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AI-Assisted Conversation Practice in Developing EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

Abdusaitova Sevinch Sadridin qizi
Student of Samarkand State
Institute of Foreign Languages
sevinchabdusaidova185@gmail.com
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Abstract. This article examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted conversation practice in developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking skills. It focuses on the potential of AI-powered conversational tools to facilitate speaking practice, improve oral fluency, enhance pronunciation accuracy, expand vocabulary, and strengthen learners' confidence in verbal communication. Particular attention is given to the pedagogical value of interactive dialogue, immediate corrective feedback, personalized learning experiences, and opportunities for autonomous language practice. The article also considers the challenges associated with integrating AI-assisted conversation into EFL instruction, including the reliability of automated feedback, the limitations of AI-generated interactions, and the importance of maintaining meaningful human communication. It argues that AI-assisted conversation practice can serve as a valuable supplementary approach to language teaching when integrated with clear instructional objectives, appropriate pedagogical strategies, and teacher guidance.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI-assisted conversation practice, EFL learners, speaking skills, oral fluency, pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary development, corrective feedback.

Introduction

In the context of rapid technological development and the digital transformation of education, artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly important resource for foreign language teaching and learning. The integration of AI-powered conversational tools into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction creates new opportunities for learners to engage in interactive communication, practise spoken English beyond the classroom, and receive immediate feedback on their language performance. Unlike traditional speaking activities, which may be constrained by limited classroom time, unequal participation, and insufficient opportunities for individual practice, AI-assisted conversation enables learners to engage in repeated dialogue, explore different communicative situations, and develop their speaking skills at an individual pace. Speaking is a fundamental component of communicative competence because it requires learners to coordinate several linguistic and cognitive processes simultaneously, including vocabulary retrieval, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, listening comprehension, and the appropriate use of language in context. For EFL learners, these demands can be particularly challenging when opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom are limited. Furthermore, fear of making mistakes, speaking anxiety, and a lack of confidence may reduce learners' willingness to participate in oral activities. Consequently, effective speaking instruction requires not only the acquisition of linguistic knowledge but also regular opportunities for

meaningful interaction and the development of confidence in using the target language. Recent research provides empirical support for examining the role of AI in addressing these challenges. Du and Daniel (2024), in a systematic review of 24 studies published between 2017 and 2023, investigated the use of AI-powered chatbots in English-speaking practice. Their findings highlighted potential benefits related to speaking anxiety, pronunciation, learner confidence, engagement, and motivation. The researchers also identified limitations, including weaknesses in speech recognition, restricted suitability for different proficiency levels, and the repetitive nature of some chatbot interactions. These findings suggest that AI-assisted conversation should be evaluated not simply in terms of technological accessibility but also in relation to its pedagogical effectiveness and its contribution to measurable speaking outcomes. Further evidence is provided by Wiboolyasarin et al. (2025), whose systematic review analysed 30 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2024 on AI-driven chatbots in second-language education. The review reported positive outcomes across productive and receptive language skills, particularly speaking and writing, and identified real-time feedback, increased practice opportunities, and reduced speaking anxiety as important potential benefits. Nevertheless, the authors emphasised that AI chatbots have limitations in reproducing nuanced human communication and emotional engagement. This indicates that the effectiveness of AI-assisted conversation depends on how the technology is integrated into language-learning activities rather than on the mere availability of AI tools. From a pedagogical perspective, AI-assisted conversation practice can be understood as a supplementary approach that combines interactive language production, personalised feedback, and repeated opportunities for communicative engagement. Learners can use AI-based conversational systems to practise everyday dialogues, participate in simulated interviews, discuss academic topics, explain opinions, and respond to questions at different levels of complexity. When appropriately designed, these activities can encourage learners to produce more extended utterances, notice recurring linguistic errors, and refine their communication strategies. However, improvements in speaking proficiency cannot be assumed solely from increased interaction with AI; they must be assessed through relevant indicators, such as fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and communicative appropriateness. The responsible integration of artificial intelligence into language education also requires attention to pedagogical supervision, data privacy, and the reliability of AI-generated responses. UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (2023) advocates a human-centred approach that prioritises ethical, safe, equitable, and meaningful use of generative AI. In EFL instruction, this principle supports the integration of AI-assisted activities with teacher guidance, explicit learning objectives, and opportunities for authentic communication with other people. Despite the growing body of research on AI-supported language learning, further attention is needed to understand the conditions under which AI-assisted conversation practice contributes to different dimensions of speaking development. In particular, the relationship between the frequency of AI-mediated interaction, the quality of feedback, learners' confidence, and measurable improvements in oral performance warrants systematic investigation. Distinguishing between learners' perceptions of improvement and objectively assessed speaking outcomes is essential for establishing the educational value of these technologies. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to examine the potential of AI-assisted conversation practice in developing EFL learners' speaking skills, with

particular emphasis on oral fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and communicative confidence. The article also considers the pedagogical opportunities and limitations of AI-powered conversational tools and the importance of integrating them into structured, teacher-guided learning activities. By addressing these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to a more evidence-based understanding of how artificial intelligence can support speaking instruction and complement established approaches to English language teaching. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly influencing the development of contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction by creating new opportunities for interactive communication, personalised learning, and independent speaking practice. AI-assisted conversation practice involves the use of intelligent conversational systems, voice-based assistants, and AI-powered language-learning applications to support learners in producing spoken language, responding to questions, and participating in simulated communicative situations. Unlike conventional speaking activities that may be restricted by classroom time and the availability of conversation partners, AI-assisted practice enables learners to engage in repeated dialogue, practise at their own pace, and receive feedback on selected aspects of their language performance. These opportunities are particularly relevant for EFL learners who have limited access to authentic English-speaking environments. Speaking competence is a multidimensional construct that encompasses oral fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, lexical competence, and the ability to communicate meaning appropriately in different contexts. Developing these components requires regular language production, active engagement in communication, and opportunities to identify and correct errors. AI-assisted conversation practice can contribute to this process by creating interactive situations in which learners formulate responses, explain their opinions, ask questions, and negotiate meaning. Through repeated interaction, learners may become more familiar with common linguistic structures, improve their ability to retrieve vocabulary, and develop strategies for maintaining conversations. However, the extent of these benefits depends on the quality of the interaction, the relevance of the tasks, and the learner's active engagement in the learning process. One of the principal educational advantages of AI-assisted conversation is its potential to increase opportunities for speaking practice. In traditional EFL classrooms, teachers must distribute their attention among multiple learners, which can limit the amount of individual speaking time available to each student. Conversational AI can supplement classroom instruction by providing additional opportunities for learners to practise dialogues, answer open-ended questions, and discuss topics relevant to their academic and professional interests. For example, learners can simulate job interviews, participate in discussions about social issues, describe personal experiences, or explain academic concepts. Such activities can encourage learners to produce extended utterances and develop their ability to communicate ideas coherently. Nevertheless, increased practice time should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of improved proficiency; progress must be evaluated through appropriate assessment procedures. The potential of AI-assisted speaking practice is supported by existing research. Du and Daniel (2024), in their systematic review of AI-powered chatbots for English-speaking practice, identified potential benefits associated with speaking development, learner confidence, engagement, and the reduction of speaking anxiety. Their findings also highlighted limitations related to speech recognition, the suitability of conversational systems for different proficiency levels, and the

quality of AI-mediated interaction. These findings indicate that conversational AI can serve as a valuable supplementary resource, although its effectiveness should be evaluated in relation to clearly defined educational objectives and observable learning outcomes. A further contribution of AI-assisted conversation practice concerns the provision of immediate feedback. During speaking activities, learners may experience difficulties identifying grammatical errors, selecting appropriate vocabulary, or producing particular sounds accurately. AI-based systems can offer suggestions, reformulate sentences, identify certain language errors, and provide opportunities for learners to repeat or improve their responses. This process may encourage greater awareness of language form and support self-correction. Nevertheless, automated feedback is not always accurate or pedagogically appropriate. Speech-recognition systems may misinterpret pronunciation, while conversational models may occasionally provide explanations that are incomplete or misleading. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to evaluate AI-generated corrections critically, and teachers should provide additional guidance when necessary. Oral fluency represents another important dimension of speaking development that may benefit from structured AI-assisted practice. Fluency involves the ability to produce connected speech at an appropriate pace, maintain continuity, and organise ideas without excessive hesitation. Conversational activities that require learners to explain opinions, narrate experiences, or respond to follow-up questions can provide opportunities to practise these abilities. Repeated engagement with varied speaking tasks may help learners retrieve familiar expressions more efficiently and develop greater confidence in spontaneous communication. However, fluency should not be understood simply as speaking quickly. Effective oral communication also requires comprehensibility, appropriate pauses, coherent organisation, and the ability to respond meaningfully to conversational partners. Pronunciation and vocabulary development are also relevant to the educational application of AI-assisted conversation. Speech-enabled systems may help learners practise word stress, sentence rhythm, and selected pronunciation features by providing feedback on their spoken responses. Topic-based conversations can simultaneously expose learners to new lexical items and encourage their use in meaningful contexts. For instance, discussions about education, technology, environmental protection, and professional development may help learners expand subject-specific vocabulary and practise expressing more complex ideas. However, pronunciation assessment should prioritise intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than requiring learners to imitate a single accent. Similarly, vocabulary development should be evaluated in terms of appropriate and accurate usage rather than the number of unfamiliar words encountered during practice. The psychological dimension of speaking development is equally important. Many EFL learners experience anxiety when speaking in front of classmates or communicating with more proficient speakers. Fear of grammatical mistakes, negative evaluation, and difficulties expressing ideas may discourage participation and reduce opportunities for language production. AI-assisted conversation can offer a relatively low-pressure environment in which learners can repeat tasks, reconsider responses, and practise without the immediate social pressure associated with face-to-face interaction. Du and Daniel (2024) identified reduced speaking anxiety and increased learner confidence among the potential benefits discussed in the research literature. Nevertheless, these outcomes should not be assumed to occur uniformly among all learners. Some students may feel more comfortable interacting with AI, whereas others may find automated conversations less

engaging or less effective than communication with teachers and peers. From a pedagogical perspective, the effectiveness of AI-assisted conversation depends on the integration of technology into a coherent instructional framework. Teachers should select conversational activities according to learners' proficiency levels, educational needs, and specific speaking objectives. Beginner learners may benefit from structured dialogues involving introductions, daily routines, and familiar situations, while intermediate learners may engage in opinion-based discussions, descriptions, and problem-solving tasks. Advanced learners may use AI to practise academic presentations, critical discussions, and professional communication. Gradually increasing the complexity of these activities can provide learners with opportunities to extend their linguistic resources and develop greater independence in communication. In this context, AI should support the teacher's instructional decisions rather than determine the learning process independently. Learner autonomy constitutes an additional advantage of AI-assisted conversation practice. By engaging with conversational systems outside formal lessons, learners can organise their own practice schedules, select topics, and identify areas requiring improvement. This approach can support self-directed learning when learners establish clear goals and monitor their performance systematically. For example, a learner may focus on providing longer answers, using newly acquired vocabulary appropriately, or improving the coherence of spoken explanations. Maintaining a learning record can help learners identify recurring difficulties and evaluate their progress over time. However, independent practice should be accompanied by critical reflection and periodic teacher assessment to ensure that learners do not reinforce incorrect language patterns or become overly dependent on AI-generated responses. Despite these opportunities, several limitations must be considered when implementing AI-assisted conversation in EFL education. One important concern is that artificial intelligence cannot fully reproduce the complexity of authentic human communication. Real-life conversations involve social relationships, cultural expectations, non-verbal signals, emotional responses, and unpredictable changes in conversational direction. Although AI systems can simulate certain communicative situations, they may not consistently reproduce the pragmatic and interpersonal dimensions of human interaction. Consequently, AI-assisted practice should be combined with pair work, group discussions, presentations, and other activities that require learners to communicate directly with people. Equitable access to technology is another important consideration. Learners may differ in their access to suitable devices, reliable internet connections, voice-recognition tools, and advanced AI applications. Differences in digital literacy may also influence their ability to formulate effective prompts, interpret automated feedback, and use conversational tools productively. Educational institutions should therefore consider accessibility and provide clear guidance on responsible technology use. Privacy is similarly important, particularly when conversational applications collect voice recordings, personal information, or learning data. Teachers and institutions should encourage learners to examine relevant privacy policies and avoid sharing unnecessary confidential information. Wiboolyasarin et al. (2025), in their systematic review of AI-driven chatbots in second-language education, identified positive outcomes across language-learning contexts while also highlighting pedagogical considerations associated with the implementation of conversational AI. Their findings reinforce the importance of evaluating AI tools in relation to learning objectives, feedback quality, and the specific needs of learners. Similarly, UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (2023)

advocates a human-centred approach that emphasises ethical implementation, appropriate educational oversight, and the protection of learners' interests. These perspectives suggest that the successful integration of AI into EFL instruction requires a balance between technological innovation and established pedagogical principles. The effectiveness of AI-assisted conversation practice should ultimately be determined through systematic assessment rather than through technological novelty or learners' subjective impressions alone. Speaking performance can be evaluated through pre-test and post-test tasks that examine fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, coherence, and communicative effectiveness. Where appropriate, an experimental group using structured AI-assisted conversation activities can be compared with a group receiving conventional speaking instruction under comparable learning conditions. Consistent assessment criteria and clearly defined instructional procedures would help determine whether observed improvements are associated with the intervention. Learner questionnaires and interviews may provide additional information about motivation, confidence, and perceptions of feedback, but these subjective measures should complement rather than replace direct assessment of speaking performance. Overall, AI-assisted conversation practice offers a promising supplementary approach to developing EFL learners' speaking skills by expanding opportunities for oral interaction, facilitating repeated language production, and supporting individualised feedback. Its educational value, however, depends on the accuracy of the technology, the quality of instructional design, the active participation of learners, and the continuing involvement of teachers. Integrating AI-assisted activities with authentic human communication and systematic performance assessment can create a more balanced learning environment in which technological tools support the development of communicative competence. Thus, the principal objective should not be to replace established approaches to speaking instruction, but to use artificial intelligence purposefully to enhance the accessibility, flexibility, and effectiveness of English language learning.

CONCLUSION

AI-assisted conversation practice represents a promising pedagogical approach to developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking skills. The analysis indicates that artificial intelligence can create additional opportunities for oral communication, facilitate repeated speaking practice, provide immediate feedback, and support the development of fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and communicative confidence. By enabling learners to engage in interactive dialogues and practise language at their own pace, AI-powered conversational tools can complement traditional classroom instruction and contribute to more flexible, learner-centred language education. The educational effectiveness of AI-assisted conversation practice depends on the purposeful integration of technology into the teaching and learning process. Conversational activities should be aligned with learners' proficiency levels, individual needs, and clearly defined instructional objectives. Teachers should guide learners in evaluating automated feedback, correcting linguistic errors, and transferring acquired knowledge to authentic communicative situations. Particular attention should also be given to the limitations of speech-recognition technologies, the reliability of AI-generated responses, unequal access to digital resources, and the protection of learners' personal information. The analysis further demonstrates the importance of combining AI-mediated interaction with teacher-guided instruction

and direct communication among learners. Although conversational AI can provide additional practice opportunities, it cannot fully replace the social, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of authentic human communication. Therefore, a balanced instructional approach should integrate AI-assisted dialogue with pair work, group discussions, presentations, and other communicative activities that require spontaneous language use. To establish the effectiveness of this approach more conclusively, future empirical research should examine changes in learners' speaking performance through systematic pre-test and post-test assessment, comparison groups, and clearly defined evaluation criteria. Particular attention should be paid to the relationship between the frequency of AI-assisted practice, feedback quality, speaking anxiety, learner engagement, and measurable improvements in oral proficiency. Such investigations would provide a stronger evidence base for designing effective AI-supported language-learning programmes. In conclusion, AI-assisted conversation practice should be regarded as a complementary pedagogical resource rather than a replacement for conventional language instruction. Its purposeful and responsible implementation can expand opportunities for speaking practice, encourage learner autonomy, and support the development of communicative competence. The successful integration of artificial intelligence into EFL education ultimately requires a combination of technological innovation, pedagogical expertise, ethical awareness, and systematic evaluation of learning outcomes.

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