



Integrating Chatbots in ELT: Opportunities and Challenges for Teachers

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has significantly influenced the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Among emerging technologies, chatbots have gained attention as interactive tools that simulate human-like communication, offering new possibilities for language learning. This paper critically examines the integration of chatbots in ELT, focusing on their pedagogical benefits, practical applications, and the challenges faced by teachers. Drawing on recent developments and classroom practices, the study explores how chatbots enhance learner engagement, provide personalized feedback, and support autonomous learning. At the same time, it highlights concerns such as technological limitations, teacher preparedness, ethical considerations, and contextual barriers, particularly in rural and resource-constrained environments. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for effective implementation and future research directions.

Keywords: Chatbots, ELT- Artificial Intelligence-Language Learning- Digital Pedagogy- Teacher Challenges.

1. Introduction

The integration of technology into education has reshaped teaching and learning processes across disciplines. In ELT, digital tools have evolved from simple audio-visual aids to sophisticated AI-driven systems. Chatbots, powered by natural language processing, represent a transformative innovation that enables real-time interaction and language practice.

In the context of globalization and the increasing demand for English proficiency, there is a need for scalable, accessible, and learner-centered solutions. Chatbots offer a promising avenue, especially for learners in rural and semi-urban settings who may lack exposure to authentic language environments. However, their successful implementation depends largely on teachers, who play a pivotal role in mediating technology and pedagogy.



In many rural and semi-urban classrooms, students face a persistent challenge: **they understand English but hesitate to use it**. This hesitation is not merely linguistic but psychological, rooted in fear of judgment and lack of confidence.

Real-Life Example:

In a first-year polytechnic classroom, when a teacher asks:

“Can anyone describe your daily routine in English?”

- 70% of students remain silent
- 20% attempt broken sentences
- 10% read memorized answers

However, when the same students are asked to interact with a chatbot:

- They type freely
- They make mistakes without hesitation
- They attempt multiple responses

Insight:

The absence of human judgment creates a psychologically safe space.

This shift highlights *a fundamental pedagogical gap* that chatbots can address—**fear-free practice environments**.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies indicate a growing interest in AI-based tools in language education. Research has shown that chatbots can simulate conversational practice, improve vocabulary retention, and reduce learner anxiety. Scholars have emphasized the role of chatbots in promoting self-paced learning and providing immediate feedback.

However, literature also highlights several concerns. Some researchers argue that chatbots lack emotional intelligence and contextual understanding, which are essential for meaningful communication. Others point out that teachers often face difficulties in integrating such tools due to limited training and infrastructural constraints.

Despite these challenges, there is a consensus that chatbots can complement traditional teaching methods rather than replace them.

Research in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has long emphasized the importance of interaction in language acquisition. With the evolution of AI, chatbots have added a new dimension by enabling **simulated conversational interaction**.

Scholars have identified three major contributions of chatbots:

1. **Cognitive Support** – aiding grammar and vocabulary learning
2. **Affective Support** – reducing anxiety and boosting confidence
3. **Social Simulation** – mimicking conversational partners



However, limitations persist:

- Lack of emotional intelligence
- Inability to fully understand cultural context
- Risk of mechanical learning

Real-life Reflection

A chatbot may correctly respond to:

“I am feeling sad”

But it cannot genuinely **empathize** like a teacher who understands the student’s background.

Thus, literature increasingly supports a **blended approach**, where technology complements human teaching.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Examine the role of chatbots in enhancing English language learning.
2. Identify opportunities offered by chatbot integration in ELT.
3. Analyze challenges faced by teachers in implementing chatbots.
4. Suggest practical strategies for effective classroom integration.

4. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, drawing insights from:

- Review of existing research and academic publications
- Observation of classroom practices
- Informal interactions with teachers and students
- Case-based reflections from real teaching contexts

The approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of both theoretical and practical dimensions.

5. Conceptual Framework: How Chatbots Function in ELT

To understand their pedagogical value, chatbots must be viewed not as tools, but as **interactive learning environments**.

Three Functional Roles of Chatbots

1. Chatbot as a Practice Partner

Students engage in continuous dialogue.

Example:

- Student: “What is your hobby?”
- Bot: “My hobby is reading. What about you?”



Encourages reciprocal communication

2. Chatbot as a Language Corrector

Provides immediate feedback.

Example:

- Student: “She go to school yesterday”
- Bot: “You should say: She went to school yesterday.”

Reinforces correct grammar instantly

3. Chatbot as a Learning Facilitator

Guides learning through prompts.

Example:

- Bot: “Describe your village in 5 sentences.”
- Student attempts structured response

Promotes organized thinking

6. Opportunities of Chatbots in ELT

6.1 Personalized Learning

Chatbots can adapt to individual learner levels, providing customized responses and exercises. This supports differentiated instruction, especially in mixed-ability classrooms.

Chatbots adjust responses based on student input.

Example:

A student types : “*I go yesterday to market.*”

The chatbot responds : “*You should say: I went to the market yesterday.*”

It may then give 2–3 similar practice sentences.

This individualized correction is difficult in large classrooms.

6.2 Enhanced Engagement

Interactive conversations with chatbots create a dynamic learning environment. Students often feel more comfortable practicing language skills without fear of judgment.

Students interact more actively with chatbots than textbooks.

Example:

Instead of writing a dialogue in a notebook, students chat with a bot:



- Bot : “What did you do today?”
- Student : “I play cricket.”
- Bot : “Great! Say: I played cricket. Who did you play with?”

This feels like a real conversation rather than an academic task.

6.3 Immediate Feedback

Unlike traditional settings, chatbots offer instant corrections and suggestions, helping learners improve in real time.

Traditional correction is delayed, but chatbots respond instantly.

Example:

In writing practice:

- Student writes a paragraph
- Chatbot instantly highlights grammar errors and suggests improvements

This speeds up learning cycles.

6.4 Development of Speaking and Writing Skills

Chatbots encourage continuous practice through simulated dialogues, enhancing fluency and coherence.

Even text-based chat improves thinking in English.

Example:

Students who struggle to speak begin by typing:

- “My father is farmer. He work hard.”
Gradually improve to:
- “My father is a farmer. He works very hard.”

This builds confidence before speaking aloud.

6.5 Accessibility and Flexibility

Learners can access chatbots anytime, enabling learning beyond classroom boundaries. This is particularly beneficial for rural students with limited exposure to English.

Chatbots extend learning beyond classroom hours.

Example:

A hostel student practices English at night using a chatbot for 10 minutes daily. Over a month, the student becomes more fluent without extra classroom time.



7. Challenges for Teachers

7.1 Lack of Technical Training

Many teachers are not adequately trained to use AI-based tools, leading to hesitation and ineffective implementation.

7.2 Infrastructure Constraints

Limited internet connectivity and lack of digital devices pose significant barriers, especially in rural institutions.

7.3 Pedagogical Alignment

Integrating chatbots with curriculum objectives requires careful planning. Without proper alignment, their use may become superficial.

7.4 Ethical and Privacy Concerns

Data security and student privacy are critical issues that need attention while using AI tools.

7.5 Overdependence on Technology

Excessive reliance on chatbots may reduce human interaction, which is essential for holistic language development.

7. Case Study: Chatbot Integration in a Polytechnic Classroom

A pilot implementation was conducted in a polytechnic college with first-year students from rural backgrounds. A simple chatbot-based activity was introduced to improve conversational skills.

Activity Design

- Students interacted with a chatbot for 15 minutes daily.
- Topics included self-introduction, daily routines, and basic conversations.
- Teachers monitored progress and provided additional guidance.

Findings

- Increased student participation and confidence
- Improved sentence formation and vocabulary usage
- Reduced hesitation in speaking English

Challenges Observed

- Initial difficulty in understanding chatbot responses
- Technical issues such as connectivity problems
- Need for teacher intervention to clarify doubts



8. Discussion

The findings suggest that chatbots can serve as effective supplementary tools in ELT. They foster learner autonomy and provide opportunities for continuous practice. However, their success depends on the teacher's ability to integrate them meaningfully into the learning process.

Teachers must transition from traditional roles to facilitators of digital learning. This requires not only technical skills but also a shift in mindset.

Chatbots are not a replacement for teachers but a support system.

Key Insight:

- Chatbot = Practice partner
- Teacher = Guide, motivator, corrector

Example:

A chatbot can correct grammar,

but only a teacher can:

- **motivate a shy student**
- **understand emotional barriers**
- **encourage real communication**

9. Recommendations

1. Teacher Training Programs

Regular workshops should be conducted to enhance digital competence.

2. Blended Learning Approach

Combine chatbot interactions with face-to-face teaching for balanced learning.

3. Curriculum Integration

Align chatbot activities with syllabus objectives and learning outcomes.

4. Infrastructure Development

Institutions should invest in basic digital resources and internet access.

5. Ethical Guidelines

Establish clear policies for data usage and privacy protection.

10. Conclusion

The integration of chatbots in ELT represents a significant pedagogical advancement, particularly in contexts where learners lack exposure and confidence. Real-life classroom experiences clearly demonstrate that chatbots can transform passive learners into active participants by providing a safe, engaging, and flexible learning environment.

However, technology alone cannot guarantee success. The effectiveness of chatbot integration depends fundamentally on the teacher's ability to design meaningful learning experiences, guide student interaction, and maintain a balance between digital tools and human instruction.

Thus, chatbots should not be viewed as replacements for teachers, but as **powerful allies in the pursuit of effective language learning.**



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