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THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This article examines how artificial intelligence (AI) tools are being used in English language teaching, what they offer to learners and teachers, and what they put at risk. Using an analytical review of research published mainly between 2016 and 2024, the study sorts the evidence into reported opportunities and reported challenges. The reviewed literature suggests that AI tools, chiefly chatbots, intelligent assistants, automated feedback systems and large language models, are most useful where they extend practice time, give immediate feedback and reduce the routine workload of teachers. The same literature points to unreliable or biased output, learner over-reliance, short-lived novelty effects, privacy risks and uneven teacher preparation. The article argues that the benefits depend less on the technology itself than on the pedagogical frame built around it, and that teacher judgement remains the deciding factor. Practical implications for EFL teachers and university programmes are outlined.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, English language teaching, chatbots, automated feedback, teacher competence.

INTRODUCTION

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

AI in education is as much a pedagogical question as a technical one, and this is the starting point of most serious work on the subject [1]. Language teachers have never lacked for new technology, and each wave has arrived with large promises. Warschauer and Healey described how computer-assisted language learning passed through behaviourist, communicative and integrative stages [2]; every stage changed what teachers were asked to do, but none removed the need for them. AI is the newest wave, and it differs in a way that matters for classrooms: the software no longer only delivers prepared material, it produces language of its own in response to the learner.

For an EFL teacher this changes the everyday situation. A student who once asked a classmate or consulted a dictionary now asks a chatbot and receives a fluent, confident answer that may or may not be correct. Research on the topic has grown quickly, yet a large review of AI applications in higher education found that few studies were written by education specialists and that ethical and pedagogical risks were seldom discussed critically [3]. Kasneci et al. likewise pair the opportunities of large language models with concerns about over-reliance, bias and the competence that teachers need in order to use such tools well [4]. A balanced account of both sides is therefore needed, particularly for teacher education programmes that prepare future English teachers.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The article aims to review what is currently known about the use of AI tools in teaching English as a foreign language and to separate documented benefits from assumed ones. A second aim is to identify the conditions under which teachers can use these tools without weakening the learning they are meant to support. The findings may be useful to practising teachers, to university lecturers who train them, and to graduate students working on technology in language education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What opportunities do AI tools create for teaching and learning English as a foreign language?
- What challenges and risks does the literature associate with their use?
- Under what conditions can teachers use AI tools productively?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviews of AI in language education describe a field that is wide but uneven. Huang et al., who mapped research trends in this area, found work on chatbots, speech recognition, automated writing evaluation and intelligent tutoring, with most of it concentrated on a few technologies and skills [5]. Writing has received particular attention. Godwin-Jones argues that grammar checkers, predictive text and machine translation have already changed how learners write, and that instruction should teach students to judge and edit machine suggestions rather than ignore or simply accept them [6]. Kohnke et al. reach a similar position for ChatGPT: it can help with materials,

explanations and practice, but teachers and learners need new digital competences to use it responsibly [7].

For speaking and listening, the evidence is more mixed. Fryer et al. compared chatbot and human partners in classroom tasks and observed that learners' interest in the chatbot tasks declined over the course, which they linked to a novelty effect [8]. Dizon, studying intelligent personal assistants with EFL learners, reported useful opportunities for listening and speaking practice, while recognition errors with learners' accented speech remained a practical limitation [9]. Taken together, these studies show that access to a conversational partner is not the same as sustained, productive conversation.

A further line of work concerns the role of the teacher. Luckin et al. present AI mainly as support for teachers and learners, handling routine tasks so that human attention can go to more demanding ones [10]. Selwyn is more sceptical and questions claims that automation can or should replace central parts of teaching, pointing to the social and ethical work that teachers do and that software cannot [11]. The two positions are less opposed than they first appear, since both place the teacher at the centre of decisions about when AI is used and for what purpose.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN: The study follows an analytical (narrative) review design, which is suited to bringing together findings from varied sources and examining them critically rather than merely counting them [12]. No primary data were collected from learners or teachers.

SOURCES: The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, books and research reports published mainly between 2016 and 2024 that deal with AI tools in English or other foreign language teaching, together with a small number of earlier works that give theoretical background. Sources were located through academic databases and search engines (Scopus, ERIC and Google Scholar) using combinations of terms such as artificial intelligence, chatbot, ChatGPT, automated feedback and language teaching. Studies were retained when they addressed language learning or teaching directly and reported findings or reasoned arguments rather than product descriptions.

ANALYSIS: The selected texts were read repeatedly and coded for reported opportunities, reported problems and the conditions attached to each. Codes were then grouped into themes following the logic of thematic analysis [13]. Because the sample is selective and the field changes rapidly, the findings should be read as a reasoned synthesis, not an exhaustive survey.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

OPPORTUNITIES

Three opportunities recur across the reviewed sources. The first is additional practice. Chatbots and voice assistants are available at any hour, do not tire, and allow learners to try out language without an audience [8, 9]. For students in large groups, who may speak for only a few minutes in a lesson, this is a real gain. The second is immediate and individualised feedback, especially on writing, where automated tools can flag form-related problems while the learner is still working on the text [6, 7]. The third is relief for teachers from repetitive work, such as preparing practice items, adapting texts to different levels or drafting examples, which leaves more time for tasks that need human judgement [7, 10].

These opportunities are real, but they are narrower than promotional language suggests. Most of the documented gains concern practice and feedback on form. Evidence that AI improves communicative competence in the long term, or that it develops learners' ability to work independently, is thin, and a good part of the literature relies on short interventions and self-reported impressions [5, 8].

CHALLENGES

The first challenge is the quality of output. Large language models generate text that sounds authoritative whether or not it is accurate, and they reproduce patterns and biases from their training data [14]. A learner who cannot yet judge correct usage is the person least able to detect a confident mistake. The second is over-reliance. When a tool produces a finished paragraph in seconds, the effort that drives learning can disappear, and teachers have to rethink what counts as the learner's own work. Detection software is not a safe answer to this problem: Liang et al. showed that AI-text detectors tend to

misclassify writing by non-native English speakers as machine-generated, which makes them particularly risky for EFL students [15].

Third, there is the novelty problem noted earlier. If learner interest falls once the tool is familiar [8], then the motivational case for AI cannot rest on its newness alone. Fourth come privacy and data governance. Learner interactions with AI systems generate data, and questions of consent, ownership and secondary use have been debated in learning analytics for some time without being settled [16]. Finally, teacher preparation is uneven. Without training, teachers either avoid the tools or use them in ways that add little to a lesson [4, 7], and unequal access to devices and reliable internet can widen gaps between learners.

CONDITIONS FOR PRODUCTIVE USE

The reviewed literature suggests several conditions under which AI use is more likely to help than harm. The tool should serve a clear learning objective, not appear in the lesson for its own sake. Learners need explicit training in checking and questioning machine output, which turns a risk into a learning task [6]. Assessment design should make process visible, for example through drafts, oral follow-up and reflection on how a tool was used, so that reliance on AI can be seen and discussed instead of policed. Finally, teachers need time and professional development to become competent users, and university programmes that train English teachers are well placed to supply both [4, 7]. In each of these conditions the deciding element is the teacher's pedagogical judgement, which agrees with both the supportive and the sceptical positions described above [10, 11].

CONCLUSION

This review set out to separate what AI tools have been shown to do in English language teaching from what they are only assumed to do. The evidence supports their value for extra practice, quick feedback and reduced routine workload; it supports much less strongly the claims about lasting gains in communicative ability or learner independence. Against these benefits stand inaccurate and biased output, over-reliance, fading novelty, privacy concerns and uneven teacher readiness. The outcome of using AI in a classroom therefore depends mainly on how teachers frame its use. For teacher

education, this implies that future English teachers should be trained not only to operate AI tools but to evaluate them, to design tasks that keep learner effort at the centre, and to guide students in questioning machine-generated language. The study is limited by its reliance on a selective review and on a literature that is still young. Future research should examine long-term effects on learners' proficiency and autonomy, and should test specific classroom designs empirically in the Kazakhstani university context.

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