

Integrating Artificial Intelligence into English Language Teaching

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Abstract

The expanse of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone significant changes with the globalisation of English. A variety of pedagogical approaches have evolved in the last few decades with new technologies becoming a significant part of the English teaching-learning process. The English language has continued to consolidate its position as a global lingua franca. With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the focus is now on integrating AI and ELT. This paper explores the application of AI-driven interactive platforms in English language teaching and learning with the aim to overcome the challenges faced by learners in speaking, listening, inaccurate pronunciation and limited exposure to authentic language practice. Some key areas have been identified on how AI can complement ELT, reshape how teaching and learning may be applied, delivered and also assist educators.

Key Words: AI tools, ELT, learner autonomy, implementation.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is a 21st century transformative technology that is closely influencing almost every sector of our society, particularly education. It is important for educators to understand how AI is here to reshape education and the teaching, learning and assessment process. AI in English Language Teaching (ELT) paves the way to a whole new range of opportunities that can provide adaptive and immersive learning experiences in dynamic academic environments. Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, chatbots, have been playing a significant role in student engagement and learner autonomy. This paper will take us through the applications of AI in the English Language teaching and learning process, its benefits, challenges and how it can be best implemented within and beyond the classroom.

Modern research revolutionises acquisition of English language teaching by using AI tools such as Microsoft's Immersive Reader, Google's Speech Recognition API, and chatbots, to provide learners with immersive and customised environments for practicing

language skills. It is important to teach learners how to use AI effectively and ethically particularly when brought into the classroom. Students can be made to practice speaking and listening in authentic situations, by integrating AI tools such as Microsoft's Immersive Reader, Google's Speech Recognition API, and AI chatbots to get real-time feedback, while building up their language skills.

Implementation of AI

Classroom Interaction -Classroom interactions are usually either between student to student or student and teacher. Instead of interreacting with another student or a teacher in a classroom, learners could be taught to practice on their own, even outside a classroom by interacting with AI powered chatbots in a non-judgmental environment where they would freely make mistakes but improve their fluency. In such situations, learners turn AI as their conversational partner by using it like *Alexa*, a personal voice assistant. Students learn to converse with *Alexa* not only to strengthen their skills of communication but also develop the skills of meaningful interactions along with vocabulary acquisition and improved language skills. AI is here a language coach providing simulated real-life scenarios for interesting and enjoyable learning. By simulating real-life conversations learners are exposed to different dialects and colloquial expressions that greatly assist in listening and comprehending in addition to speaking.

Learner Autonomy

To complement classroom teaching, learners may be taught to use AI tutors outside a classroom. AI tutors will contribute significantly to learner autonomy by providing one-on-one assistance to students offering immediate feedback on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. AI tutors would embrace a student's pace and skill level coming up with exercises targeted to overcome specific drawbacks of students. AI powered language apps such as *Grammarly* and *Duolingo* and applications such as *ELSA Speak* encourage 'learner autonomy' and analyse learner input to offer real-time feedback and suggestions, that helps improve speech recognition, speaking and writing skills. AI chatbots pose as patient and focused conversation partners for language learners. AI tools provide platforms for learners to personalise learning experiences with activities such as role-play and others. Students can be made to use AI platforms by listening to dialogues depicting everyday situations, such as ordering food or making a reservation, and then enacting similar role-playing scenarios.

However, too much dependence on AI tools can limit opportunities for learners to be a part of actual real-world communication and face-to-face interactions. It is necessary to build up conversational fluency and cultural competence in learners. For effective learning, therefore, a blending of AI-assisted learning and human-led teaching would be the most desirable alternative.

Students' Perspectives on using AI tools

To assess the impact of AI in English Language teaching and learning, this study employed a mixed-methods approach. Around 160 college students enrolled in an English Language Skill Development Course took part in the study. The study provides an overall understanding of the effectiveness of AI in different teaching-learning contexts. A

questionnaire was used for collection of data for the study to measure the participants' agreement regarding the benefits and challenges of using AI tools. Here are some of the perspectives shared by students who took part in the study-

With the use of AI tools my English-Speaking skills have largely improved as I can learn at my own pace and receive immediate feedback.

With the use of AI apps, I get practice in fluency, grammar and pronunciation.

I feel more confident while using AI chatbots as I can freely make mistakes without being judged.

AI based platforms helped me pick up new words that I am able to use in conversations.

On the flip side, some of the participants who took part in the study reported challenges they faced in using AI tools in English language teaching and learning. Some perspectives of participants are quoted, such as:

I miss the student-teacher human interaction which no AI can provide.

The feedback from AI is helpful, but somewhat impersonal. I still miss the human interaction you get with a teacher.

Sometimes, the AI doesn't understand the context of what I'm trying to say, while I'm practicing conversations.

I have difficulty in using AI tools.

In another study, 40 students were divided into two groups of twenty learners each. Twenty learners in group 1, the experimental group interacted using AI powered tools, AI practice apps and speech recognition tools. These tools were used to develop their language skills through several activities. The second group of another twenty learners, group 2, was not given access to any AI-driven tools and followed a traditional ESL curriculum that emphasised speaking and listening activities. This division made possible a comparative study of the efficacy of using AI based language learning tools and conventional teaching methods. Both the groups participated in a range of speaking and listening activities, the first group, Group 1 with access to AI tools and Group 2 without access to AI tools. One speaking activity was a group discussion on a current event in which group 1 students used AI platform to watch a video clip of the news based on the current topic and was able to ascertain their thoughts in a more comprehensive manner and with conviction. The students of Group 2, followed the conventional method of brain-storming ideas from what they remembered about the current event topic being discussed. They had no access to AI tools. The Group 2 learners therefore could not ascertain their points with much conviction.

Speaking Practice through AI

Speak AI for instance is an AI-powered language learning app designed to help users improve their speaking skills. Learners here, get access to personalized learning experience through an AI tutor and practice real-life conversations, engage in role-plays, and receive instant speech correction. For a speaking activity such as a debating on varied issues students may be encouraged to use AI platforms to gather arguments and counter-arguments thereby actively participating in debates. *Loora AI* is a personalized AI tutor for learners to practice conversation free of judgements. *SmallTalk2Me* is another popular AI-powered speaking

assistant that helps learners to practice English speaking and improve their communication skills by recording and analysing their speech – without any teacher or a speaking partner. It also provides accurate and immediate English-level assessment of learners.

Listening Practice through AI

Listening is learnt best by listening to radio broadcasts and viewing TV shows. There are special channels and apps dedicated to listening. Podcast application is one of the most advanced applications for listening practice. Some significant AI Apps that can be considered for developing Listening Skills include *ELSA Speak* that focuses on pronunciation and fluency of learners. *Memrise* another AI app uses real-life videos for improving listening comprehension. *Listenwise* is an online listening skill platform with podcasts and audio stories that give learner's practice in listening. These apps use authentic real-life audios and videos, providing personalised content and giving immediate feedback to learners. They are designed to make English listening practice engaging and accessible for learners of all levels.

AI support for Teachers

Artificial Intelligence has considerably simplified various teaching and administrative work for educators. AI language tools such as *Open AI* provide teachers considerable support in curriculum development and assessment thereby simplifying tasks such as evaluating assessments, creating worksheets or writing a review. These AI tools reduce the burden of teachers and allow them to focus more on learner engagement, innovative teaching and research.

Advantages

Artificial Intelligence creates immersive learning experiences for learners as it can simulate real world scenarios making learning enjoyable. Implementing AI tools like chatbots and virtual assistants in language acquisition not only helps in learner autonomy but also provide learners with instant feedback in speaking, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, leading to gradual improvement and skill enhancement. Such AI platforms provide personalised learning experiences. Such simulations powered by AI, enhance student engagement, motivate learners and boosts up their confidence. AI may be used to create tailor-made personalised educational content according to the requirement of a particular learner. AI-powered educational platforms are also cost effective and can reach out to a very large number of students thereby making quality education easily accessible and affordable. For educators, artificial intelligence can be used to carry out routine tasks such as creating lesson plans, grading and evaluation, managing students' records. This will allow teachers with more free time to concentrate more on quality teaching. Besides, AI can refine and better the accuracy and speed of any task, and greatly reduce the chances of human error.

Disadvantages

In spite of several advantages, the use of AI brings important drawbacks too. Data security is an important issue that cannot be overlooked. AI mostly requires vast amount of personal data to function effectively. This is a matter of concern as to how this extensive data may be stored and safeguarded. In addition to this, the use of AI in education for teaching, assessment and administrative work promotes excessive dependence on technology.

The absence of human touch is a critical disadvantage of using AI in ELT. Traditional education based on human interaction between students and teachers goes beyond classroom teaching. Since time immemorial, it has been a human teacher who has shaped the lives of innumerable future students influencing each one within and beyond the classroom as mentors and lifelong educators, thus giving each one the much needed emotional support, affection and encouragement. Artificial intelligence with its advanced technology, however, cannot replicate the empathy, personal connection and deep bond that human educators share with their students.

AI in education also raises the risk of academic dishonesty such as, cheating. Students often use AI tools to write plagiarised academic content and complete assignments without making use of their critical thinking skills. At times, they use such sophisticated AI-generated content that are even able to outsmart AI-powered plagiarism detection systems.

Conclusion

Will AI displace Teachers?

The rise of AI in education creates an alert in the job displacement of teachers. As AI systems take on automated grading, AI-driven tutoring, administrative tasks and the like, there is a fear that teachers might become obsolete some day or the need for teachers may reduce, leading to huge number of job losses. An important challenge linked with the implementation of AI is the need for teachers' training. Educators in future, need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge of effectively integrating AI into their teaching. AI technology may assist teachers and bring about significant changes in English language teaching practices but without a student-teacher understanding that grows out of deep-rooted bond within and beyond the classroom, the entire teaching process will disintegrate. Teachers are indispensable to the education system, providing the much-needed human touch to students that technology can never replace.

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