Generative AI in English Language Learning (Review Article)

(Review Article)

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Abstract

This targeted review looks at the positioning of generative artificial intelligence in English language learning and under what circumstances the use of generative artificial intelligence is pedagogically justifiable. To maintain the discourse clear and compatible with a succinctly-structured review format, the paper summarizes four recent, high-relevancy articles, which deal with general ELT affordances, empirical use of ChatGPT in ESL/EFL, discrepancies between the use of AI-generated text, and the concept of distributed agency. The literature review indicates that generative AI has the potential to aid English learning by providing quick feedback, generating ideas, and assisting in revision, providing an opportunity to interact with low stakes, and supporting teachers in planning and preparing materials. The strongest types of evidence are those engaged in the context of writing, and reading, listening and application on a school level are still not well developed in literature. Concurrently, the articles universally caution against erroneous production, overdependence, loss of voice, imbalanced access, and unanswered queries of academic integrity. An effective pedagogic position is neither denying nor unconditional taking up, in short, is neither rejection nor unconditional taking up. Rather, AI must

be applied as a scaffold in teacher guided activities which must be verified, reflected upon and visible student input.

Keywords: Generative AI; English language learning; writing support; AI literacy.

دور الذكاء الاصطناعي التوليدي في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية (مقالة مراجعة)

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه المراجعة المركّزة موقع الذكاء الاصطناعي التوليدي في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية، والشروط التي تجعل استخدامه مقبولًا تربويًا .وللحفاظ على تماسك المقال وانسجامه مع صيغة المراجعة المختصرة، يعتمد البحث على أربعة مصادر حديثة مرتفعة الصلة، تغطي الإمكانات العامة في تعليم الإنجليزية، والدراسات التجريبية الخاصة بتطبيق ChatGPT في سياقات ESL/EFL، والتناقضات المرتبطة بالنصوص المولَّدة آليًا، وفكرة الوكالة الموزعة بين المتعلّم والمعلم والأداة .وتبيّن الأدبيات أن الذكاء الاصطناعي التوليدي يمكن أن يدعم التعلّم عبر التغذية الراجعة السريعة، وتوليد الأفكار، ومساندة المراجعة الكتابية، وتهيئة فرص تفاعل منخفضة المخاطر، إضافةً إلى دعم المعلم في التخطيط وإعداد المواد .غير أن هذا الدعم يتركز بصورة أوضح في الكتابة، بينما ما تزال القراءة والاستماع وتطبيقات المراحل المدرسية أقل حضورًا في البحث .كما تحذر الدراسات من مشكلات الدقة، والإفراط في الاعتماد، وتراجع صوت المتعلم، وعدم تكافؤ الوصول، والإشكالات المتعلقة بالنزاهة الأكاديمية .وعليه، فإن الموقف التربوي الأنسب ليس الرفض التام ولا التبني غير المقيّد، بل الاستخدام الموجّه ضمن مهام يشرف عليها المعلم وتستلزم التحقق والتأمل وإظهار إسهام المتعلم بصورة واضحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الذكاء الاصطناعي التوليدي، تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية، دعم الكتابة، محو الأمية الذكائية.

Introduction

Generative AI has quickly become a new technology and an integral part of education. Its appeal in the English language learning relates to the speed of it in creating explanations, model texts, feedback, prompts and conversation responses. The pedagogical value of the tools cannot be predetermined solely with the notion of novelty, however. The question of whether AI is able to generate language is not central but

rather, whether using it can help enhance learning in a manner that does not infringe on the learner agency, teacher judgment, and academic integrity.

To answer that question within the confines of a semi- brief review article, this paper generalizes about four more recent sources that were chosen based on their direct relevance and complementary focus: Crompton et al. (2024) on AI affordances and challenges in English language teaching, Lo et al. (2024) on the use of chatbots empirically in the teaching of English language, Warschauer et al. (Collectively, these sources are a small yet analytically well-rounded foundation to estimate the promise and limitation.

Despite the fact that generative AI is commonly referred to as one classroom solution, the literature reviewed indicates that the educational outcomes have rather to do with the pedagogical arrangement rather than technology. The same system can serve to provide explanation, provide a feedback partner, simulate conversations, act as a planning aid or a bypass to learning. This is why the current review considers effectiveness as a context-specific issue: who is the user of the tool, what goal does he/she achieve, on what instructions and based on what evidence the factual language development process has already become actual.

Educational Affordances

As Godwin-Jones (2024, p. 4) notes, “Generative AI offers significant opportunities for language learning.”. Lo et al. (2024, p. 1) describe ChatGPT as “capable of providing personalised responses to users’ inquiries,” which explains why it can function as on-demand support in ESL/EFL learning. The students can seek clarifications, illustrations, paraphrase and vocabularies and corrective offers on demand. This responsiveness can both out of classroom time and practice, and even contribute to learners to work at their own speeds.

Lo et al. (2024, p. 1) report that "the majority of studies have focused on students' use of this AI tool in writing," so writing remains the strongest area in the current evidence base. Throughout the studies reviewed, the use of AI tools to assist in brainstorming, an idea development, organization, lexical choice, grammatical revision, and providing feedback on the quality of the draft is typical. In that sense, AI will not operate on the basis of being a fully fledged author, but rather provisional helper, capable of provoking revision and addressing the writing process to be more dialogic.

Third, AI can increase the possibilities to communicate according to the literature. Learners can pose questions, rehearse, and experiment with formulations with chat-based tools which can provide low-stakes, low-pressure social space, when compared with classroom performance. These would be useful opportunities to build confidence, and are potentially valuable so long as they are combined with the feedback of the teacher and not used as an alternative to teaching.

Pedagogical Conditions to be successfully used.

The literature reveals that generative AI does not necessarily constitute education due to only being interactive. Its worth hinges on the construction of the task that it is entrenched in. Unless students have specific objectives, process procedures, and criteria of responsibility, the tool may easily replace thinking when they have a wide latitude of permission to use AI without any specific objectives. In comparison, when teachers state that they will use AI to perform tasks like creating examples or testing alternative formulations, or use the tool to get feedback on a draft, it will seem more like a learning assistant than a learning replacement.

The prompt design and the evaluation of response is one of the levels where teacher mediation is particularly important. Students tend to require instructions in how to effectively pose questions, focus a request

and how to evaluate the sufficiency of response they get. In the absence of such mediation students can take refined, and perhaps superficial replies; or they will fail to recognize when an output is too general to suit the task in hand. Warschauer et al. (2023, p. 2, preprint) propose "a five-part pedagogical framework focusing on understanding, accessing, prompting, corroborating, and incorporating AI in the writing process.". This is strongly consistent with the focus on AI literacy in Warschauer et al. (2023) and with the pedagogical framing in general as Godwin-Jones (2024) argues.

Another requirement is related to alignment of AI usage and the level of proficiency. Novices might find it useful to have assisted models, simplified descriptions, and a broadening of vocabulary, but more inclined to parrot the information without comprehension. As Warschauer et al. (2023, p. 8, preprint) put it, "the better they can write without it, the better they will be prepared to write with it.". The literature reviewed thus leaves the threshold as to whether or not AI should be used, and how its application should be adjusted to the student, the skill and the learning goal of the lesson.

Lastly, the generative AI can be used by upholding teachers and students. It can be used to help in the preparation of the lesson, writing examples, creating prompts, and creating differentiated materials. Nevertheless, such support is not found in the literature as the reason to decrease the role of the teacher. To the contrary, teacher mediation is still crucial as the purpose of instruction, designing and assessment standards still demand human formulations.

The other significant affordance is the fact that there is the potential of repeated formative practice. Due to a quick-reactive behavior of generative AI and the possibility to have many versions of the same sentence and paraphrase it or ask a follow-up question, learners have an opportunity to test numerous possibilities and reread the explanations

multiple times in a short period of time. Such an iterative rhythm is pedagogically convenient since the acquisition of language often follows the pattern of attempt, feedback and revision cycles rather than being based on the unique exposures to the correct form. In tasks that are properly designed, AI can thus expand the amount of significant rehearsal without having the teacher to supply all the instances of low-level feedback, one-on-one.

The sources reviewed also suggest that the support based on metalinguistics can be more accessible with the help of generative AI. Students who fail to grasp what is being taught by the first explanation by the teacher might demand to have the explanation simplified, translated, given examples or have the explanation rephrased until the subject matter comes light. This does not mean that there is no need to be instructed but it may help to minimize the time between misunderstanding and understanding. This flexibility can also come in particularly handy in heterogeneous classrooms where students may vary in level of proficiency, speed of learning and confidence, as long as the teachers keep track of the quality of the responses they are using.

Challenges and Tensions

Crompton et al. (2024, p. 2503) report that the main AI challenges in ELT/L were "technology breakdowns, limited capabilities, fear and standardising language.". Lo et al. (2024, p. 1) summarize the key risks as "incorrect information, privacy leakage, and academic dishonesty," which gives this paragraph a firmer source-based formulation. Fluency may be confused with correctness in language production and thus un-critical acceptance is very dangerous.

Teaching/Assessment implications.

The most fruitful implication, in the case of classroom teaching, is that AI must be integrated into sequences, as opposed to individual instances. The sequence should be well-designed and can start with

the attempt of the learner, proceed with the comparison or feedback provided by AI, and finish with the humanly justified revision. This series maintains the mental effort but still enables students to enjoy quick assistance. It also dispels the myth of the AI use in education being the generation of a final answer in the quickest time possible.

In the case of the writing instruction, the literature reviewed has indicated that there should be a change in assessment to product-only to process- aware. Educators might have to enquire not only about the fluent nature of a text, but also about the process of development of the text, what choices the learner made, what modifications were accepted or dismissed and how final version reflects the intention of the learner. This is important particularly when the AI-generated recommendations are linguistically powerful enough to conceal poor comprehension.

Policy language and staff development at the program level should be realistic when introducing AI into the program. Without guidance of institutions, teachers cannot be expected to deal with new ethical and assessment dilemmas. Acceptable support should also be outlined in policies, transparency is a must and simplistic assumptions about all AI use as a case of fraud should not be made. Meanwhile, professional development must assist the instructors to develop prompts, assess outputs and choose tasks where human learning is evident and prominent.

The second issue is that of over-reliance. When students give away too much planning, drafting or revising to AI, they might end up with less than fully-developed linguistic and cognitive processes which those tasks were meant to help them develop. This is of particular concern in the writing, where learners must not only have polished output, but control over argument, structure, and rhetorical choice as well.

Warschauer et al. (2023, p. 5, preprint) capture this tension sharply: “English learners are told to imitate, yet are punished for imitating too

well.". Warschauer et al. (2023) demonstrate that artificial intelligence writing can be beneficial to second-language writers but makes the identification, authorship, and evaluation more complicated. The difficulty, however, does not lie in the fact that it is not only possible to detect the use of AI, but it is necessary to determine what kinds of assistance can be considered educationally valid and how students can recognize AI assistance without eliminating their own input.

Another issue that is on the rise is equity. The seeming transparency of generative AI may obscure the disparities of usage: not all learners have access to a stable internet connection, equal digital literacy, and access to the same tools and high-quality features. Assuming that the tasks in classrooms require every student to work with AI in the most advanced manner possible, the existing disparities can be reenacted instead of being decreased. This problem is particularly topical in situations when the institutional infrastructure is not even or when students use personal devices as the main ones.

There are also more complexities in the assessment practices in AI-rich environments. The finished polished work might not demonstrate any longer the extent of language knowledge that the student can marshal on his/her own. That is why, the literature reviewed suggests paying more attention to process evidence, e.g. drafts, revision histories, reflective commentaries or short performances in the classroom to prove the ownership. These can not eradicate the issue, but can decrease the probability that assessment will give a reward to face fluency in lieu of true competence.

Structural gaps in the field, in its turn, are also mentioned in the literature. Lo et al. (2024, p. 1) note that "the impact of ChatGPT on other language skills, such as reading, speaking, and listening, remains under-researched.". Such imbalances imply that it would be too early to

make strong claims regarding the worth of generative AI in all of the English-learning situations.

A Balanced Pedagogical Position

Godwin-Jones (2024, p. 15) writes, “The concept of shared and distributed agency is helpful in understanding the role of AI in language learning.”. In this sense, there is not such an interaction as one learner and one tool in the process of learning with AI. Rather than treating AI as a mere instrument, Godwin-Jones (2024, p. 15) argues that the relationship is “more of a partnership than a simple tool use.”. This perception is a pedagogical concern since it avoids been radical when claiming that AI has the power to revolutionize the way language should be learned.

But a balanced stance is derived on the basis of that observation. AI is to be more of a scaffold and not a substitute to the learner or the teacher. Students require facilitated ways to challenge AI results, make comparisons, selectively revise, and provide reasons to support their ultimate decisions. On their part, teachers should devise assignments whereby the thought process of the students is present. Educational value of AI-assisted work can be preserved with the help of the reflection notes, annotated drafts, record of prompts, and short, oral defenses.

What comes out of the analysed literature is not a single option of either prohibiting AI and adopting it without any ordeal. Principled integration is more defensible there, and AI may always be applied where it enhances practice and feedback, expels it where it hides learning, and must always be verified and held accountable by humans.

Curriculum design has direct implications that are brought about by this principled incorporation. The use of AI cannot just be seen as an ad-hoc in-classroom experimentation, but rather as being associated with clearly outlined learning outcomes. In case the objective is vocabulary

development, students could be asked to provide a comparison between lexical options provided by AI-generators and to provide reasons as to why they have chosen this option. In the case of writing quality as the objective, they could mark the impact of AI feedback to the decision to revise. When the aim is preparation to speak, the interaction between AI and a human being must result in human performance as opposed to being terminated in human performance screen-based rehearsal. Here, education will be based on the actions of the students towards AI output rather than the existence of the tool.

The same argument can be made with regard to assessment. It is necessary to maintain an independent performance space in a defensible evaluation system in the era of generative AI and at the same time acknowledge that the communicative practice of the future will commonly be provided through the use of tools. This implies that some tasks might require a combination of formats: some must be done by hand without the use of AI to show they can be done without AI guidance, and some require open AI aid to see how judging, revising, and using AI is responsible. This model is more realistic than either assuming that there is no such thing as AI, or that all the use of AI is interchangeable.

Recommendations

1- Generative AI is to be incorporated into the English-learning activities as a support and not a one-step answer generator. Tasks that involve brainstorming, drafting, feedback, and revision have more educationally justifiable activities, compared to those that require students to post AI-generated text with little or no editing.

2- Pedagogy of writing must not take away the voice of the learner. AI suggestions must be edited, appraised and customized by the students to ensure that the text is not due to the fluency of the AI but human intent.

3- Teachers are expected to teach explicitly the practices of verification. Students should be trained on how to verify the accuracy of facts, contrasting other answers, weak suggestions, and how AI was utilized when completing the task.

4- The adoption of explicit and attainable policies regarding the use of AI in language classes should be taken in institutions. These policies ought to draw a line between acceptable assistance and unacceptable substitution and they ought to appreciate transparency as opposed to punishment-based policies alone.

5- Future studies need to change the existing focus on writing as well as higher education. There is a need to pay more focus on listening, reading, school-level learners as well as the extended classroom implementation.

6- Teachers should be provided with professional development. The successful application of AI should be based not only on technical knowledge, but also on pedagogical sense, assessment planning and ethical consideration.

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