

Guiding Principles: Ethical AI for Language Learning and Assessment

AI has the power to profoundly enhance human lives – but it must be used responsibly. To unlock its full potential, especially in education, AI technologies must be safe, trustworthy and genuinely beneficial to the people they're designed to support. Put simply, providers have a fundamental responsibility to deliver AI ethically.

This is more important than ever in language learning and assessment.

Education providers must understand not just how AI can be used, but when it should be used – and be aware of the risks. As Cambridge continues to explore how AI can support learners, educators, and institutions, we've defined six guiding principles to ensure AI is used ethically and effectively in language education.

Our six guiding principles:

1 AI must consistently meet human examiners' standards

AI systems must accurately assess the right language skills and deliver results that people can trust. The technology should enhance the integrity of what's being measured and not be used to cut corners. This is essential when AI is used for high-stakes English tests for admissions or immigration purposes. We urge test providers to collect robust evidence to show how AI scores meet the same standards as highly skilled and experienced human examiners.

2 Fairness isn't optional – it's foundational

AI-based language learning and assessment systems must be trained on inclusive data to ensure they are fair and free from bias. Along with using diverse data sets it's essential to continuously monitor for bias and involve a wide range of stakeholders throughout the design process. Equal access to AI tools must also be prioritised, so that all learners – regardless of location or resources – can benefit from the technology.

3 Data privacy and consent are non-negotiable

By ethically collecting and leveraging data, we can improve the learning and assessment tools we offer. All parties must be clearly informed about what data is collected, how it's stored, and what it's used for – and they must actively give consent. Behind the scenes, this means implementing robust encryption, secure storage protocols, and safeguards against hacking. This robust approach helps us to develop quality AI language learning and assessment tools that users can trust.

4 Transparency and explainability are key

Learners need to know when and how AI was used to determine their results. It is also important that the integrity of the test is maintained. To do this, AI systems must be developed and deployed transparently, to ensure oversight and governance. Providers must be able to clearly articulate the role AI plays, as well as the frameworks that are in place to ensure test accuracy.

5 Language learning must remain a human endeavour

While AI can enhance learning, it cannot replace the uniquely human experience of acquiring and using language. Ethical AI in education must support and empower learners, not overshadow the human touch that makes language meaningful. AI-based assessment must always keep a human in the loop. This helps to establish accountability on the part of test providers, and allows a human to step in where oversight, clarity or a correction is needed for quality control.

6 Sustainability is an ethical issue

AI isn't just a digital tool – it's a physical one, with real-world environmental costs. AI systems crunch vast amounts of data and energy, which places a big responsibility on everyone including language providers. This must be kept in mind when choosing which of the different types of AI should be developed or used. It's important to ask: is this AI system necessary, or are there ecologically friendly and more sustainable options available?

Read the full paper **Ethical AI for language learning and assessment** by Carla Pastorino-Campos and Nick Saville at [cambridge.org/english-insights](https://www.cambridge.org/english-insights).

