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HOW AI SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming English language teaching (ELT) from drill-based practice toward rich, interactional learning. When used deliberately and ethically, AI tools—large-language-model (LLM) chatbots, automatic speech recognition (ASR), text-to-speech (TTS), and learning analytics—expand opportunities for purposeful communication, timely feedback, and individualized scaffolding. This article outlines a practical framework showing how AI can nurture linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences; presents classroom-ready applications across skills; proposes assessment approaches that keep teachers “in the loop”; and highlights implementation and ethics.

Keywords: AI in ELT; communicative competence; chatbots; ASR; feedback; assessment; task-based learning.

1) Introduction: From practice to interaction

Communicative skills are best developed through meaningful tasks where learners must negotiate meaning, manage turn-taking, adapt to audience and context, and repair breakdowns. AI supports this shift by (a) simulating varied interlocutors and scenarios; (b) providing immediate, targeted feedback; and (c) personalizing input and difficulty. Crucially, AI augments—rather than replaces—the teacher's role as designer, coach, and assessor.

2) A competence-based lens

A balanced communicative syllabus targets four interlocking domains:

- **Linguistic competence:** grammar, lexis, phonology.
- **Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) competence:** register, politeness, intercultural appropriacy.
- **Discourse competence:** cohesion, coherence, and genre conventions.
- **Strategic competence:** planning, monitoring, clarifying, and repair.

AI affordances map naturally onto each domain:

- **LLM chatbots** model audience-sensitive language, provide reformulations, and support role-plays.
- **ASR + TTS** surface pronunciation, rhythm, and intelligibility issues with repeatable, low-anxiety practice.
- **Analytics** visualize progress in vocabulary range, speaking time, or discourse moves.
- **Generative tools** supply leveled input, prompts, and counter-arguments that fuel negotiation of meaning.

3) Classroom applications by skill

A. Speaking & Listening

1. AI-mediated role-plays (pair or solo).

- *Task*: “Call a hotel to resolve a booking error.”
- *AI support*: The chatbot acts as the receptionist; difficulty can be adjusted (e.g., uncooperative tone, background constraints).
- *Targets*: turn-openers, hedging, clarification requests, closing moves.
- *Follow-up*: Export transcript → highlight repair strategies and pragmatics.

2. Pronunciation clinics with ASR.

- *Routine*: 10–12 minute micro-drills on problem sounds (e.g., /θ/ vs /t/), word stress, or thought groups.
- *Cycle*: Model → student attempt → ASR feedback → teacher cue → re-record → reflect.

3. Listening with adaptive scaffolds.

- *Setup*: Upload audio; generate synchronized transcript, glossed keywords, and comprehension checks.
- *Strategy focus*: prediction, selective listening, and verification; gradually remove scaffolds.

B. Reading & Writing

4. Genre-aware drafting assistants.

- *Task*: Write an inquiry email to a professor and a casual message to a friend about the same topic.
- *AI support*: Suggest genre moves (greeting, purpose, request, thanks), highlight register mismatches, provide examples of hedging and mitigation.
- *Metacognition*: Students justify accepted/rejected suggestions.

5. Critical responding & summarizing.

- *Task*: Summarize an article in 120 words, then have AI challenge the summary with counter-points; students refine stance and cohesion.
- *Targets*: discourse markers, stance verbs, cohesive devices.

C. Integrated tasks

6. Project simulations.

- *Example*: Plan a community workshop. Use AI to (a) script phone calls, (b) draft flyers, (c) rehearse Q&A.
- *Assessment*: Task achievement (clarity, relevance to audience), discourse structure, interactional management, and language control.

4) Feedback and assessment (formative first)

- **Instant, criterion-linked feedback.** Calibrate AI outputs to your rubric (e.g., *Task Fulfilment, Coherence & Cohesion, Lexical Resource, Pronunciation/Intelligibility, Pragmatics*). Students receive targeted comments and examples, while the teacher validates and adds human judgment—especially for high-stakes decisions.
- **Evidence of process.** Require drafts, prompts used, AI interactions, and a short *rationale note* (“What did I change and why?”). This fosters responsibility and reduces over-reliance.
- **Speaking analytics, not score obsession.** Track turns per minute, average turn length, percentage of successful repairs, backchannel frequency, and vocabulary variety. Visualize growth across weeks.
- **Integrity without “detectors.”** Instead of policing, design assessments that include in-class components, oral defenses, and reflective logs.

5) Implementation roadmap for schools and programs

1. **Purpose & policy.** Define acceptable uses (e.g., idea generation, language repair, pronunciation practice, scenario rehearsal) and boundaries for high-stakes tasks. Communicate clearly to students and parents.
2. **Teacher capacity building.** Short, iterative PD cycles on: prompt design for pedagogy; moderating AI feedback; AI-supported assessment; and inclusive practices.
3. **Tool selection criteria.**
 - Privacy posture and data controls.
 - Classroom features (transcript export, rubric alignment, difficulty controls).
 - Accessibility (mobile/offline options, TTS voices, captioning).
 - Transparency (explainable feedback rather than opaque scores).
4. **Equity and access.** Provide low-tech equivalents (print role cards, teacher-led reading circles), shared devices, and offline practice packs.
5. **Monitoring & evaluation.** Set quarterly targets (e.g., “reduce teacher talk time by 15%,” “increase student turns by 30%”) and use common tasks to benchmark progress.

6) Ethics and safe use

- **Bias & appropriacy.** Review outputs for cultural and gender biases; expose learners to global Englishes and multiple registers.
- **Privacy & consent.** Avoid uploading sensitive data; anonymize student work; obtain consent for recording.
- **Well-being.** Keep AI interactions time-bounded; prioritize human discussion and collaboration.
- **Transparency.** Tell learners what AI did in teaching, feedback, and grading—and what the teacher decided.

7) Sample 90-minute lesson (B1–B2): Handling a complaint call

Objective: Develop sociolinguistic and strategic competence (polite complaints and repair).

1. **Lead-in (10’):** Brainstorm problems; extract target language (e.g., “I’m afraid there’s been a mistake,” “Could you clarify...?”).
2. **Model (10’):** Teacher demo + quick noticing (openings, empathy, solution, closing).
3. **AI Role-play (25’):** Students call an AI “agent”; each call must (a) explain the issue, (b) ask clarifying Qs, (c) propose/accept a solution.
4. **Feedback (15’):** Export transcripts; annotate repair moves and politeness markers; teacher adds corrections and upgraded phrases.
5. **Pronunciation focus (10’):** ASR drills on sentence stress and thought groups for key phrases.
6. **Live performance (15’):** Pair-to-pair role-play without AI; peers use a micro-rubric.
7. **Reflection (5’):** “Which phrases felt natural? What would you try next time?”

Micro-rubric (5 points each): Task clarity | Politeness & tone | Repair strategies | Fluency/turn-taking | Intelligibility.

8) Prompt bank for communicative practice (copy-paste ready)

- **Role-play generator:**
“Act as a [hotel receptionist / academic advisor / shop assistant]. Give me a realistic scenario with 2–3 problems to solve. Vary your tone slightly (neutral → mildly impatient). Keep responses to 1–3 sentences so I must ask follow-ups.”

- **Pragmatics coach:**

“Rewrite my message for a professor (formal) and for a friend (casual). Explain the key differences in tone, hedging, and directness in 3 bullets.”

- **Repair trainer:**

“During our chat, deliberately misunderstand me once in a while. I will practice clarification. After 5 minutes, summarize which repair phrases I used and where I could improve.”

- **Pronunciation focus:**

“Give me 8 sentences that contrast /θ/ and /s/, then listen to my recording and point out segmental and word-stress issues. Provide minimal pairs for targeted re-practice.”

9) Conclusion

AI's greatest contribution to communicative skill development is *quantity and quality of interaction with feedback*. Chatbots and ASR widen practice windows, lower anxiety, and make feedback immediate; analytics help teachers individualize support; genre-aware drafting tools cultivate discourse control and audience awareness. When anchored in clear learning aims, robust pedagogy, and ethical safeguards—and when teachers remain the ultimate decision-makers—AI becomes a powerful ally in helping learners speak, listen, read, and write English more effectively and confidently.

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