SP Publications
International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)
An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:** 8.175 (SJIF)
ISSN: 2581-8333|**Volume 8, Issue-1(January);2026**

AI & ELT: A REALISTIC SURVEY OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND DIGITAL LITERACY

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Article Received: 19/12/2025
Article Accepted: 20/01/2026
Published Online: 21/01/2026
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.8.01.325

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence has entered English Language Teaching and flipped it. Moving away from those old-school grammar drills and worksheets, now, teachers use chatbots, smart tutoring systems, speech recognition, and automated writing feedback to give students a more personal, hands-on experience. Learners get instant feedback, real conversations, and practice that actually feels real—not just exercises out of a textbook. These tools help students get better at speaking, listening, and writing. They give them a chance to use English in real situations, without all the pressure, build digital skills just by using technology—learning how to navigate online platforms, think critically, and use tech responsibly. So, AI isn't just another gadget in the classroom. It's more like a teaching partner, helping teachers and students grow as language users and as digital citizens. This paper focusses on how AI can reshape students' communicative competence and digital literacy in the modern context by moulding teachers too in the way they teach. Further, the paper projects a research survey conducted on the use of AI in ELT for Junior Colleges and UG Colleges selecting respondents from the Visakhapatnam district analysing and interpreting the data collected aligning English language education with the demands of the contemporary digital world.

Key words: AI, ELT, Communicative competence, Digital Literacy, survey, analysis, outcome.

Introduction:

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought significant transformations across various domains, including education. In English Language Teaching (ELT), AI has emerged as a powerful tool capable of reshaping pedagogical practices, assessment methods, and learner engagement. Traditional ELT approaches, which largely emphasized grammar, vocabulary, and rote learning, are increasingly being replaced by

learner-centered and skill-based methodologies. In the modern age, English is no longer merely an academic subject; it is a global skill essential for communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and employability. Consequently, the focus of ELT has shifted toward developing communicative competence and digital literacy, both of which are indispensable for learners navigating a technologically driven world.

AI-driven tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, chatbots, speech recognition software, automated writing evaluation tools, and adaptive learning platforms are increasingly integrated into ELT classrooms. These technologies offer personalized learning experiences, immediate feedback, and authentic language exposure, thereby supporting communicative and digital skill development. This chapter explores the role of AI in ELT with particular emphasis on how it enhances modern communicative competence and digital literacy. It also discusses pedagogical implications, challenges, and future prospects of AI integration in language education.

Artificial Intelligence in ELT: An Overview

Artificial Intelligence refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, problem-solving, and language processing. In ELT, AI is most commonly applied through Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, and data analytics. These technologies enable systems to analyze learner language, identify errors, provide feedback, and adapt instructional content according to individual learner needs.

The integration of AI in ELT has evolved from early forms of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to more sophisticated, interactive, and adaptive systems. AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Duolingo, and automated speech recognition software simulate conversational interaction, evaluate learner output, and provide real-time corrective feedback. Unlike traditional teaching aids, AI tools support continuous learning beyond the classroom, allowing learners to practice language skills in authentic and flexible environments.

Furthermore, AI supports teachers by assisting in lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management. Automated evaluation tools reduce the burden of repetitive tasks, enabling teachers to focus more on facilitating communication and higher-order thinking skills. Thus, AI acts not as a replacement for teachers but as a supportive pedagogical partner in modern ELT.

AI and Communicative Competence in the Modern Age

The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Hymes, extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. Modern communicative competence encompasses multiple dimensions, including linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, pragmatic, and strategic competence. In the 21st century,

communicative competence also involves intercultural awareness and the ability to communicate effectively in digital and multimodal environments.

AI plays a crucial role in fostering communicative competence by providing learners with opportunities for meaningful interaction. AI-based chatbots and conversational agents simulate real-life communication scenarios, allowing learners to practice speaking and writing without the fear of judgment. These tools encourage experimentation with language and promote fluency by offering immediate, non-threatening feedback.

Speech recognition and pronunciation tools contribute significantly to the development of oral communication skills. By analysing learners' speech patterns, AI systems identify pronunciation errors, stress, and intonation issues, helping learners improve intelligibility and confidence. Similarly, AI-powered listening tools expose learners to diverse accents and authentic language use, thereby enhancing comprehension and pragmatic understanding.

Moreover, AI supports discourse competence by enabling learners to produce coherent and contextually appropriate texts. Automated writing evaluation tools provide feedback on organization, coherence, and style, guiding learners toward effective communication. Through such applications, AI facilitates a shift from form-focused instruction to meaning-focused, communicative language use.

AI and Digital Literacy in ELT

Digital literacy has become a core competence in the modern educational landscape. It refers to the ability to use digital technologies effectively, critically, and ethically for communication, learning, and problem-solving. In ELT, digital literacy is closely linked with language proficiency, as learners increasingly engage with English through digital platforms, online resources, and AI-based tools.

AI-enhanced ELT environments promote digital literacy by familiarizing learners with advanced technologies and digital communication practices. Learners develop skills such as navigating digital platforms, evaluating online information, and using AI tools responsibly. Through guided use of AI applications, students learn to differentiate between reliable and unreliable content, fostering critical digital awareness.

AI also supports autonomous and lifelong learning by enabling personalized learning pathways. Adaptive learning systems analyse learner performance and tailor content accordingly, encouraging self-directed learning and reflection. Such experiences empower learners to take responsibility for their learning, a key aspect of digital literacy.

However, digital literacy in the AI era also involves ethical considerations. Learners must understand issues related to data privacy, academic integrity, and responsible AI use.

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to use AI tools ethically, emphasizing originality, critical thinking, and transparency. Thus, AI integration in ELT not only enhances linguistic skills but also prepares learners to function as responsible digital citizens.

Review of Literature:

The concept of communicative competence has been central to modern English Language Teaching (ELT) since Dell Hymes (1972) first emphasized that language learning involves more than grammatical accuracy: "a speaker's ability to communicate effectively in a speech community depends not only on grammatical knowledge but on knowing when and how to say what" (Hymes, 1972, p. 281). Expanding this framework, Canale and Swain (1980) identified four components—grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence—highlighting that learners must develop skills to negotiate meaning, respond appropriately, and apply communication strategies. Scholars such as Chapelle (2001) and Godwin-Jones (2018) have shown that technology, particularly AI-powered tools, supports these dimensions of communicative competence by providing authentic interaction, personalized feedback, and opportunities for low-stakes practice, enabling learners to engage meaningfully with language in contexts that mirror real-world communication.

In addition to communicative competence, digital literacy has become an essential skill in 21st-century ELT. Harmer (2015) noted that "modern language teaching must prepare learners not only to use English correctly but to operate effectively in a digital, interconnected world" (Harmer, 2015, p. 72), while Crystal (2003) emphasized English as a global language increasingly mediated through digital platforms. AI-based applications such as chatbots, adaptive learning platforms, and automated writing tools help learners develop these digital competencies alongside language skills, supporting autonomous learning and critical engagement with technology. According to Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019), AI fosters holistic language development, integrating linguistic, communicative, and digital competencies, thereby aligning ELT with the demands of contemporary global communication and professional practice.

The survey results indicate a high level of awareness of AI tools among teachers. A majority of respondents reported familiarity with tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and AI-based learning platforms. Most teachers indicated that they use AI tools either weekly or occasionally, primarily for lesson planning, language skill development, and assessment support.

This result suggests that AI has already entered mainstream ELT practices, although the level of integration varies depending on access to technology and teacher training.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the extent to which Artificial Intelligence (AI) is integrated into English Language Teaching (ELT).

2. To analyse teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of AI in developing communicative competence.
3. To explore the role of AI in enhancing learners' digital literacy in the modern age.
4. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing AI-based tools in ELT.
5. To interpret the overall impact of AI on modern ELT practices.

These objectives guided the design of the survey instrument and the interpretation of the findings.

Methodology of the Study:

The study adopted a descriptive survey method, which is appropriate for collecting quantitative and qualitative data on teachers' perceptions and practices. A structured questionnaire was designed focusing on the use of AI in ELT, communicative competence, and digital literacy.

Sample Selected

The survey was administered to English language teachers from Junior college and Degree colleges across Visakhapatnam District. The number of respondents were 100 in number. Participants varied in age, teaching experience, and institutional background, ensuring a diverse and representative sample.

Data Collection Tools Employed

The questionnaire consisted of:

- Demographic questions
- Likert-scale items measuring attitudes toward AI in ELT
- Multiple-choice questions on AI usage
- Open-ended questions for qualitative insights

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using **percentage analysis** for quantitative responses and **thematic interpretation** for qualitative responses. The results were then interpreted in relation to the stated objectives of the study.

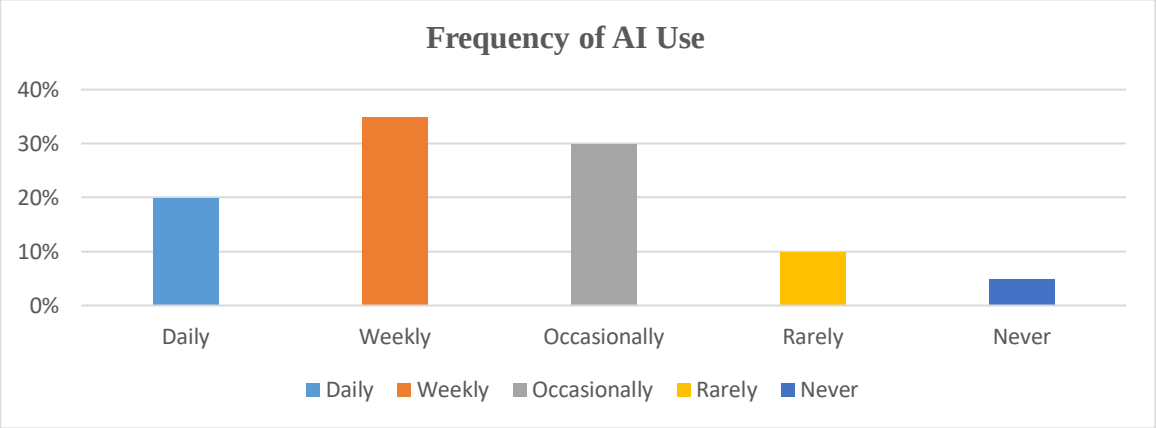
Awareness and Use of AI in ELT: Survey Analysis

Table 1: Awareness of AI Tools in ELT

Level of Awareness	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Very familiar	42	42%
Somewhat familiar	38	38%
Neutral	10	10%
Slightly familiar	7	7%
Not familiar at all	3	3%
Total	**100**	**100%**

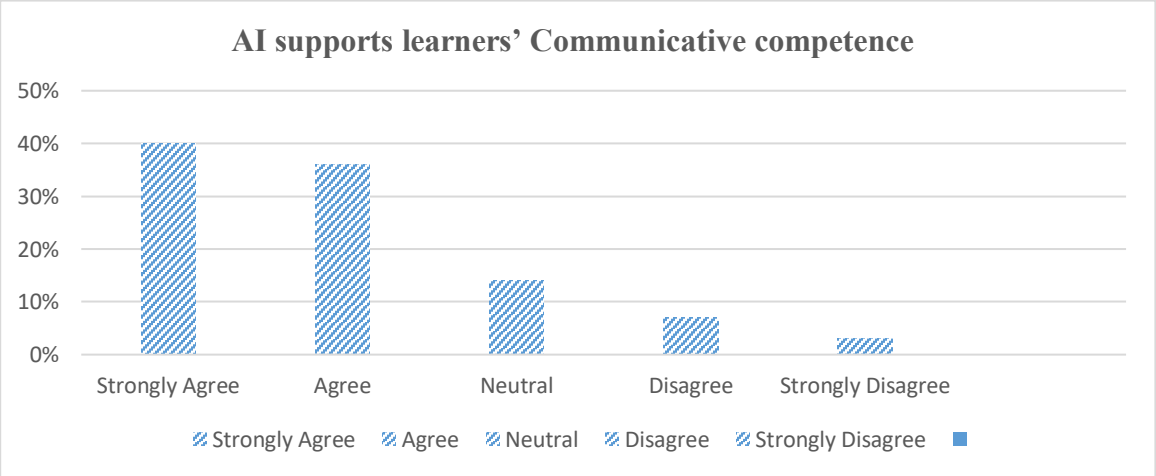
Interpretation: The data shown in the table indicates that a substantial majority of respondents (up to 80%) are either very familiar or somewhat familiar with AI tools used in ELT. This suggests a growing awareness of AI-driven technologies among English language teachers, reflecting the increasing relevance of AI in contemporary teaching practices.

Frequency of AI Use in ELT Classrooms



Interpretation: More than half of the respondents (55%) use AI tools daily or weekly, indicating that AI has begun to form a regular component of ELT practice. However, 15% report rare or no use, highlighting disparities in access, training, or institutional support.

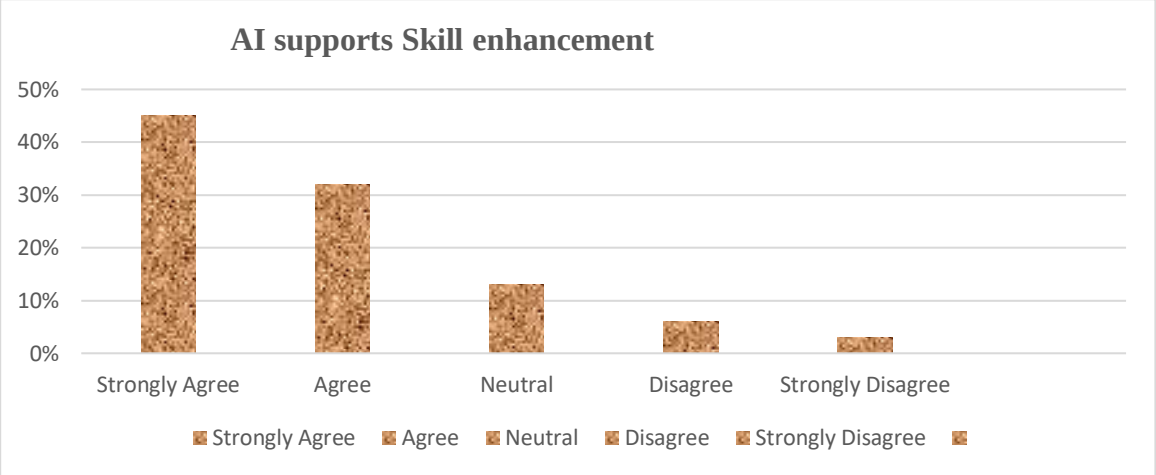
Perception of AI in Enhancing Communicative Competence



Interpretation: A clear majority nearly 76% of teachers agree that AI contributes positively to the development of communicative competence. This supports the argument that AI tools facilitate interactive, learner-centered communication, moving ELT beyond grammar-focused instruction.

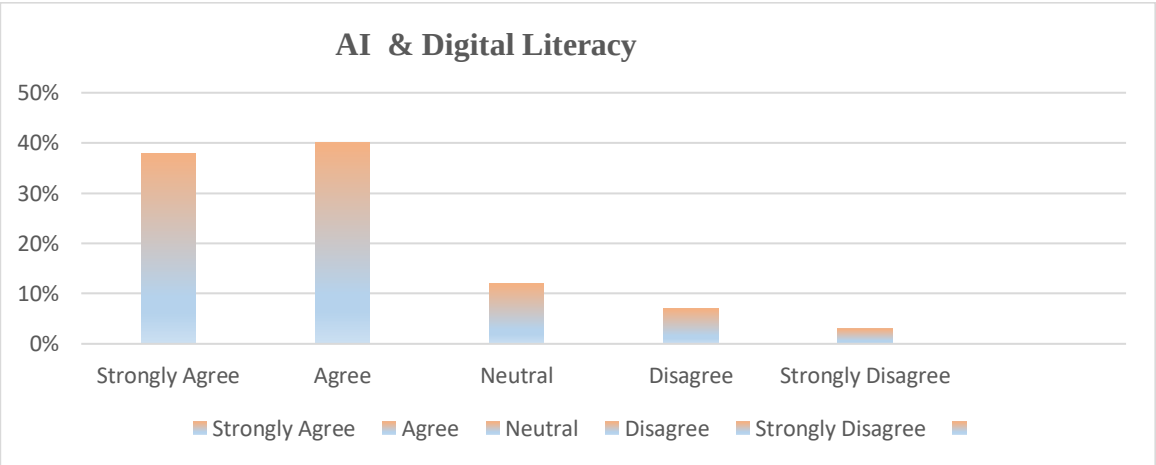
AI Support for Skill Enhancement

The survey conducted also denoted that speaking and listening skills were enhanced by AI support.



Interpretation: An overwhelming 77% of respondents perceive AI tools as effective in improving speaking and listening skills. This finding reinforces the role of AI-powered chatbots, speech recognition tools, and interactive platforms in enhancing oral communication.

Role of AI in Enhancing Digital Literacy: The role of AI in enhancing Digital Literacy was also surveyed for 100 respondents who were Junior and Degree College teachers across the district.



Interpretation: A significant majority i.e., 78% acknowledge that AI enhances learners' digital literacy. This indicates that AI-integrated ELT classrooms foster not only language proficiency but also essential digital skills such as platform navigation, critical evaluation, and responsible technology use.

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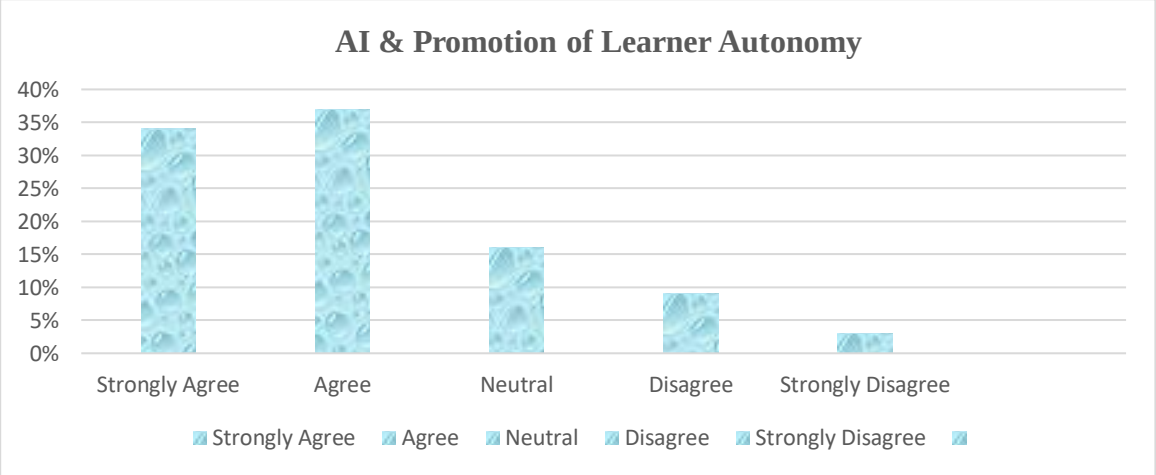
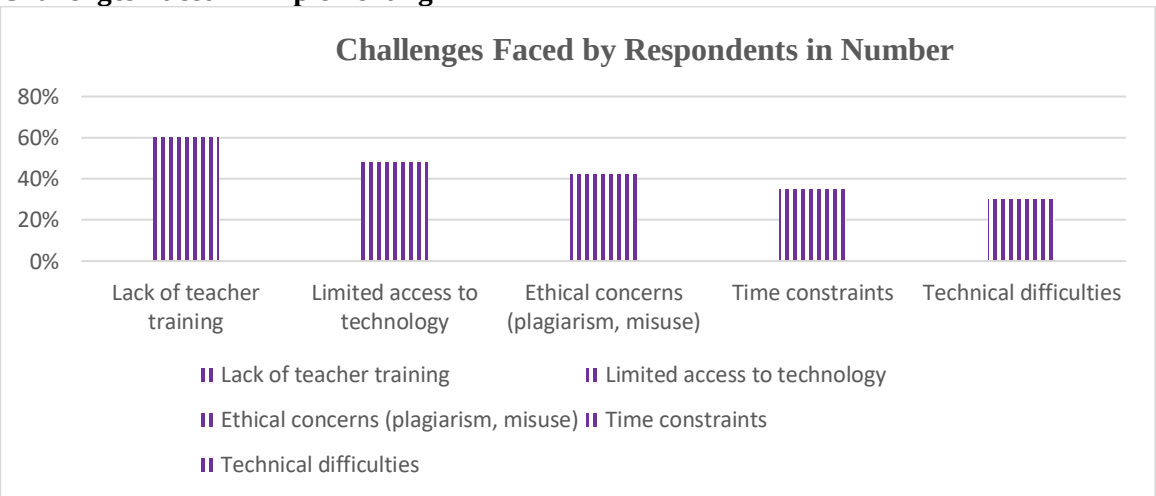
Teachers' Perception of AI in Promoting Learner Autonomy: The survey also analysed teachers' perception and extracted their perspectives on AI in promoting learner autonomy.



Interpretation: About 71% of respondents believe AI promotes learner autonomy. This suggests that personalized feedback and adaptive learning pathways encourage self-directed learning, which is a key component of both communicative competence and digital literacy.

Challenges Faced in Implementing AI in ELT



Interpretation: For this survey, multiple responses were allowed to respondents. The major challenge identified is lack of teacher training (60%), followed by limited access to technology (48%). These findings emphasize that effective AI integration requires institutional support, professional development, and ethical guidelines.

Overall Analysis and Challenges:

The percentage-based analysis represented by pie charts clearly demonstrates that AI is widely perceived as beneficial for enhancing communicative competence and digital literacy in ELT. While teachers show positive attitudes and growing adoption, infrastructural and pedagogical challenges still remain persistent. The results confirm that AI is most effective when used as a supportive pedagogical tool rather than a replacement for human instruction. Limited infrastructure and access to technology were cited as major barriers. Ethical concerns such as plagiarism, overdependence on AI, and data privacy were frequently mentioned by respondents. These challenges highlight the need for institutional support and clear pedagogical guidelines.

Interpretation and Analysis of Survey Findings

The interpretation of the survey findings reveals a strong alignment between AI integration and the development of modern communicative competence. The high level of agreement regarding AI's role in speaking, listening, and interaction suggests that AI tools effectively compensate for limitations of traditional ELT classrooms. By enabling continuous, low-anxiety communicative practice, AI supports fluency, strategic competence, and learner confidence.

The analysis further indicates that AI encourages a shift from grammar-centered instruction to meaning-focused communication. Teachers' responses demonstrate that AI tools facilitate real-time feedback and contextual language use, which are essential for communicative language teaching. This supports the view that AI enhances, rather than undermines, communicative pedagogy. In terms of digital literacy, the survey findings confirm that AI-integrated ELT environments help learners develop critical digital skills alongside language proficiency. The ability to navigate AI platforms, assess AI-generated content, and engage ethically with technology reflects an expanded notion of literacy in the modern age. The interpretation suggests that ELT classrooms have become key sites for fostering responsible digital citizenship.

However, the analysis also underscores the importance of teacher mediation. Concerns regarding overdependence and ethical misuse of AI indicate that technology alone cannot ensure effective learning. Teachers' digital competence and pedagogical awareness significantly influence learning outcomes, reinforcing the need for professional development.

Outcomes of the Survey

Based on the survey results and their interpretation, the following outcomes emerge:

1. AI has a positive impact on the development of communicative competence in ELT.
2. AI integration enhances learners' digital literacy and autonomous learning skills.
3. Teachers generally hold favourable attitudes toward AI, but require systematic training.
4. Ethical and infrastructural challenges must be addressed for sustainable AI use.

5. AI is most effective when integrated within communicative and learner-centered pedagogies.

Conclusion:

The explicit linkage between survey findings and interpretation demonstrates that Artificial Intelligence plays a transformative role in modern ELT. The study confirms that AI supports the dual goals of communicative competence and digital literacy, aligning English language education with the demands of the contemporary digital world. While challenges remain, the outcomes suggest that informed, balanced, and ethically guided use of AI can significantly enhance and reinforce the quality and relevance of English language teaching in the modern age.

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