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DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract: The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), is creating new opportunities for English language teacher education. AI-powered tools can provide opportunities for language practice, simulated interaction, immediate feedback, and personalised learning. However, the educational value of these tools depends not simply on their availability but on how they are integrated into pedagogical practice. This article discusses the potential of artificial intelligence for developing the communicative competence of pre-service English teachers. Drawing on recent research on generative AI in language education, the article argues that AI should be viewed as a pedagogical support rather than a replacement for teachers or authentic human communication. Particular attention is given to speaking practice, interaction, feedback, reflection, and the development of teachers' ability to use AI critically and responsibly. The discussion suggests that meaningful integration of AI into teacher education requires a human-centred approach in which AI-supported activities are followed by teacher-guided reflection and authentic interpersonal communication. The article concludes that AI can contribute to the development of communicative competence when it is integrated into purposeful, interaction-based and pedagogically guided learning processes.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, generative AI, communicative competence, pre-service English teachers, English language teaching, teacher education

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has rapidly become an important component of contemporary education, and English language teaching is one of the areas in which its influence has been particularly visible. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and other large language model-based applications has expanded the possibilities for language practice, feedback, content generation and interactive learning. Recent systematic research demonstrates a rapid expansion of empirical studies on GenAI in language learning and teaching, particularly in higher education and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Li et al., 2025).

For English language teacher education, this development is especially significant. Pre-service English teachers are expected not only to possess adequate linguistic knowledge but also to communicate effectively, interact appropriately in different contexts, provide meaningful feedback and facilitate communication among their future learners. Consequently, communicative competence represents an essential component of their professional preparation.

The concept of communicative competence goes beyond grammatical accuracy. Effective language users need to understand how language is used appropriately in different social and communicative

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contexts, maintain interaction, negotiate meaning and employ communication strategies when difficulties arise. For future English teachers, these abilities are particularly important because they will eventually serve as linguistic and communicative models for their learners. AI technologies can potentially extend opportunities for developing such abilities. AI-powered conversational systems can simulate dialogues, provide feedback, generate professional scenarios and allow learners to practise repeatedly. A recent systematic review of 49 empirical studies found that GenAI has been used as a feedback provider, learning tutor, cognitive stimulator, interaction facilitator and conversation partner in language education (Lee et al., 2025). However, the same review identified important challenges, including content quality, querying difficulties, learner overreliance and pedagogical limitations.

Another systematic review of 144 empirical studies showed that research on GenAI in language education has grown rapidly, but writing remains the dominant area of investigation, while speaking, listening and reading have received comparatively less attention (Li et al., 2025). This finding is particularly relevant to communicative competence because communication-oriented skills require opportunities for interaction rather than language production alone.

Therefore, the central issue is not whether AI can be used in English language education, but **how it can be pedagogically integrated to support the communicative development of future English teachers**. This article discusses this issue by focusing on AI-supported practice, feedback, reflection and authentic human interaction.

2. Artificial Intelligence and Communicative Competence

Communicative competence can be understood as the ability to use language effectively and appropriately for particular communicative purposes. In teacher education, this competence includes linguistic knowledge as well as the ability to manage interaction, adapt language to different contexts and employ strategies when communication becomes difficult. Artificial intelligence can support several aspects of this development.

First, AI-based conversational tools can provide additional opportunities for interaction. A pre-service teacher can simulate a classroom discussion, professional interview, debate, parent–teacher conversation or classroom-management situation. Such activities may be particularly useful when students have limited opportunities for individual speaking practice.

Second, AI can provide immediate linguistic feedback. Learners can ask AI systems to identify grammatical problems, suggest alternative expressions or comment on the clarity and organisation of their responses. This can make feedback more immediate and accessible.

Third, AI can facilitate personalised practice. Learners can adapt prompts according to their proficiency level, professional interests and communicative goals. For example, a pre-service teacher preparing for a teaching practicum may ask an AI system to simulate different types of student responses and practise appropriate teacher reactions.

However, AI-supported communication should not be considered equivalent to authentic human communication. Human interaction includes emotional, social, cultural and contextual dimensions that cannot necessarily be reproduced by an artificial system. Consequently, AI should function as a **supporting environment for communicative practice rather than a substitute for human interaction**. This distinction is supported by recent research. Li et al. (2025) found that although GenAI research in language education is expanding rapidly, much of the empirical literature remains concentrated on writing and learner perceptions. Similarly, Lee et al. (2025) identified the need to expand research towards broader language skills and more diverse forms of interaction.

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For pre-service English teachers, this means that AI use should be connected to meaningful communicative objectives. A student should not simply "talk to ChatGPT"; instead, the interaction should form part of a purposeful pedagogical task.

3. Pedagogically Guided Use of AI

The effectiveness of AI in developing communicative competence depends largely on pedagogical design. Simply providing students with access to an AI chatbot does not automatically result in meaningful learning. AI activities need to be connected to clear learning objectives, interactional tasks and opportunities for reflection.

A practical sequence can be represented as follows:

Communicative task → AI-supported practice → Feedback → Reflection → Human interaction

For example, a pre-service teacher may first prepare a short classroom-management dialogue. The learner can then use an AI tool to simulate different student reactions. After completing the simulation, the learner analyses the AI-generated feedback and identifies areas requiring improvement. Finally, the learner performs the same task with a human partner or during a classroom-based activity. Such an approach gives AI a specific pedagogical function while preserving the central role of human communication. Teacher education is particularly important in this process. Pre-service teachers need to learn how to formulate effective prompts, evaluate AI-generated responses, identify inaccurate or inappropriate information, and decide when AI use is educationally justified. Huang, Wu, and Wu (2025), for example, found that a structured 12-week GenAI intervention significantly improved pre-service language teachers' overall GenAI literacy as well as technical, critical, communicative, creative and ethical dimensions of AI literacy.

This finding suggests that AI competence should not be developed merely through informal experimentation. It should be incorporated into teacher education through structured pedagogical activities. Recent research also demonstrates the importance of teacher readiness. Chan and Tang (2026) developed and validated an English Language Teachers' Generative AI Readiness Scale involving 307 pre-service and in-service English teachers. Their model incorporates GenAI literacy, ethical considerations, prompt engineering and the specific demands of English language teaching.

Therefore, future English teachers need to understand not only **how to use AI**, but also **when to use it, why to use it and when human judgement should take priority**.

4. Practical Implications for Pre-Service English Teacher Education

The integration of artificial intelligence into English language teacher education can be implemented through several practical areas.

4.1 AI-supported speaking practice

Pre-service teachers can use AI systems to simulate classroom and professional communication. For example, AI can act as a student who misunderstands an explanation, a parent asking about a learner's progress, or a colleague discussing lesson planning. Such simulations can provide additional opportunities for spontaneous language production.

4.2 AI-supported feedback

Following a speaking or teaching simulation, students can request feedback concerning vocabulary, grammar, fluency, clarity and appropriateness. However, students should evaluate this feedback critically rather than accept it automatically. Comparing AI feedback with teacher feedback can itself become a valuable learning activity.

4.3 Reflective practice

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After AI-supported interaction, students can reflect on questions such as:

- Was my response appropriate for the communicative situation?
- Did I express my intended meaning clearly?
- Did I rely excessively on AI?
- How would my response change in interaction with a real person?
- Which aspects of my communication require further development?

Such reflection moves the learning process beyond simple error correction and encourages greater communicative awareness.

4.4 Human-AI balance

The central pedagogical principle should be a balance between technological assistance and human interaction. AI can provide additional opportunities for preparation and rehearsal, but students should subsequently transfer their learning to human communication. This principle is particularly important because recent research has identified both the benefits and limitations of GenAI in language education. Lee et al. (2025) reported that GenAI can perform several educational roles but also highlighted concerns related to overreliance, academic integrity and pedagogical limitations. Similarly, Li et al. (2025) emphasised the need for more diverse research beyond writing and for greater attention to implementation.

Thus, AI should be regarded as a **mediating pedagogical resource**, not as an independent teacher.

5. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is creating new opportunities for the development of communicative competence among pre-service English teachers. AI-based tools can provide learners with additional opportunities for conversation practice, simulated professional and classroom situations, personalised feedback, and reflective learning. These affordances are particularly valuable in educational contexts where limited classroom time, large class sizes, or insufficient opportunities for individual interaction may restrict learners' chances to engage in meaningful communication. Through AI-supported activities, pre-service teachers can rehearse classroom interactions, experiment with different communicative strategies, receive immediate feedback, and reflect on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their language use. At the same time, such opportunities can help future teachers become more aware of their own communicative strengths and areas requiring further development. When integrated purposefully into teacher education, AI can therefore extend conventional classroom practices and create a more flexible environment for repeated communicative practice. However, its role should remain supportive rather than substitutive, with AI-mediated practice complemented by authentic human interaction, teacher guidance, and reflective learning.

However, AI does not automatically develop communicative competence. Effective communication requires more than producing grammatically accurate sentences. It involves contextual awareness, interaction, negotiation of meaning, strategic communication and the ability to respond appropriately to real people.

The discussion presented in this article suggests that the educational value of AI depends largely on **pedagogically guided integration**. AI can provide opportunities for practice and feedback, while teachers remain responsible for task design, evaluation, contextualisation and pedagogical decision-making. Consequently, AI should complement rather than replace human interaction and teacher expertise. For pre-service English teachers, this approach has an additional advantage. Learning to use

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AI critically and responsibly while developing their own communicative competence can prepare them for the changing demands of contemporary English language teaching.

Therefore, the goal of AI integration in teacher education should not simply be to prepare teachers who can use artificial intelligence. It should be to prepare teachers who can **use artificial intelligence intelligently, critically, ethically and pedagogically**.

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