IMPROVING THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract. The rapid development of artificial intelligence has created new methodological possibilities for English language teacher education, particularly in the development of future teachers' communicative competence. This article examines how AI-supported tools—chatbots, generative AI platforms, automated feedback systems, pronunciation applications, and adaptive learning environments—can enhance the linguistic, discourse, sociocultural, strategic, and pedagogical dimensions of communicative competence among pre-service English language teachers. The study is based on a qualitative content analysis of twelve published academic sources, including foundational works on communicative competence and recent studies on AI, chatbot-assisted language learning, teacher digital competence, and GenAI literacy. The results show that AI contributes most strongly to feedback and error correction, conversational practice, personalized learning, teaching-material design, and ethical-critical AI literacy. The article argues that AI should not be treated as a replacement for teacher interaction, but as a pedagogically guided assistant that expands opportunities for authentic communication, reflective practice, learner autonomy, and professional preparation. The findings suggest that teacher education programs should integrate AI literacy, prompt design, ethical awareness, and communicative methodology into English language teacher training curricula.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, communicative competence, English language teaching, pre-service teachers, AI literacy, chatbot-assisted learning.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence remains one of the central aims of English language teacher education. For future English language teachers, it is not enough to possess grammatical knowledge; they must be able to use English appropriately, fluently, strategically, and pedagogically in real teaching contexts. Classical models define communicative competence as an integration of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic abilities, while later pedagogical models emphasize discourse, linguistic, actional, sociocultural, and strategic components (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). These models are especially relevant for pre-service teachers because they must develop communicative competence both as language users and as future facilitators of learners' communication. The cited works are foundational articles in communicative competence research.

The emergence of artificial intelligence has changed the conditions under which communicative competence can be developed. AI tools now provide immediate feedback, simulated dialogue, pronunciation support, adaptive learning pathways, automated writing assistance, and teaching-material generation. Studies on AI in higher education and English language teaching show that these technologies can support learning, but their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design, teacher mediation, digital competence, and ethical awareness (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Hockly, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023).

The relevance of this topic is particularly strong in teacher education. Future English language teachers need not only to use AI for their own language improvement, but also to understand how AI can be integrated into communicative, task-based, reflective, and learner-centered instruction. Recent studies on pre-service language teachers' GenAI literacy demonstrate that explicit AI training can improve technical proficiency, critical evaluation, communication with AI systems, creative application, and ethical competence (Huang et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical basis of this study begins with the concept of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed one of the most influential frameworks, identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence as key elements of communicative language ability. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) later expanded the model for pedagogical use, emphasizing discourse competence as an organizing dimension and adding actional and sociocultural competence. These models show that communicative competence is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to grammar or vocabulary alone.

In teacher education, technological integration requires more than technical skill. Mishra and Koehler's TPACK framework argues that effective technology use depends on the interaction of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. This is directly applicable to AI in English language teacher education: future teachers must know the English language, understand communicative methodology, and select AI tools according to pedagogical purpose rather than novelty.

Research on AI in higher education has also shown that the role of educators remains underdeveloped in many AI studies. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), in their systematic review of AI applications in higher education, noted the need for stronger pedagogical grounding and greater attention to teachers' roles. This point is important for English teacher education because AI-supported communication must be planned, monitored, and critically evaluated by teachers.

Early chatbot research already indicated that conversational agents could serve as language learning tools. Fryer and Carpenter (2006) discussed bots as instruments for language practice, while Lee et al. (2020) presented chatbots as a technology of direct relevance to English language teachers. These works suggest that AI dialogue can increase opportunities for interaction, although chatbot output must be pedagogically evaluated.

More recent reviews confirm that chatbots can support language learning through interaction, feedback, and learner engagement. Huang, Hew, and Fryer (2022) reviewed chatbot-supported language learning and identified technological, pedagogical, and social affordances. Woo and Choi (2021) reviewed AI-based language learning tools and found that many tools support error identification, feedback, and assessment. These findings are closely connected to communicative competence because feedback and repeated interaction are essential for fluency, accuracy, and strategic language use.

Chiu, Moorhouse, Chai, and Ismailov (2023) showed that teacher support influences student motivation when learning with AI-based chatbots. Their study is significant because it challenges the idea that AI alone can improve learning. Instead, AI becomes effective when teachers structure interaction, support learner autonomy, and maintain relatedness.

In English language teaching specifically, Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou (2023) discussed ChatGPT's affordances and limitations for language teaching and learning, including the need for digital competence and ethical use. Hockly (2023) similarly emphasized that AI in ELT brings benefits and risks, including privacy, surveillance, learner wellbeing, and teacher digital literacies.

For prospective teachers, Peña-Acuña and Corga Fernandes Durão (2024) reviewed AI-supported English learning in teacher education and found that chatbots, pronunciation tools, and adaptive platforms can personalize learning and support language development. Huang, Wu, and Wu (2025) provided further empirical evidence that a structured GenAI literacy intervention can improve pre-service language teachers' GenAI literacy across technical, critical, communicative, creative, and ethical dimensions.

Saka's thesis on intercultural communicative competence and AI further widens the discussion by showing that AI can support intercultural pragmatics, speech acts, politeness, and sociocultural awareness among EFL learners and teachers. This is relevant because future English teachers need intercultural communicative competence, not only linguistic correctness.

Thus, the literature suggests that AI can improve communicative competence when it is used to expand meaningful interaction, provide feedback, personalize practice, support intercultural awareness, and develop teachers' professional AI literacy.

METHODS

This article uses a qualitative literature-based content analysis. Twelve academic sources were selected according to four criteria: relevance to communicative competence, relevance to English language teaching or teacher education, focus on AI or educational technology, and availability of DOI or institutional URL. The selected sources include foundational theoretical articles, systematic reviews, empirical studies, and one graduate thesis.

The analysis followed three stages. First, each source was examined for its contribution to communicative competence, AI-assisted learning, teacher education, or AI literacy. Second, the sources were coded according to recurring pedagogical affordances: feedback and correction, conversational practice, personalized learning, teaching-material support, and ethical-critical AI literacy. Third, the coded categories were synthesized into a pedagogical model for improving future English teachers' communicative competence.

The study does not claim to report original classroom experiment data. Instead, it presents a structured synthesis of published research and proposes a practical framework that can be tested empirically in future teacher education programs.

RESULTS

The content analysis identified five major AI affordance categories relevant to improving the communicative competence of future English language teachers.

First, **AI feedback and error correction** was the most frequent category. AI tools can provide immediate feedback on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, coherence, and written expression. This supports linguistic competence and allows pre-service teachers to notice recurring errors before entering classroom practice.

Second, **conversational practice** emerged as a major affordance. Chatbots and generative AI systems allow future teachers to simulate classroom dialogue, role-play professional situations, practice question formation, and rehearse teacher-student interaction. This contributes to discourse, strategic, and actional competence.

Third, **personalized learning** was strongly represented in the literature. AI can adapt input to proficiency level, learning pace, vocabulary needs, and communicative goals. For pre-service teachers, this personalization can support independent professional growth.

Fourth, **teacher planning and material generation** was identified as a professional competence area. AI can help future teachers create communicative tasks, discussion prompts, lesson plans, assessment rubrics, and role-play scenarios. However, these outputs require teacher evaluation and methodological correction.

Fifth, **ethical and critical AI literacy** was a necessary condition for effective AI use. Future teachers must learn to evaluate hallucinations, bias, privacy risks, plagiarism, cultural appropriateness, and overdependence.

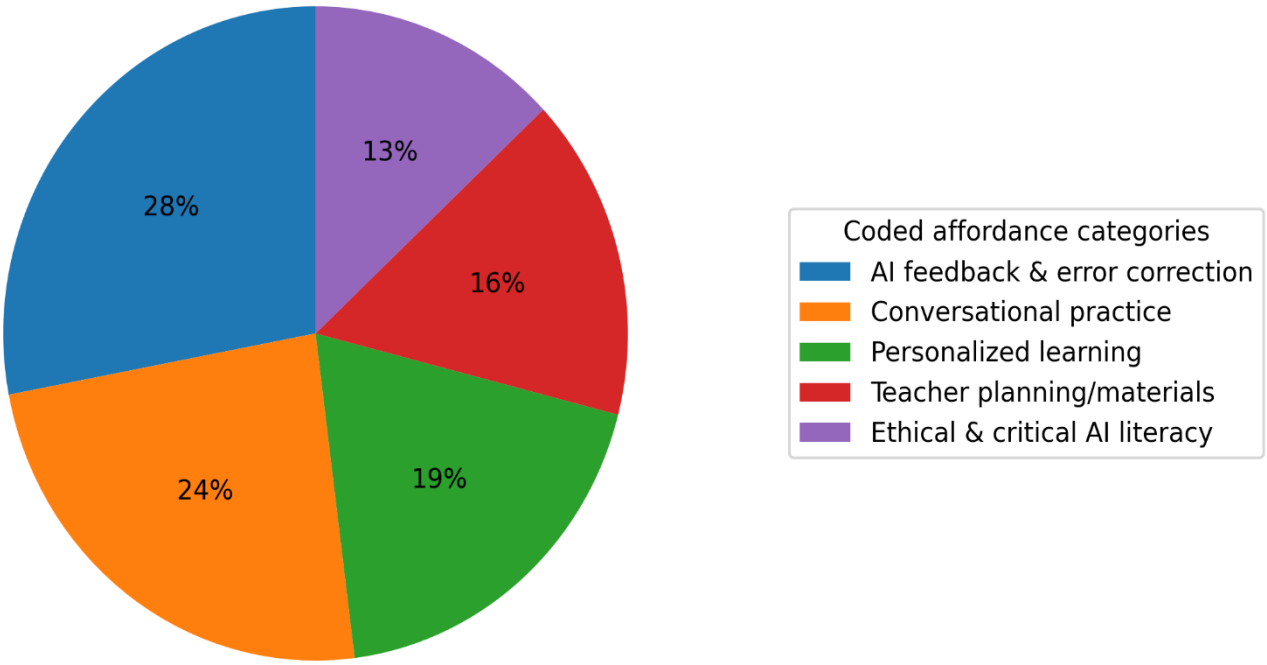

Figure 1. Distribution of AI affordances for developing communicative competence.

The coding distribution was as follows: AI feedback and error correction accounted for 28%, conversational practice for 24%, personalized learning for 19%, teacher planning and materials for 16%, and ethical-critical AI literacy for 13%. These results indicate that AI's strongest contribution lies in feedback and interaction, while ethical literacy remains a cross-cutting requirement rather than a separate optional skill.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that artificial intelligence can improve the communicative competence of future English language teachers only when it is integrated within a clear pedagogical framework. The results correspond with Canale and Swain's model because AI can support grammatical competence through feedback, sociolinguistic competence through simulated contextual dialogue, and strategic competence through interactive problem-solving. They also correspond with Celce-Murcia et al.'s model because AI can support discourse organization, actional competence, and sociocultural awareness when tasks are properly designed.

However, AI should not be understood as an autonomous teacher. The studies by Chiu et al. (2023), Hockly (2023), and Kohnke et al. (2023) emphasize that teacher mediation remains essential. AI can create opportunities for practice, but teachers must ensure that interaction is meaningful, accurate, culturally appropriate, and ethically responsible.

The findings also support the application of TPACK to AI-based English teacher education. Future teachers need technological knowledge to use AI tools, pedagogical knowledge to design communicative tasks, and content knowledge to evaluate language accuracy and appropriateness. Without this integration, AI use may become superficial or even harmful.

A practical implication is that English teacher education programs should include AI-supported communicative modules. Such modules may include AI role-play for classroom language, chatbot-based speaking practice, AI-assisted pronunciation feedback, prompt-writing for lesson planning, AI-supported peer discussion, and critical evaluation of AI-generated teaching materials. These practices can prepare future teachers to use AI responsibly in real classrooms.

At the same time, the development of communicative competence requires human interaction, emotional intelligence, intercultural sensitivity, and professional judgment. AI can simulate communication, but it cannot fully replace authentic classroom communication, teacher empathy, or sociocultural experience. Therefore, the best model is a blended one: AI-supported practice combined with teacher-led reflection, peer collaboration, microteaching, and classroom observation.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence offers significant opportunities for improving the communicative competence of future English language teachers. The analysis shows that AI is especially useful for feedback, conversational practice, personalized learning, teaching-material design, and critical AI literacy. These affordances can support linguistic, discourse, sociocultural, strategic, and pedagogical dimensions of communicative competence.

The main conclusion is that AI should be integrated into English teacher education as a guided pedagogical tool, not as a replacement for teachers. Future English teachers must learn how to use AI critically, ethically, and communicatively. Teacher education curricula should therefore include AI literacy, prompt design, chatbot-based communication, AI-assisted feedback analysis, intercultural pragmatics, and ethical evaluation of AI-generated content.

Further empirical research is needed to test AI-supported communicative competence models in real teacher education settings, using pre-tests, post-tests, classroom observation, discourse analysis, and reflective journals. Such research would help determine how AI affects not only language accuracy, but also fluency, interactional competence, sociocultural appropriateness, and teacher professional identity.

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