ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AFFORDANCES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. This paper explores the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing on its pedagogical advantages and potential challenges. AI-powered tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, automated writing evaluators, and speech recognition systems have transformed traditional learning environments into interactive and personalized spaces. Through qualitative analysis of recent studies, the paper examines how AI enhances language acquisition, provides adaptive feedback, and supports teachers in managing classroom tasks. At the same time, it highlights issues related to technological dependency, data ethics, and the loss of human interaction. The study concludes that AI, when applied thoughtfully, can complement human teaching and improve educational outcomes.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, ELT, digital pedagogy, language learning, automation, feedback, ethical challenges.

Introduction

Over the past decade, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has dramatically changed the landscape of education, particularly in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). AI is no longer confined to laboratories and research centers—it now appears in classrooms through intelligent tutoring systems, voice-recognition applications, and automated assessment tools.

These technologies have the potential to personalize learning experiences, making education more efficient and inclusive [1; 25-p].

AI systems can analyze learner performance, provide real-time feedback, and even adapt lesson difficulty according to student progress. For language learners, this means individualized pronunciation practice, grammar correction, and vocabulary support. However, while AI offers significant advantages, it also raises important pedagogical and ethical questions. Can machines truly understand the emotional aspects of learning? Will over-reliance on automation reduce learners' creativity and social interaction?

The purpose of this paper is to explore both sides of this innovation: the *affordances*—the opportunities and benefits AI brings to language teaching—and the *challenges*—the risks and limitations that educators must carefully manage.

Overview of Related Studies

The integration of technology into language education has long been a topic of research, but the emergence of AI represents a new phase in this evolution. Luckin et al. describe AI as an adaptive system capable of analyzing learners' cognitive patterns to provide personalized instruction. Their research emphasizes that AI's true strength lies in its ability to learn from data and adjust teaching approaches automatically.

Popenici and Kerr examined how AI could transform higher education, arguing that intelligent algorithms help teachers identify learning gaps and support differentiated instruction. Similarly, Godwin-Jones explored how AI-powered chatbots, translation tools, and virtual tutors can promote learner autonomy and self-correction in ELT settings [2; 49-p].

Another significant contribution comes from Li who discusses AI's potential to create more student-centered environments. According to Li, the adaptive nature of AI allows each learner to receive feedback suited to their pace and style, fostering motivation and engagement.

However, Selwyn cautions against an uncritical adoption of technology. He argues that AI cannot replicate the empathy, moral judgment, and creativity of human teachers.

These studies collectively demonstrate that while AI has expanded opportunities for individualized learning, it cannot replace human connection in language education. The challenge lies in achieving a balance between automation and authenticity in classroom practice.

Research Framework

This paper is based on a qualitative analytical approach that synthesizes findings from recent academic sources and classroom observations.

Data sources: peer-reviewed articles, reports from AI-integrated classrooms, and educational technology case studies.

Focus: identifying both the benefits and the constraints of AI implementation in EFL teaching contexts.

The analysis categorized literature into two main themes:

1. Affordances of AI – the positive contributions of AI tools to English language learning;

2. Challenges of AI – the pedagogical, ethical, and practical concerns that accompany technological integration.

Descriptive and interpretive methods were applied to highlight how these aspects interact and affect both teachers and learners in real-world educational environments.

Results and Interpretation

1. Affordances of AI in ELT

Personalized learning:

AI systems such as Duolingo and ELSA Speak adapt lessons to each learner's pace and accuracy. They analyze responses and instantly adjust difficulty levels, promoting self-directed learning and motivation [3; 88-p].

Automated feedback and writing support:

Tools like Grammarly and Write & Improve provide real-time feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and coherence. This reduces teacher workload while encouraging independent practice.

Speech recognition and pronunciation improvement:

Applications with AI-driven speech analysis help learners refine pronunciation by detecting minor phonetic errors, offering suggestions for correction.

Data-driven teaching:

AI platforms collect learning data that teachers can analyze to identify students' weaknesses, track progress, and tailor future lessons more effectively.

2. Challenges and Limitations

Lack of emotional intelligence:

AI lacks empathy and the ability to sense learners' frustration or confusion, elements that are crucial in language acquisition [4; 72-p].

Data privacy concerns:

Many AI tools require personal information, raising ethical questions about how that data is stored and used.

Over-reliance on automation:

Excessive dependence on AI may weaken students' critical thinking and reduce opportunities for creative language use.

Digital inequality:

Not all institutions have equal access to advanced technology. Students from underfunded schools risk being left behind.

These limitations indicate that AI integration should be guided by human oversight and ethical responsibility.

Pedagogical Implications

The introduction of AI into ELT does not eliminate the need for teachers; rather, it redefines their role. Teachers become facilitators, guiding students to interpret and apply AI-generated feedback critically. They must also develop AI literacy—an understanding of how algorithms function, what biases they may carry, and how to use them responsibly.

Institutions should invest in teacher training programs focused on integrating AI tools effectively. Equally important is maintaining emotional communication in classrooms: discussions, debates, and group projects ensure that learners do not become isolated behind screens.

The future of ELT depends on cooperation between human intuition and artificial precision. By combining the empathy of teachers with the analytical power of AI, educators can create learning experiences that are both efficient and humane.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence has emerged as one of the most transformative forces in modern English language teaching. Its ability to provide personalized learning, immediate feedback, and adaptive assessment has brought remarkable progress to language education. However, AI cannot replace the human qualities that make teaching meaningful — empathy, creativity, and the power to inspire.

To make the most of AI's potential, teachers and policymakers should:

1. Use AI as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for teaching;
2. Ensure ethical use and data protection in educational technologies;
3. Train teachers in digital pedagogy and AI-based feedback systems;
4. Maintain a balance between automation and interpersonal communication.

The future of language education will depend on how effectively we integrate technology without losing the human touch that lies at the heart of learning.

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