

THE DRAWBACKS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) has increasingly become a significant component of foreign language education. AI-powered applications provide learners with opportunities to practise speaking, receive immediate feedback, simulate conversations, and improve pronunciation without the constant presence of a teacher. However, the increasing use of AI in speaking instruction also raises important pedagogical concerns. This article examines several potential drawbacks of relying on AI for the development of English speaking skills. Particular attention is given to reduced human interaction, AI dependency, limitations in understanding pragmatic and emotional aspects of communication, possible inaccuracies in automated feedback, and the risk of prioritizing linguistic accuracy over communicative fluency. The article argues that AI can function as a useful supplementary tool, but it should not replace authentic interaction with teachers and other learners. A balanced pedagogical approach combining AI-assisted practice with human communication may provide more comprehensive opportunities for speaking development.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, EFL, speaking skills, AI dependency, human interaction, communicative competence, language learning*

Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has created new opportunities for foreign language education. AI-based applications can simulate conversations, recognize speech, provide pronunciation feedback, correct grammatical errors, and generate personalised speaking activities. These capabilities make AI particularly attractive for learners who have limited opportunities to practise English outside the classroom.

However, the availability of AI does not necessarily mean that greater use of technology will automatically lead to better speaking competence. Speaking is a complex communicative skill involving not only vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation but also turn-taking, pragmatic awareness, emotional interpretation, negotiation of meaning, and the ability to respond spontaneously to unpredictable situations.

Consequently, the increasing use of AI for speaking practice should also be examined critically. While AI can provide additional opportunities for language

production, excessive dependence on it may create limitations that are less visible when speaking performance is measured only through accuracy or fluency.

2. Reduced Human Interaction

One of the most important limitations of AI-based speaking practice is the potential reduction of authentic human interaction.

Communication between humans involves numerous factors that cannot always be reproduced by an AI system. Speakers must interpret facial expressions, gestures, hesitation, emotions, social relationships, cultural expectations, and changes in conversational direction.

For example, a learner communicating with an AI system may receive a relatively predictable response. In contrast, a human conversation partner may misunderstand a statement, interrupt unexpectedly, change the topic, use humour, or respond emotionally.

Therefore, regular AI practice may provide valuable language production opportunities but may not fully prepare learners for the unpredictability of real-world communication.

3. The Risk of AI Dependency

Another concern is learner dependency.

AI tools can provide immediate assistance when learners cannot remember a word, construct a sentence, or understand a question. Although this support can be beneficial, excessive assistance may reduce learners' willingness to struggle with language independently.

For example, a student who constantly asks an AI system to correct every sentence may become less comfortable producing language without external assistance. In authentic communication, however, speakers frequently need to continue communicating despite grammatical mistakes or limited vocabulary.

This suggests that speaking instruction should not focus exclusively on producing perfect sentences. Learners also need to develop the ability to compensate for linguistic limitations and maintain communication when they do not know the exact expression they want to use.

4. Limitations of AI Feedback

AI systems can provide rapid feedback on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Nevertheless, automated feedback should not always be considered equivalent to expert human feedback.

Speech-recognition systems may have difficulty understanding certain accents, pronunciation patterns, background noise, or speech characteristics. Similarly, an AI system may identify a grammatically unusual expression as incorrect even when it is appropriate in a particular communicative context.

There is also a pedagogical issue concerning the interpretation of feedback. A teacher can explain **why** an expression is inappropriate and provide an alternative according to the learner's level, communicative purpose, and context. AI-generated feedback may not always provide the same level of contextual explanation.

5. Pragmatic and Sociocultural Limitations

Speaking competence extends beyond grammatical correctness.

Learners need to understand how language changes according to social context. For example, the way a person makes a request to a close friend may differ from the way they make a request to a university professor.

Developing this type of pragmatic competence requires exposure to different speakers, social situations, cultures, and communication styles.

AI can simulate some of these situations, but simulated communication should not automatically be assumed to reproduce the full complexity of authentic human interaction.

6. Accuracy Versus Fluency

Another potential problem is excessive emphasis on correction.

If learners receive immediate correction after almost every mistake, they may become increasingly concerned about grammatical accuracy. This can negatively affect their willingness to communicate spontaneously.

In speaking lessons, errors can sometimes be a natural part of developing fluency. A learner may produce an imperfect sentence but successfully communicate the intended meaning.

Therefore, AI-supported speaking activities should distinguish between situations in which accuracy is the primary objective and situations in which fluency and communication are more important.

7. Emotional and Interpersonal Dimensions

Human communication contains emotional and interpersonal dimensions that are difficult to reproduce completely through technology.

A teacher can recognize when a learner is nervous, embarrassed, confused, enthusiastic, or frustrated and modify an activity accordingly. Similarly, classmates can encourage one another and develop interpersonal relationships through communication.

AI can simulate supportive responses, but learners should still have opportunities to communicate with real people because interpersonal communication is itself an important component of speaking competence.

8. Implications for Teachers

The limitations discussed above do not mean that AI should be excluded from language education. Instead, they suggest that AI should be integrated strategically.

Teachers can use AI for:

- additional speaking practice;
- pronunciation practice;
- vocabulary development;
- role-play preparation;
- individual practice outside class;
- generating discussion questions;
- recording and reviewing speaking performance.

At the same time, classroom activities should continue to include:

- pair discussions;
- group discussions;
- presentations;
- debates;
- role plays;
- peer interviews;
- problem-solving tasks;
- teacher–student interaction.

A useful principle is therefore:

AI can increase opportunities for speaking practice, but human interaction should remain central to communicative language learning.

9. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence has significant potential to support the development of EFL speaking skills. Nevertheless, its increasing use also presents several challenges. Reduced human interaction, AI dependency, limitations of automated feedback, insufficient exposure to unpredictable communication, and possible overemphasis on linguistic accuracy are important issues that require further investigation.

The central issue is therefore not whether AI should be used in speaking education, but **how it should be used**. AI is most beneficial when it supplements rather than replaces human communication. A balanced approach can allow learners to benefit from the accessibility and immediacy of AI while continuing to develop the interpersonal, pragmatic, emotional, and spontaneous aspects of communication through interaction with real people.

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