



Integrating AI tools in ESL classrooms: A pedagogical perspective

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Abstract

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into English as a Second Language (ESL) programs represents a significant shift in language training. Writing assistants, speech recognition software, intelligent tutoring systems, and adaptive learning platforms are examples of artificial intelligence (AI) tools that are transforming traditional teaching by offering personalized, data-driven training that enhances learner autonomy, engagement, and performance. In this paper, the attempt has been made to look at these technologies' educational value and emphasize how they facilitate differentiated training, offer real-time feedback, and mimic real-world communication situations. The changing role of teachers is essential to this integration. Teachers who serve as designers, mediators, and facilitators to ensure moral, culturally sensitive, and efficient AI use. Even though AI has many advantages, it has some drawbacks too such as issues with teacher preparedness, digital equity, data privacy, and linguistic bias. The paper discusses these issues and outlines future directions for AI in ESL, including advancements in conversational AI, immersive technologies, hyper-personalized learning, and improved ethical standards. Emphasizing collaboration between human educators and AI systems, this study highlights the need for balanced, inclusive, and pedagogically sound approaches to harness AI's full potential in language learning.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, ESL, language learning, educational technology, personalized, learning, adaptive learning, AI tools, teacher role

Introduction

The way that language learning is taught and experienced has changed significantly with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Traditional pedagogical approaches are being gradually transformed by artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which range from speech recognition platforms and adaptive learning environments to intelligent tutoring systems and writing assistance. Instant feedback, more student autonomy, and individualized, data-driven training are all made possible by these technologies. AI empowers teachers and students in ESL settings. Tools that adjust to their level of skill, mimic real-world communication, and offer engaging writing and pronunciation practice are beneficial to learners. In the meanwhile, teachers can use AI to improve instructional decisionmaking, expedite assessment, and better manage sizable, mixed-ability classrooms. However, integrating AI into ESL training is not without its challenges. To ensure moral and successful adoption, we must address some of the concerns like teacher preparedness, bias in language models, data privacy, and equity of access. Furthermore, even while AI is capable of automating a lot of work, it is unable to replace the human components that are crucial to teaching languages, such as empathy, cultural awareness, and the capacity to stimulate critical thought.

The present paper highlights the changing role of teachers in AI-enhanced learning environments and investigates the pedagogical relevance of AI tools in ESL classes. It also critically analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of integrating them.

AI Tools Used in ESL Classrooms

English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are increasingly using AI tools to help both teachers and students. These resources support engagement, lesson

planning, assessment, language learning, and individualized instruction. The below mentioned are some of the useful AI resources that are utilized in ESL classes. The data has been presented in the form examples, features and value of the AI tools used in ESL classes.

a. Language Learning Apps

- **Examples:** Duolingo, Elsa Speak, Babbel
- **Features:** Speech recognition, adaptive learning, gamification
- **Value:** Supports pronunciation practice, vocabulary retention, and learner autonomy.

b. Chatbots and Conversational Agents

- **Examples:** Replika, ChatGPT, Google's AI Tutor
- **Features:** Simulated conversation, contextual feedback, role-play
- **Value:** Offers low-stakes, real-time language practice and error correction.

c. Writing Assistants

- **Examples:** Grammarly, Quillbot, Write & Improve (Cambridge)
- **Features:** Grammar and style suggestions, paraphrasing, feedback loops
- **Value:** Enhances writing skills and promotes metalinguistic awareness.

d. Translation Tools

- **Examples:** Google Translate, DeepL
- **Features:** Instant translation, pronunciation help, multilingual support

- **Value:** Bridges gaps in understanding but requires guidance to avoid overreliance.
- e. Learning Management Systems (LMS) with AI**
- **Examples:** Moodle with AI plugins, Edmodo AI features
 - **Features:** Personalized learning paths, data analytics, formative assessments
 - **Value:** Supports differentiated instruction and learner progress tracking.

Pedagogical Value of AI in ESL

1. Personalization of Learning

- AI can tailor instruction based on a learner's proficiency level, pace, and goals.
- **Example:** Adaptive grammar exercises that increase in complexity based on performance.

2. Immediate Feedback and Error Correction

- Tools like Grammarly or AI chatbots provide real-time corrections, crucial for language development.
- Encourages self-monitoring and autonomous learning.

3. Authentic Communication Opportunities

- AI-driven dialogue systems mimic real-world interactions, helping learners practice fluency and pragmatics.
- Role-play with AI agents enhances sociolinguistic competence.

4. Engagement Through Gamification and Interactivity

- Apps using AI often incorporate game elements (e.g., badges, leaderboards), increasing motivation and persistence.

5. Support for Differentiated Instruction

- AI systems help teachers address mixed-ability classrooms by generating customized tasks and providing targeted scaffolding.

6. Enhanced Assessment and Feedback

- AI analytics offer data-driven insights into student progress, identifying specific areas of need.

The Role of Teachers in AI Integration

The teacher's position is still crucial despite AI's capabilities. AI tools ought to be used as supplementary technologies that improve learning rather than taking the role of teacher-led training. Teachers must contextualize language use, understand AI-generated feedback, lead students through challenging assignments, and provide opportunity for meaningful communication.

It is crucial to have pedagogical alignment. Teachers must make sure that AI tools are applied in ways that advance curriculum objectives and develop abilities like creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural communication since these are the areas in which AI currently has little influence. The teachers must also take into account that AI systems frequently ignore the affective and social aspects of language learning.

If the teachers want to use AI in the classroom, they need to improve their technology literacy in addition to their material and pedagogical skills. This entails knowing the limitations of AI technologies, how they operate, and how to effectively incorporate them into lesson plans. The key to developing this capacity is ongoing professional growth.

The teachers play following role while integrating AI in ESL

1. Mediators of Technology

Teachers act as intermediaries between AI tools and students, ensuring that:

- Tools align with pedagogical goals and language learning standards.
- Students use AI meaningfully rather than passively or inappropriately.
- Ethical and privacy considerations are respected.

2. Designers of Learning Experiences

AI tools may automate certain functions, but only teachers can:

- Design tasks that incorporate AI meaningfully (e.g., AI-assisted writing projects, chatbot interviews).
- Integrate contextual and cultural knowledge that AI lacks.
- Adapt AI outputs to fit classroom dynamics and learner needs.

3. Facilitators of Critical Thinking

AI can provide answers, but teachers must:

- Encourage learners to question and evaluate AI-generated content.
- Guide students in identifying bias, errors, or limitations in tools like translators or chatbots.
- Promote metacognitive skills by discussing how and why AI helps in learning

4. Monitors of Learning Progress

While AI offers automated assessments, teachers are still essential for:

- Interpreting AI-generated analytics to inform instructional decisions.
- Recognizing non-quantifiable factors like motivation, engagement, or anxiety.
- Providing formative feedback that goes beyond automated correction.

5. Supporters of Equity and Access

Teachers play a critical role in ensuring **fair access** to AI-enhanced learning:

- Addressing the digital divide by supporting students with limited tech skills or access.
- Differentiating instruction so AI tools cater to diverse learning styles and abilities.
- Advocating for inclusive design and linguistically diverse AI resources.

6. Lifelong Learners and Innovators

To remain effective, teachers must:

- Continuously learn about emerging AI tools and trends.
- Participate in professional development related to educational technology.
- Share best practices and collaborate with peers on integrating AI ethically and effectively.

7. Preservers of Human Connection

Despite AI's capabilities, teachers remain irreplaceable in:

- Building emotional connections and trust with students.
- Creating a safe and motivating classroom environment.
- Cultivating empathy, collaboration, and another human-centric skills AI cannot teach.

Challenges and Considerations of Integrating AI in ESL Classrooms

Even though AI has a lot of potential to revolutionize ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction, integrating it is not without its difficulties. In order to ensure the moral, efficient, and fair application of AI in language learning, teachers, institutions, and policy makers need to address a number of important issues.

1. Pedagogical Challenges

a. Over-Reliance on AI Tools

- Students may become dependent on AI (e.g., translators, grammar checkers) rather than developing independent language skills.
- Teachers must guide learners in balancing AI support with cognitive engagement and critical thinking.

b. Lack of Contextual Understanding

- AI lacks nuanced understanding of cultural context, idiomatic language, or pragmatic subtleties.
- It may misinterpret or oversimplify language usage, especially in communicative or sociolinguistic settings.

c. One-Size-Fits-All Feedback

- AI tools provide generalized corrections that may not suit all learners.
- Feedback may lack personalization, affecting motivation and targeted learning.

2. Ethical and Privacy Concerns

a. Data Privacy and Security

- Many AI tools collect user data, raising concerns about student privacy, especially for minors.
- Schools must ensure compliance with data protection laws (e.g., GDPR, FERPA).

b. Bias and Fairness

- AI models may reflect biases present in their training data, leading to discriminatory or inaccurate responses.
- Language learning content may favor native-speaker norms or certain accents, marginalizing others.

c. Equity and Access

- Not all students have equal access to the devices or connectivity needed to use AI tools effectively.
- Technological disparities can exacerbate existing educational inequalities.

3. Teacher Readiness and Training

a. Digital Literacy Gaps

- Many ESL teachers lack training in how to use AI tools pedagogically, not just technically.
- Professional development is needed to integrate AI meaningfully into lesson planning and instruction.

b. Resistance to Change

- Some teachers may fear that AI will replace their roles or undermine traditional teaching methods.

- Building confidence and showcasing success stories can help overcome this resistance.

4. Curriculum and Policy Alignment

a. Lack of Guidelines

- Most ESL curricula do not yet include structured policies for AI integration.
- Teachers often experiment independently, which may lead to inconsistent or ineffective practices.

b. Assessment Incompatibility

- AI tools may not align with traditional assessment formats or standards.
- Teachers must reconcile AI-enhanced learning with existing evaluation systems.

5. Language Learning Specific Challenges

a. Pronunciation and Accent Recognition

- AI speech recognition tools may struggle with non-native accents or regional varieties of English.
- Misrecognition can discourage learners and lead to inaccurate feedback.

b. Cultural and Linguistic Sensitivity

- AI may not always respect or represent cultural diversity in ESL contexts.
- Teachers must ensure tools are used to complement cultural awareness, not dilute it.

6. Integration into Classroom Practice

a. Time Constraints

- Learning and incorporating AI into teaching takes time—something many ESL teachers lack.
- Institutional support is crucial to facilitate experimentation and adoption.

b. Fragmentation of Tools

- The wide variety of AI tools can overwhelm teachers and students.
- A cohesive strategy is needed to select and align tools with learning objectives.

Positive Outcomes and Future Directions of AI Integration in ESL Classrooms The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms has already led to measurable improvements in language teaching and learning. As this technology evolves, it is poised to play an even greater role in shaping the future of language education.

Positive Outcomes of AI Integration

1. Enhanced Language Proficiency

- **Pronunciation & Fluency:** Tools like **Elsa Speak** provide real-time pronunciation feedback, helping learners refine accent and intonation.
- **Grammar & Writing:** AI-powered writing assistants such as Grammarly or Write & Improve promote accuracy and clarity in learners' written output.

2. Personalized Learning Paths

- Adaptive platforms (e.g., **Duolingo**, **LingQ**) adjust content difficulty based on performance.
- Learners receive targeted practice in areas of weakness, increasing efficiency and motivation.

3. Increased Learner Autonomy

- Students can practice outside of class at their own pace.
- AI tools offer instant support, fostering independence and self-directed learning.

4. Richer Classroom Interaction

- AI frees up teacher time by handling repetitive tasks (e.g., grading, feedback).
- Teachers can focus on communicative activities, discussion, and higher-order thinking skills.

5. Data-Driven Decision Making

- AI provides real-time analytics on student performance.
- Teachers gain insights into learning trends and can adjust instruction accordingly.

6. Inclusive and Accessible Learning

- AI supports learners with different needs (e.g., visual/audio learners, students with learning difficulties).
- Translation and speech-to-text tools break language barriers and support multilingual environments.

Future of AI in ESL

1. More Advanced Conversational AI

- Future chatbots will simulate more natural, nuanced conversation with emotional intelligence.
- AI tutors may be able to recognize learner frustration and adjust tone or difficulty.

2. Seamless Integration with AR/VR

- AI-enhanced virtual reality (VR) environments will allow learners to practice language in immersive contexts (e.g., shopping in a virtual English-speaking market).
- Augmented Reality (AR) could provide real-time language tips during physical interactions.

3. Improved Cultural Competency

- AI systems will increasingly incorporate **cross-cultural data**, helping learners understand not just language but cultural usage, tone, and context.

4. Hyper-Personalization

- AI may soon be able to generate individualized syllabi, learning materials, and even simulate peer interactions based on a learner's interests, background, and goals.

5. Ethical and Transparent AI

- As ethical standards evolve, AI tools will be more transparent about how they collect and use data, giving educators and students greater control.

6. Teacher-AI Collaboration

- Teachers will play an **orchestrator role**, using AI to support differentiated instruction and formative assessment.
- Future teacher training will include **AI literacy** as a core competency.

Conclusion

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into English as a Second Language (ESL) education represents a paradigm shift in language instruction. AI tools, ranging from

adaptive learning platforms to speech recognition systems and writing assistants, offer unparalleled opportunities for personalized, engaging, and data-driven learning experiences. These technologies empower learners by providing immediate feedback, fostering autonomy, and simulating authentic communication scenarios. Simultaneously, they assist teachers by streamlining assessments, supporting differentiated instruction, and offering actionable insights into student progress.

However, this transformation is not without challenges. Ethical concerns related to data privacy, digital equity, algorithmic bias, and the over-reliance on AI tools must be critically addressed. Furthermore, AI cannot replace the nuanced, empathetic, and culturally responsive teaching that teachers provide. The evolving role of teachers as mediators, designers, facilitators, and advocates underscores the irreplaceable human element in education.

As AI continues to evolve, its responsible and inclusive integration into ESL instruction demands ongoing teacher training, curriculum alignment, and policy development. Emphasizing a collaborative model, where teachers and AI work in synergy, will ensure that technological advancements serve pedagogical goals and uphold educational values. The future of AI in ESL lies not in replacing teachers, but in enhancing their capacity to deliver more effective, inclusive, and learner-centered instruction.

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