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THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH RESPONSIVE SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG FIRST-YEAR PHILOLOGY STUDENTS

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Abstract. The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into foreign language education has created new opportunities for developing learners’ oral communication skills. In particular, AI-powered conversational tools can provide learners with additional opportunities to practise responding to questions, expressing opinions, clarifying information, and maintaining short conversations in English. This paper explores the potential role of generative AI in developing English responsive speaking skills among first-year philology students. It focuses on the relationship between AI-assisted speaking practice and such components of oral performance as response relevance, fluency, linguistic accuracy, and contextual appropriateness. Drawing on relevant theoretical perspectives and recent empirical studies, the paper discusses how conversational AI tools can support regular speaking practice, provide immediate interaction, and create a less stressful environment for language production. It also considers possible limitations, including inaccurate responses, unnatural interaction, and learners’ excessive dependence on AI-generated language. The paper argues that generative AI can serve as a supplementary pedagogical resource when its use is guided by clear learning objectives and combined with teacher-led communication activities.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, responsive speaking, EFL, philology students, AI-assisted learning, oral communication, conversational practice.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the essential skills in foreign language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, and participate in different communicative situations. However, developing speaking competence requires more than memorising vocabulary and grammatical structures. Learners should also be able to understand spoken input, process information, and produce appropriate responses within a limited period of time. These demands can be particularly challenging for first-year philology students who are still developing confidence and communicative independence in English. Within the classification of speaking activities presented by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), responsive speaking involves short interactions in which learners respond to questions, comments, or statements. Unlike extended monologues, this type of speaking requires learners to understand an interlocutor’s contribution and formulate a relevant response. Therefore, responsive speaking is closely connected with comprehension, vocabulary retrieval, grammatical control, and the ability to respond appropriately in a particular context.

In many EFL classrooms, students have limited opportunities to practise spontaneous oral responses individually. Classroom time, differences in language proficiency, and fear of making mistakes may reduce learners’ participation. Generative AI tools offer an additional opportunity to address some of these challenges by providing interactive speaking tasks and allowing learners to practise English beyond the classroom. The purpose of this paper is to examine the pedagogical potential of generative AI in developing English responsive speaking skills among first-year philology students and to identify practical ways of integrating AI-assisted activities into speaking instruction.

Theoretical Background

Responsive speaking requires learners to produce meaningful and relevant responses to spoken or written prompts. Its development involves several interconnected abilities: understanding the question, identifying its communicative purpose, selecting appropriate vocabulary, constructing a grammatically acceptable response, and delivering it within an

appropriate timeframe. Bygate (1987) emphasises the distinctive characteristics of spoken language, particularly the role of real-time processing and interaction. In comparison with writing, speaking generally provides less opportunity for extensive planning and editing. Speakers must often make linguistic decisions while communication is taking place. This characteristic makes regular practice especially important for learners who need to become more confident and efficient in responding to others. Generative AI can provide an environment in which learners repeatedly practise these communicative processes. AI-powered conversational tools can generate questions, respond to learners’ answers, introduce follow-up questions, and offer opportunities to repeat speaking tasks. Such interaction may help learners become more familiar with common conversational patterns and develop the ability to formulate responses without relying entirely on memorised texts. Recent research provides evidence of the growing educational relevance of AI-assisted speaking practice. Tai and Chen (2024), for example, investigated generative AI chatbot interactions among elementary EFL learners. Their findings indicated improvements in speaking performance among learners who practised with the chatbot, while interviews also highlighted the supportive and engaging nature of the interaction. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) examined conversational GenAI tools in relation to EFL learners’ willingness to communicate, speaking anxiety, and self-perceived communicative competence. Their findings suggest that the design of AI interaction can influence learners’ emotional experiences and willingness to participate in English communication.

Furthermore, Du and Daniel (2024), in their systematic review of AI-powered chatbots for EFL speaking practice, identified the potential of conversational technologies to support speaking development, confidence, engagement, and pronunciation practice. Nevertheless, these studies generally address speaking development from a broader perspective. More focused attention to responsive speaking among first-year philology students may help clarify how AI-supported activities can be organised around short, contextually appropriate oral responses.

Pedagogical Applications of Generative AI in Responsive Speaking

Generative AI can be incorporated into responsive speaking instruction through structured activities that require learners to respond to different communicative prompts. Rather than asking students to produce long prepared speeches, teachers can use AI tools to create short conversational exchanges that encourage immediate and meaningful language production. One possible activity is question-and-answer practice. The AI tool asks students questions about familiar topics, such as education, daily routines, hobbies, university life, or future plans. Students respond orally, and the tool can continue the conversation with related questions. This activity allows learners to practise understanding questions and producing relevant answers without preparing complete responses in advance. Another useful activity is context-based response practice. In this task, the AI tool presents everyday situations and asks learners to respond appropriately. For example, students may be asked to explain why they missed a class, request clarification, give an opinion, or respond to a suggestion. Such activities can develop learners’ ability to select language according to the communicative situation rather than simply reproduce memorized sentences.

A further possibility is follow-up question practice. After receiving an initial response, the AI tool asks an additional question that requires the learner to explain, justify, or expand the original answer. This encourages students to move beyond one-word responses and develop more meaningful short exchanges. These activities can be organized around four important dimensions of responsive speaking: Relevance of response: the ability to understand a prompt and provide an answer directly related to it. Fluency: the ability to produce responses with fewer unnecessary pauses and interruptions. Linguistic accuracy: the appropriate use of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Contextual appropriateness: the ability to select expressions suitable for the communicative situation. For first-year philology students, these dimensions can be incorporated into a gradual learning process. Initially, students may practice responding to simple and familiar questions. Later, they can work with follow-up questions, unfamiliar situations, and prompts that require explanation or justification. Teachers can adjust the complexity of tasks according to students’ language

proficiency and learning needs.

Challenges and Pedagogical Considerations

Although generative AI offers several opportunities for speaking practice, its implementation requires careful pedagogical planning. AI-generated responses and feedback are not always accurate, natural, or appropriate to the context. Consequently, students should not accept every suggestion without critical evaluation. Another important consideration is the possibility of overdependence on AI-generated language. If learners repeatedly memorize answers produced by a chatbot, they may become less capable of responding independently in real communication. To prevent this, teachers should encourage students to formulate their own answers before consulting AI feedback. In addition, AI-assisted speaking activities should not replace communication with teachers and classmates. Human interaction involves social, emotional, and pragmatic aspects that cannot always be fully reproduced by conversational technologies. Therefore, generative AI should be regarded as a supplementary learning resource rather than a substitute for classroom interaction. Teachers also need to provide clear instructions, select appropriate speaking tasks, and monitor students’ progress. A balanced approach combining AI-assisted individual practice, peer interaction, and teacher feedback can create more meaningful opportunities for developing responsive speaking performance.

Conclusion

Generative AI has considerable potential to support the development of English responsive speaking skills among first-year philology students. Its interactive functions can provide additional opportunities to practise short oral responses, answer follow-up questions, and communicate in different everyday situations. Through repeated and structured practice, learners may become more familiar with spontaneous language production and develop greater confidence in responding in English. However, the educational value of AI-assisted speaking practice depends on how these tools are integrated into the teaching process. Their use should be guided by specific learning objectives, supported by teacher supervision, and combined with authentic communication activities.

In this respect, generative AI is most effective when it complements rather than replaces traditional speaking instruction. Further empirical research involving first-year philology students in the Uzbek EFL context is needed to investigate the extent to which AI-assisted practice influences response relevance, fluency, linguistic accuracy, and contextual appropriateness. Such research could contribute to developing more targeted pedagogical approaches to responsive speaking in higher education.

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