AI system that tracks every aspect of a learner's engagement can create a detailed, high-resolution portrait of their learning habits, strengths, weaknesses, and even their moments of inattention. While proponents argue this is for the benign purpose of optimizing learning, it constitutes a form of monitoring that can create a "chilling effect." Learners may become risk-averse, afraid to make mistakes or explore creative but "incorrect" uses of language for fear of algorithmic penalty. This transforms the learning environment from a safe space for experimentation into a panopticon of constant evaluation. For international students, this concern can be even more acute, with anxieties about how their data-potentially including opinions expressed in practice essays or conversations-might be stored, shared, and interpreted by state or institutional actors. The ethical line between pedagogical analytics and intrusive surveillance is dangerously thin and ill-defined.

3.3. Pedagogical Dehumanization and the Role of the Educator

While AI can excel at structured, rule-based aspects of language instruction, an over-reliance on it risks stripping the educational process of its essential humanistic core. Language learning is not merely a cognitive exercise in pattern recognition; it is a socio-affective journey of identity formation and human connection.

A primary concern is the erosion of the teacher's holistic role. The human educator does far more than transmit information and correct errors. They inspire, motivate, empathize, and act as cultural mediators. They can read the subtle, non-verbal cues of a student's frustration or breakthrough, adjusting their approach in real-time with a level of emotional intelligence that current AI cannot replicate[8]. If AI systems are deployed to handle the bulk of interactive and corrective tasks, the teacher may be relegated to the role of a mere technician or manager of the technology. This de-professionalizes teaching and severs the crucial teacher-student relationship that is often the primary motivator for a learner's persistence and success.

Furthermore, there is the danger of affective and pragmatic impoverishment. Language is used to build relationships, negotiate meaning, express emotion, and navigate complex social situations. AI chatbots, for all their syntactic fluency, typically lack genuine pragmatic competence and emotional depth. A learner who practices exclusively with an AI may become proficient in grammar but remain inept at real-world communication. They may not learn how to politely interrupt, how to show appropriate deference, or how to interpret the subtle humor in a conversation. The learning experience becomes transactional rather than relational. This leads to a form of sterile competence, where the learner can construct grammatically perfect sentences but cannot connect with other human beings through the language, which is arguably the ultimate goal of ICLE.

3.4. Issues of Accountability and Transparency

The increasing complexity of AI models, particularly deep learning networks, gives rise to the "black box" problem. This lack of transparency presents a significant ethical hurdle for education.

When a learner receives feedback from an AI-powered writing tool, they are often simply given a correction or a score without a clear explanation of the underlying linguistic rule or reasoning. This inhibits metacognitive learning; the student learns what is wrong, but not why. This is pedagogically inferior to the dialogic feedback a human teacher can provide, which guides the student to understand and internalize the principles at play. This opacity makes the AI a source of authority rather than a tool for inquiry[9].

This lack of transparency is directly linked to the problem of accountability. If an AI system provides factually incorrect information, biased cultural content, or an unfair assessment, who is responsible? Is it the developer who created the algorithm? The institution that purchased and deployed the software? The individual teacher who assigned it to the class? The distributed nature of AI systems diffuses responsibility, making it difficult to seek redress or correct systemic errors. A student who feels they have been unfairly graded by an algorithm may have no clear path for appeal. This accountability vacuum undermines fairness and trust in the educational system. Without clear mechanisms for auditing algorithms and holding their creators and deployers responsible, the use of AI in high-stakes educational contexts like formal assessment becomes ethically untenable.

4. Proposing Evasive and Mitigating Strategies: A Framework for Ethical AI Integration

Confronting the ethical dilemmas outlined above requires more than passive awareness; it demands the formulation and implementation of a proactive, multi-stakeholder framework of avoidance and mitigation strategies. This framework must be grounded in a commitment to placing humanistic values at the center of technological integration. The strategies proposed here correspond to the four domains of ethical risk previously identified.

4.1. Cultivating Algorithmic Fairness and Cultural Inclusivity

To counter the threat of algorithmic bias and cultural hegemony, a conscious and sustained effort to promote diversity and fairness at every stage of the AI lifecycle is essential.

First, the principle of diverse data stewardship must be paramount. Developers and institutions creating or procuring AI for ICLE must move beyond convenience sampling of readily available data. They must invest in the curation of balanced and representative linguistic and cultural datasets. This includes actively sourcing speech data from speakers with diverse regional accents (e.g., Taiwanese, Singaporean, Malaysian, Cantonese-influenced Mandarin), and text data that reflects a plurality of cultural perspectives, literary genres, and social contexts. This is

not merely a technical task but an ethical imperative to ensure the AI tool recognizes and validates the rich tapestry of the Chinese-speaking world.

Second, the adoption of a Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) model is critical for quality control and bias mitigation. This means that AI systems should be designed to flag ambiguous or low-confidence judgments for review by a human educator. For instance, if an AI speech recognition tool cannot parse a student's utterance with high confidence, instead of marking it "wrong," it should refer the audio clip to a teacher. This ensures that pedagogical decisions are not solely outsourced to machines and provides a mechanism for continuously correcting and refining the AI's performance based on expert human judgment.

Third, educational institutions must prioritize the development of critical AI literacy among both educators and learners. Students and teachers should be educated about the nature of algorithms, the concept of bias in data, and the potential for AI to represent information in a particular way[10]. Curricula should encourage learners to critically question AI-generated content, to compare it with other sources, and to understand that an AI tool is not an infallible oracle but a product of specific design choices. This empowers users to be critical consumers, rather than passive recipients, of AI-driven education.

4.2. Establishing Robust Data Governance and Privacy Frameworks

Protecting learner privacy in an age of data-intensive AI requires a shift from retroactive compliance to a proactive "privacy by design" approach.

Institutions must develop and enforce a clear and transparent data governance policy specifically for educational technologies. This policy should be written in accessible language and explicitly state what data is being collected, the precise pedagogical purpose for its collection, how long it will be stored, who will have access to it, and under what circumstances it might be shared. Crucially, this policy should prohibit the use of educational data for commercial or non-pedagogical surveillance purposes.

The principle of meaningful and granular consent must be upheld. Instead of a single, all-encompassing "accept" button, learners (or their guardians) should be given granular control over their data, with the ability to opt-in or opt-out of specific types of data collection that are not strictly essential for the platform's core functionality.

Technically, strategies like data minimization and anonymization should be standard practice. AI systems should be designed to collect only the minimum amount of data necessary to achieve a specific pedagogical goal. Wherever possible, this data should be anonymized or de-identified to protect learner privacy. For instance, voice recordings for pronunciation practice can be processed and then deleted, or stored without being linked to a student's personal identity.

4.3. Reasserting Humanistic Pedagogy in the AI Era

To prevent the dehumanization of the learning process, the role of AI must be carefully and deliberately circumscribed. The guiding philosophy should be that AI is a tool to augment, not replace, the human educator.

This can be realized through a "AI as Co-pilot" or "Centaur" model of pedagogy. In this model, the AI is assigned tasks at which it excels: repetitive drills, instant feedback on grammatical form, and managing personalized practice schedules. This frees the human educator from these burdensome tasks, allowing them to dedicate more class time and energy to activities that require a uniquely human touch: facilitating nuanced discussions about cultural texts, role-playing complex social scenarios, providing empathetic mentorship, and fostering a supportive classroom community. The AI manages the "skill," while the teacher cultivates the "will" and the "intercultural wisdom."

Educational programs should consciously design blended learning curricula that strategically integrate AI-based independent study with essential, high-quality human interaction. The

pedagogical value of face-to-face (or synchronous online) interaction, spontaneous conversation, and collaborative projects must be explicitly championed and protected. The goal is not to maximize screen time but to optimize learning by using the best tool for each specific pedagogical task.

Finally, teacher training and professional development programs must evolve. They need to equip educators not only with the skills to use AI tools effectively but also with the critical pedagogical frameworks to understand their limitations and to advocate for their students' socio-affective needs in an increasingly technologized educational landscape.

4.4. Enhancing Transparency, Explainability, and Accountability

Addressing the "black box" problem is fundamental to building trust and ensuring fairness.

Institutions, as primary purchasers of EdTech, must use their market power to demand greater transparency and explainability (XAI) from developers. They should prioritize acquiring AI systems that can provide clear, comprehensible rationales for their outputs. For example, an AWE tool should not just highlight an error; it should be able to state the grammatical rule that was violated and perhaps even provide an example of correct usage. This transforms the AI from a mere judge into a pedagogical agent.

Clear accountability protocols must be established at the institutional level. These protocols should define a clear process for students and educators to challenge or appeal an algorithmic decision. They should also delineate the responsibilities of the institution, the technology provider, and the educator in the event of AI-induced error or harm. This ensures that accountability is not diffused into oblivion but is clearly assigned.

At a macro level, there is a need for the development of industry standards and independent auditing mechanisms for educational AI. Just as textbooks are reviewed for accuracy and bias, AI educational tools should be subject to independent audits that assess their algorithmic fairness, data security practices, and pedagogical soundness before they are approved for use in educational settings. This creates a systemic check on the technology, ensuring that ethical and pedagogical considerations are embedded throughout the ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into International Chinese Language Education represents a significant technological frontier, offering tantalizing prospects for enhancing the learning experience on a global scale. Yet, as this analysis has argued, this frontier is fraught with profound ethical dilemmas that cannot be ignored or deferred. The uncritical pursuit of technological efficiency risks creating a learning environment that, while personalized, is also biased; while data-rich, is also intrusive; and while syntactically sophisticated, is also humanistically impoverished.

This paper has systematically delineated four principal domains of ethical concern: the perpetuation of linguistic and cultural hegemony through algorithmic bias; the compromise of learner autonomy through invasive data practices; the dehumanization of pedagogy and the erosion of the teacher-student relationship; and the crisis of accountability engendered by opaque AI systems. These are not speculative, futuristic problems; they are present and active challenges inherent in the AI technologies being deployed today.

However, a Luddite rejection of technology is neither a feasible nor a desirable response. The potential of AI to support ICLE is real. The solution, therefore, lies not in rejection, but in responsible and critical integration. The framework of mitigating strategies proposed herein offers a pathway forward. By insisting on diverse and equitable data stewardship, establishing robust privacy-by-design governance, championing a human-centric pedagogical model where

AI serves as a co-pilot, and demanding systemic transparency and accountability, we can guide the development and deployment of AI in a more ethically sound direction.

The ultimate contribution of this paper is to call for a fundamental shift in perspective. The success of AI in ICLE should not be measured solely by metrics of efficiency, engagement, or even linguistic accuracy. The ultimate metric of success must be whether this technology enhances our capacity to achieve the core humanistic goals of language education: to foster deep intercultural understanding, to cultivate communicative empathy, and to empower individuals to connect with others across linguistic and cultural divides. The central challenge for educators, developers, and policymakers is to ensure that in our embrace of artificial intelligence, we do not sacrifice the very human intelligence, wisdom, and connection that make language learning one of humanity's most enriching endeavors. Future empirical research is needed to investigate the real-world impact of these dilemmas and the efficacy of the proposed strategies, but this conceptual analysis provides the essential ethical map for navigating the complex journey ahead.

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