

FROM AI DEPENDENCE TO AI LITERACY: DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE GENERATIVE AI USE AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract. *The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has created new opportunities for individualized feedback, vocabulary development, writing support, translation, and interactive language practice. At the same time, unrestricted reliance on AI-generated content may weaken learner autonomy, critical thinking, authorship, and the ability to evaluate linguistic and factual accuracy.*

Keywords: *generative artificial intelligence, AI literacy, EFL learners, ChatGPT, learner autonomy.*

INTRODUCTION

Generative artificial intelligence has rapidly become part of the learning environment of students studying English as a foreign language. Large language model-based systems can generate explanations, examples, translations, summaries, dialogues, vocabulary exercises, essay outlines, grammatical corrections, and individualized feedback within seconds. For EFL learners, particularly those who have limited opportunities to interact with proficient speakers outside the classroom, these functions can provide an accessible form of linguistic support. Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou note that ChatGPT offers significant possibilities for language teaching and learning while simultaneously requiring learners and teachers to develop the digital competencies necessary for its ethical and effective use [3]. The educational problem, therefore, is no longer whether learners will encounter GenAI, but how they can use it without transferring essential cognitive and linguistic responsibilities to the technology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

AI dependence may be understood as a condition in which learners increasingly delegate tasks to generative systems that they are expected to perform, practise, or understand themselves. Such dependence is especially relevant to foreign-language learning because progress requires sustained cognitive engagement with vocabulary, grammar, discourse organization, meaning negotiation, and revision. If a student regularly asks AI to produce complete essays before attempting to formulate ideas independently, the resulting text may appear linguistically advanced without representing equivalent development in the learner's productive competence. Similarly, automatic correction can be educationally valuable when

students compare alternatives and analyse their mistakes, but it becomes less productive when corrections are accepted mechanically. Thus, the essential distinction is not between using and avoiding AI, but between AI as cognitive scaffolding and AI as cognitive substitution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on EFL writing illustrates this dual character. Werdiningsih, Marzuki, and Rusdin found that learners valued ChatGPT for vocabulary clarification, generating ideas, addressing linguistic uncertainty, and improving academic writing; however, their study also emphasized concerns about authenticity, cultural sensitivity, inaccurate output, and the continuing need for human judgment [4]. Likewise, Fathi and Rahimi reported that AI-mediated interaction could contribute to the development of academic writing when learners participated actively in mediated writing activities rather than simply receiving completed texts [5]. These findings indicate that GenAI has greater pedagogical value when learners interact with, examine, modify, and reflect upon AI output instead of treating it as an unquestionable final product.

The transition from dependence to literacy should begin with conceptual understanding. EFL learners need a basic explanation that generative AI does not “know” information in the same way as a human expert and that fluent language does not guarantee factual reliability. Learners should understand the possibility of fabricated references, misleading explanations, culturally inappropriate formulations, and confident but inaccurate responses. UNESCO’s guidance on GenAI in education stresses a human-centred approach and identifies concerns relating to data privacy, ethical use, validation, and the need to preserve human agency in educational applications [2]. Consequently, an AI-literate student should approach generated output as material requiring evaluation rather than as an authoritative answer.

A second component is critical linguistic evaluation. In an EFL classroom, students can be required to compare their own paragraph with an AI-revised version and identify every significant change. Instead of asking “Is the AI version better?”, learners should investigate why a particular verb, connector, collocation, sentence structure, or organizational pattern was changed. They may accept some modifications, reject others, and justify their choices through linguistic reasoning. Such activities transform AI feedback into an object of analysis. The learner remains intellectually responsible for the final text, while the AI functions as a source of alternatives. This approach corresponds to the broader conception of AI literacy in which evaluation is as important as operational use [1].

A third element involves strategic prompting. Prompt engineering in EFL education should not be taught merely as a technique for obtaining more polished answers. Its pedagogical value lies in helping learners formulate clear learning objectives. For example, “Write my essay about online education” delegates authorship, whereas “Identify three

cohesion problems in my paragraph, explain each problem, and do not rewrite the whole paragraph” preserves learner participation. Similarly, students can ask GenAI to generate counterarguments, role-play a speaking partner, provide graded vocabulary examples, explain grammatical contrasts, or ask comprehension questions. The quality of responsible AI use therefore depends partly on whether prompts request learning support or task replacement.

CONCLUSION

The expansion of generative AI in EFL education creates neither an inherently beneficial nor an inherently harmful learning environment. Its educational effect depends largely on how learners interact with the technology and how teachers structure that interaction. When GenAI routinely replaces idea generation, drafting, linguistic decision-making, and revision, students risk developing technological dependence without corresponding language competence. When the same technology is used for guided feedback, comparison, dialogue, explanation, rehearsal, and critical analysis, it can become a meaningful pedagogical scaffold.

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