

AI DEPENDENCY AND ITS EFFECTS ON AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION IN EFL SPEAKING DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The rapid development of artificial intelligence has changed the way EFL learners practise speaking. AI conversation tools provide learners with accessible and immediate opportunities to communicate in English. However, frequent dependence on AI may also influence the development of authentic communicative competence. This thesis examines the relationship between AI dependency and learners' ability to communicate spontaneously with real people. Particular attention is given to reduced human interaction, dependence on immediate linguistic assistance, limited exposure to unpredictable conversations, and the development of pragmatic competence. Recent studies suggest that AI can increase learners' speaking practice and willingness to communicate, but research also identifies limitations in authentic interaction and higher-level communicative development.

1. Introduction

The purpose of speaking instruction is not simply to enable learners to produce grammatically correct sentences. Successful speakers must also respond spontaneously, negotiate meaning, understand social context, manage conversations, and adapt their language to different interlocutors.

AI conversation tools have created a new form of language practice in which learners can communicate with an artificial conversational partner at almost any time. This can be especially useful for students who have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. Studies have reported positive effects of AI-mediated speaking activities on speaking performance and willingness to communicate.

However, the convenience of AI may also encourage excessive dependence. If learners consistently practise with AI instead of communicating with other people, they may receive less exposure to the unpredictable and socially complex nature of human communication.

2. AI Dependency in Speaking Practice

AI dependency can be understood as excessive reliance on an AI system for language production, correction, vocabulary selection, or conversational support.

For example, a learner may stop a conversation whenever they do not know a word and ask AI for an appropriate expression. Similarly, learners may repeatedly request corrections before continuing their speech. Although such support can be useful

during initial learning, excessive assistance may reduce opportunities for independent language production.

Speaking fluency requires learners to tolerate a certain degree of uncertainty. They need to learn how to explain an unknown word, reformulate an idea, use simpler language, or continue a conversation despite mistakes.

3. Reduced Authentic Interaction

Human conversation is unpredictable. A real conversation partner may interrupt, disagree, misunderstand a statement, change the subject, use humour, or respond emotionally.

A systematic review of AI-powered chatbots in EFL speaking identified challenges including disengagement from communication, limitations in speech recognition, differences between learner levels, and relatively monotonous content and formats.

Therefore, AI can increase the quantity of speaking practice without necessarily reproducing every quality of human interaction.

This distinction is important because communicative competence develops through interaction. Learners need to experience different speaking styles, accents, personalities, levels of knowledge, and communication strategies.

4. Pragmatic Competence

Another concern involves pragmatic competence. Learners must understand how language is influenced by relationships, context, culture, and social expectations.

For example, requesting something from a close friend and requesting the same thing from a university professor require different levels of formality. Similarly, disagreement, humour, apology, persuasion, and politeness depend heavily on context.

AI can create role-play situations for these purposes, but simulated interaction should complement rather than replace genuine communication. Recent research suggests that although AI-mediated speaking can support fluency and confidence, evidence concerning sustained development of higher-order communicative competence is less consistent.

5. Implications for EFL Teaching

Teachers should therefore establish a balance between AI-supported and human-supported speaking practice.

AI can be used for:

- individual speaking practice;
- vocabulary preparation;
- pronunciation practice;
- conversation simulations;
- preparation before classroom discussions;
- self-reflection after speaking activities.

Human interaction should remain central through:

- pair work;
- group discussions;
- debates;
- presentations;
- interviews;
- role plays;
- problem-solving activities.

A useful model is therefore:

AI practice → classroom interaction → teacher/peer feedback → independent reflection.

This approach allows students to benefit from AI without becoming completely dependent on it.

6. Conclusion

AI dependency represents an important issue in the development of EFL speaking skills. AI can provide frequent, convenient, and low-pressure speaking practice, but excessive dependence may limit learners' exposure to spontaneous human communication. AI systems cannot automatically reproduce every social, emotional, cultural, and pragmatic feature of real interaction.

Therefore, AI should be viewed as an **additional communication resource rather than a replacement for human communication**. Effective EFL speaking instruction should combine technological opportunities with meaningful interaction among learners and teachers.

References:

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