



THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: *The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings has become a rapidly growing issue in the context of promoting students' autonomy in the foreign language learning environment. The AI tools offer a variety of opportunities for students' learning experiences by bringing both individualised feedback and flexible learning pathways. The general education has moved from a teacher-centered approach towards student-centered learning, thanks to the advancements in technology. This study aims to investigate the applications and effects of using AI-based digital tools in EFL settings.*

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, EFL, autonomous learning, personalized feedback, pedagogical innovation, digital literacy.*

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'qitishda (EFL) mustaqil ta'limni rivojlantirish uchun sun'iy intellekt (SI) vositalaridan foydalanish masalalari yoritilgan. SI platformalari qanday qilib individual teskari aloqa va moslashuvchan o'quv yo'nalishlarini taqdim etishi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot zamonaviy texnologik innovatsiyalar orqali talabaga yo'naltirilgan ta'limga o'tishni yoritib beradi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *Sun'iy intellekt, EFL, mustaqil ta'lim, individual qayta aloqa, pedagogik innovatsiya, raqamli savodxonlik.*



Digital technology is advancing at a blistering pace in the 21st century, and this is having an enormous impact on the way we educate. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is not exempt from this revolution, with the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) opening up new avenues for learning. The ability to teach learners to become autonomous or self-sufficient in their learning is a major concern for educators today. With education moving in the direction of learner-centred instruction, the role of AI in EFL teaching can provide learners with the right support and materials needed to function independently.

In today's information age, the integration of AI technology into language learning is no longer a matter of choice but of necessity. Learners are often left to their own devices in a global market of plenty, where instruction is lacking. As students engage in long hours of independent study, they must be highly motivated and able to regulate their own learning. This crucial aspect of autonomous learning can be supported by the help of technology that can tailor itself to the individual needs of learners, a concept introduced by Benson (2011: 45).

Literature review

The idea of learner autonomy in language learning and teaching has been discussed for decades. According to Holec, "learner autonomy is the learner's ability to take charge of his own learning" [Holec, 1981: 3]. With the development of information and communication technology, learner autonomy also changes. Benson noted that the "third space" afforded by technology enables learners to practice language skills in an environment free from the constraints of the language-learning classroom [Benson, 2011: 15].

Evidently, nowadays, many researchers have started to focus on the ability of recent AI-based tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and other language learning software. For example, as Hockly (2023, p.312) mentions, these tools are capable of delivering immediate feedback on the output produced by the learner. This is something that could only be provided by the teachers in the old days with the aid of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The movement from CALL to ICALL – which basically stands for intelligent computer-assisted language learning



– indicates that modern applications can recognise where learners are located in terms of the input given, instead of just comparing it with a large number of text bases.

In Uzbekistan's higher education system, particularly in the Uzbekistan State World Languages University, the use of technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) for foreign language teaching can strengthen the connection between theory and practice in the foreign language classroom. For example, foreign language learners can improve their conversational skills using the AI chat tool; they can train and strengthen their pronunciation skills by practicing speech recognition technology, which gives feedback to students to correct and enhance their pronunciation of spoken sounds in the foreign language. In addition, they can improve their structural knowledge of foreign language writing using online resources. Moreover, the use of technology may alleviate the fear of foreign language anxiety when learners perform before the class, as they may practice in a low-stakes private setting before presenting to their peers.

Large Language Models (LLMs) are integrated in order to allow contextual learning. Unlike outdated language learning software, new generation AI can actually explain why certain expressions are relevant in a given context, thereby increasing learners' sociolinguistic competence. However, the implementation of the new technology also implies new challenges, which need to be addressed by teachers. Among them is avoiding over-reliance of students on digital tools and the resulting lack of real engagement at the cognitive level; teachers should therefore aim to make the most out of the digital scaffold provided by the technology, while planning and preparing for the transition to a truly independent level of learning.

Chatbots and real-time interaction

Here are some of the changes that happened in our EFL classroom after introducing some AI-based applications into language teaching and learning. Using Chatbots as language partners is another important application of AI in EFL education. As it has already been mentioned, one of the main problems of our Uzbek students is a lack of exposure to a native speech environment. Here, using chatbots



works as a wonderful solution to this language teaching and learning problem, in that students can talk to chatbots in a non-judgmental atmosphere, thus providing them an environment to communicate risk-free. Students usually do not get enough time from their teacher, as many teachers may not have time to provide the required amount of speaking practice for each of their students, which often leads to incomplete language practice for the students. But with the help of an AI tutor that teachers can use by installing the relevant applications on their mobile devices, students are provided with enough talking time within 24/7 hours, thus enabling them to practice speaking as much as possible, if they like.

One of the most important factors affecting the acquisition of vocabulary using technology is AI. Applications use what is called “Spaced Repetition Systems” (SRS) to enable students to memorize the words in accordance with their respective learning curves. The student does not have to memorize long lists of words; they have to communicate with an application that applies a set of artificial intelligence methods to identify the words that the student is supposed to remember at the appropriate time in accordance with the SRS method. The SRS method guarantees that the autonomous learner uses his time in the most efficient way possible, as he will focus on reviewing his weaknesses.

Pedagogical implications for higher education

All these new tools and applications need to change the way of working for teachers from being a “source of knowledge” to being a “teacher of digital teaching methods”. In our country, the integration of AI into the curricula of the faculty of Philology (English Language and Literature department) is meant to teach the language, as well as how to teach AI, in order to make students AI-literate. In other words, we have to know the best way to ask or instruct the AI to get the best results for the linguistic data we want.

Sarvinoz Maxamadaliyeva said that their future English teachers should be able to deal with new technologies to be competitive and able to apply the international educational standards.



In addition, there are other functions of this system that we consider particularly important and that contribute to mitigating the affective filter phenomenon, which occurs when students avoid speaking due to feelings of anxiety and fear caused by the mistake they fear making. Since the system does not evaluate the students' language, as it only records the utterances that correspond to the moment in which the exercise is located, the anxious feelings that make communication difficult to take place are reduced. This increases the likelihood of communication to take place in a natural way, thus facilitating the process of learning the language.

Finally, we argue that Artificial Intelligence is here to stay and is likely to become a new normal in the way learners engage with the English language learning process. Based on the discussion above, it can be inferred that with the help of technology, learners can attain a higher level of autonomy in the English language learning process and, consequently, have a better learning experience through the use of technology. The English language learning process using technology affords learners a highly interactive, easy, and comfortable learning experience. Learners can engage with the use of intelligent tutoring systems, get instant feedback, and interact with conversational agents, thus becoming less dependent on the teachers and more independent and self-regulated in their learning process.

Art and science of human- centered education: adapting to new challenges.

With the curricula of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan being heavily restricted by local regulatory frameworks and at the same time being required to meet international language standards, the introduction of AI-enhanced pedagogies provides an opportunity to address this challenge. For education to be effective, there needs to be harmonization of human factors and technological advancements. Teachers will have to transform into brokers of skills in students for the efficient and effective use of technology, equipping them with the ability to ethically and critically make use of technological tools. The technology should act as a tool for scaffolding higher-order cognitive skills and not simply be a means to an end for completing mundane tasks.



Future EFL teaching and learning will depend on the learners' ability to learn languages autonomously with the help of technology. In this context, the core competence that learners should develop in the Digital Age is to learn languages autonomously with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Future EFL teaching and learning will strive to achieve a delicate balance between the human and the technological. On the one hand, the teacher's human contribution should enhance the learners' self-directed learning abilities by making full use of the strengths of technology. On the other hand, the technology provided by the support of artificial intelligence should be employed to meet the diverse learning needs of all learners to make the learning and teaching process more equitable, efficient, and productive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Artificial Intelligence is not merely a passing technological trend but a fundamental shift in the paradigm of English language acquisition. The evidence discussed underscores that AI-driven tools significantly boost learner autonomy by providing a personalized, low-stress, and highly interactive environment. Through the integration of intelligent tutoring systems, immediate feedback loops, and sophisticated conversational agents, EFL students are no longer passive recipients of information but active managers of their own educational journey.

While the transition toward AI-enhanced pedagogy offers a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between local classroom constraints and global linguistic standards in higher education institutions, particularly in Uzbekistan, its successful implementation relies on educators evolving into facilitators who guide students through the ethical and critical use of AI. However, the successful implementation of these innovations depends on the synergy between human expertise and digital efficiency. Educators must evolve into facilitators who guide students through the ethical and critical use of AI, ensuring that technology serves as a scaffold for deep cognitive development rather than a shortcut for surface-level task completion.

As we move further into the digital age, the ability to learn a language autonomously with the aid of AI will become a core competency. The future of EFL



education lies in creating a balanced ecosystem where the human touch of a teacher is augmented by the limitless, data-driven potential of artificial intelligence, ultimately leading to a more inclusive, effective, and self-directed learning experience for every student.

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