The Guardian

Could AI help cure 'downward spiral' of human loneliness?

Level 3: Advanced – Teacher's notes

Article summary: The article presents two sides to considering AI for companionship and whether it can help solve loneliness.

Time: 60 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Modals of possibility and recommendations

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

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1. Warmer

a. This activity aims to get students thinking about companionship and what qualities and attributes it has for them. To help elicit ideas, you may wish to ask questions like:

- When you have a problem, who do you talk to? Why?
- What is that person like?
- What things make you feel valued and happy in a relationship?
- What makes a good friend to you?

Encourage students to share their thoughts and opinions about the topic.

2. Key words

a. Ask students to do the exercise individually and compare their answers in pairs or small groups. Students may find it interesting to know that one opposite of *reciprocal* is *one-sided*.

Key:
1. strike up
2. introvert
3. chatbot
4. loneliness
5. meaningful
6. bond
7. reciprocal
8. stimulating
9. personalised
10. isolation
11. characterise
12. chronic
13. disembodied
14. backfire
15. trustworthy

b. Before reading the article carefully, students use some of the key words to fill the gaps in the sentences to ensure that they understand and know how the words are used in other contexts.

Key:
1. characterise
2. chronic
3. stimulating
4. trustworthy
5. bond
6. chatbots
7. reciprocal
8. isolation / loneliness
9. personalised
10. loneliness / isolation
11. introverts
12. backfired

3. Comprehension check

a. Students answer the questions based on the information in the article. They may do this in different ways, e.g. in item 1, they may say, '*The 2013 sci-fi film Her starred Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson*,' or similar.

Key (suggested answers):
1. Her; Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson
2. that it has an important role in preventing human loneliness
3. people having pets and children playing with dolls
4. They can hone their social skills by practising conversations.
5. nearly four million people (or more than 7%)
6. heart disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, premature death
7. She doesn't believe AI connections can be meaningful because they don't include reciprocity.
8. He says it points to having a close human friend as the best solution for loneliness.
9. that there are rules to keep them moral and trustworthy and that privacy is protected
10. Scarlett Johansson

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4. Key language

a. The activity allows students to review modals of possibility and recommendation. You may point out or review the different tenses used with the modals in the sentences. As an extension activity, have students identify the rest of the verb phrases used in each sentence and compare the tenses.

   Key:
   1. *should; can*
   2. *may*
   3. *could*
   4. *may; could*
   5. *could*
   6. *can*
   7. *should*
   8. *may*

b. This activity builds on the previous activity and allows students to identify the use of each modal presented in task a. As an extension activity, you could ask students to change the modal used so that the modals for possibility become ones for recommendation and vice versa.

   Key:
   1. *recommendation*
   2. *possibility*
   3. *possibility*
   4. *possibility*
   5. *possibility*
   6. *possibility*
   7. *recommendation*
   8. *possibility*

c. Students can write four sentences of their own, two of which use modals for possibility and two for recommendation. Invite students to challenge themselves and get creative as they write their sentences. If students need support, you may wish to have them work in pairs. Save some time for students to share examples of their work.

5. Discussion

a. Students discuss the statements related to the article and give their reasons and justifications for each answer, referring to their own experiences wherever possible.

6. In your own words

a. Ask students to research more about AI.

b. Students could then present their reports to the class. Encourage students to share their opinions and give reasons to support their answers. Encourage students to use some of the given phrases in their presentations when stating facts and their opinions.