pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 4, April -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

# THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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**Abstract**

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped language learning practices and theoretical perspectives in applied linguistics. AI-driven technologies, including intelligent tutoring systems, automated feedback tools, and conversational agents, offer personalized and immediate learning support. Despite these advantages, concerns have emerged regarding learner autonomy, cognitive dependency, and the depth of linguistic competence acquired through AI-mediated learning. This article critically examines the dual impact of AI on language learning, focusing on its influence on motivation, engagement, and linguistic development in EFL contexts. Drawing on classroom-based observations and existing literature, the study highlights both the transformative potential and the limitations of AI integration. The findings suggest that while AI enhances accessibility and efficiency, its effectiveness depends on pedagogically informed implementation that preserves human interaction and critical thinking.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, language learning, EFL learners, motivation, linguistic competence

## Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become a defining force in modern education, particularly in the field of language learning. In applied linguistics, AI technologies are transforming traditional approaches by introducing adaptive learning systems, real-time feedback mechanisms, and interactive communication tools.

For EFL learners, especially in contexts with limited exposure to authentic language use, AI offers unprecedented opportunities to practice language skills beyond the classroom. However, this transformation raises critical questions about the nature of language learning itself. If learners increasingly rely on AI-generated input, does this enhance or weaken their linguistic competence?

## Literature Review

Recent research highlights the growing role of AI in language education. Studies indicate that AI-based tools improve vocabulary acquisition, grammar accuracy, and writing performance due to their ability to provide immediate corrective feedback.

Technology has been shown to enhance access to language learning resources and promote learner autonomy (Warschauer, 2003). Similarly, AI-driven applications support personalized learning pathways, allowing learners to progress at their own pace (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

However, excessive dependence on technology may reduce critical engagement and deep learning (Selwyn, 2016). Additionally, automated feedback often lacks the contextual understanding provided by human teachers.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 4, April -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

**Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of interaction in language development, suggesting that learning occurs through communication with more knowledgeable individuals. Although AI can simulate interaction, it cannot fully replicate authentic human communication.

Cognitive load theory explains that while AI reduces processing effort, it may also limit deeper learning if learners rely excessively on automated support.

Self-determination theory highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivation. AI supports autonomy and competence but may weaken social interaction.

**Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative observational design conducted over six weeks with twenty-four EFL students. Students engaged with AI tools for writing tasks, speaking practice, and vocabulary development.

Data were collected through classroom observations, student reflections, and performance comparisons.

**Results and Discussion**

The findings indicate that AI tools positively influence student engagement and language accuracy. Students demonstrated improvement in grammar and vocabulary, particularly in writing tasks.

However, some learners showed dependency on AI-generated responses, which limited independent language production. While motivation increased due to interactive features, it was often linked to technological novelty rather than sustained intrinsic interest.

These findings highlight the need for balanced integration of AI in language learning.

**Conclusion**

Artificial intelligence represents both an opportunity and a challenge in language learning. While it enhances accessibility and efficiency, it also raises concerns about learner autonomy and cognitive engagement.

AI should be used as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. Human interaction remains essential for developing communicative competence and critical thinking skills.

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pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 4, April -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

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