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Exploring the Role of AI Tools in Improving Spoken English Skills of Non-Native Learners

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Abstract

The growing presence of artificial intelligence in education has opened new possibilities for language learning, especially for learners who struggle to speak English with confidence in real-life situations. Recent research shows that AI-supported tools can provide immediate feedback, personalized practice, simulated conversation, and flexible learning opportunities for non-native English speakers in ways that traditional classrooms often cannot consistently provide. Speech recognition systems, conversational chatbots, and language learning applications have been found to support pronunciation practice, fluency development, and learners' willingness to communicate by creating a low-pressure environment for repeated practice. At the same time, scholars also caution that the educational value of AI depends on thoughtful use, because overdependence, inaccuracy, privacy concerns, and reduced independent thinking may limit its long-term effectiveness if learners use it uncritically. This paper examines the role of AI tools in improving the spoken English skills of non-native learners from a human-centered perspective. It focuses on how these tools respond to real learner needs such as fear of making mistakes, lack of speaking partners, hesitation in pronunciation, and low confidence in communication. The discussion argues that AI can function best not as a replacement for the teacher, but as a supportive companion that encourages practice, reflection, and confidence-building in spoken English learning.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, spoken English, non-native learners, pronunciation, fluency, confidence, speech recognition, chatbots, language learning applications*

Introduction

In many non-native contexts, English is taught for years as a subject, yet many learners remain uncomfortable when they are required to speak it in interviews, presentations, classrooms, or public interactions. This gap between knowing English and speaking English with confidence has become a major concern in language education, particularly in higher education and employability-oriented learning environments. Traditional classroom teaching often gives more attention to grammar, reading, and writing than to speaking practice, and many learners receive limited opportunities for individual oral feedback. Recent scholarship on AI in education suggests that digital tools can help address this problem by extending language practice beyond classroom time and by offering immediate, individualized support.

The role of AI in spoken English learning has become especially significant after the wider availability of conversational AI systems and automated speech technologies. These tools allow learners to practice at their own pace, repeat tasks without embarrassment, and receive responses that are adapted to their language level and needs. This is important because speaking is not only a technical skill; it is also a deeply human act shaped by emotion, confidence, anxiety, identity, and social context. For that reason, a research paper on this topic should not look at AI only as technology. It should examine how AI tools meet the emotional and practical needs of real learners who are trying to find their voice in English.

Background of the Study

Artificial intelligence has become increasingly visible in educational settings, especially after the release of advanced generative AI tools that made interactive assistance more accessible to students and teachers . Research in language education now describes AI as a growing support system for personalized learning, vocabulary growth, writing assistance, communication practice, and feedback-based improvement. In the context of spoken English, this shift is particularly meaningful because oral communication requires continuous practice, correction, and encouragement, which are difficult to provide equally to every learner in a crowded classroom.

The background of this study also lies in the specific condition of non-native English learners, many of whom understand English concepts but hesitate to speak because of fear, limited exposure, and concern about being judged. Recent reviews of AI-supported instruction report that AI-enhanced language learning has shown substantial positive effects on speaking proficiency, with speaking emerging as one of the strongest areas of improvement in synthesized findings from experimental studies. Similarly, scholarship on conversational AI notes that chatbots and voice-enabled tools can create patient and always-available practice environments, which reduce anxiety and increase opportunities for communication . This context makes it necessary to explore AI not only as an innovation, but as a practical response to a human language-learning problem.

Statement of the Problem

A major problem in English language education is that many non-native learners study English for academic success but remain unable to speak it confidently and fluently in authentic situations. Even after years of formal instruction, learners may struggle with pronunciation, hesitation, speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary retrieval, and lack of confidence during oral communication. The classroom alone often cannot solve this problem because speaking improvement requires repeated practice, immediate correction, and emotionally safe interaction, all of which are difficult to sustain in large or examination-driven settings .

Although AI tools are increasingly used in education, there is still a need to understand how they specifically support spoken English development from a learner-centered perspective. Existing discussions often focus broadly on AI in education or on writing assistance, while spoken English, especially among non-native learners, requires more focused examination of pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and communication practice. The problem, therefore, is not simply whether AI exists, but how effectively it can help non-native learners become more confident and capable speakers of English in real human contexts.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore the role of AI tools in improving the spoken English skills of non-native learners in a practical and human-centered way. It seeks to understand how AI-supported tools contribute to pronunciation development, fluency building, and confidence enhancement during spoken communication. It also aims to examine the kinds of AI tools most commonly associated with spoken language improvement, including speech recognition systems, conversational chatbots, and language learning applications. In addition, the study intends to identify the advantages and limitations of AI-assisted speaking practice so that teachers and learners can use these tools more responsibly and effectively.

Research Questions

This paper is guided by the following research questions. How do AI tools support the development of spoken English skills among non-native learners? In what ways do speech recognition tools, chatbots, and language learning applications help learners improve pronunciation, fluency, and confidence ? What advantages do AI tools offer over traditional speaking practice in

terms of accessibility, personalization, and learner comfort? What limitations and challenges should educators and learners consider when using AI tools for spoken English development?

Review of Literature

Recent literature shows a growing academic interest in the educational use of AI for language learning, especially in the areas of feedback, personalization, learner autonomy, and communication practice. A 2025 study on non-native English-speaking students in higher education found that AI and generative AI tools helped students manage linguistic demands, support personalized learning, and improve understanding of academic content, while also raising concerns about overdependence and critical thinking . A broad review on conversational AI chatbots in English language teaching similarly reports that such tools can provide personalized learning experiences, immediate feedback, scalable support, and increased willingness to communicate when integrated carefully into pedagogy .

Research focusing more directly on speaking suggests that AI can make an especially strong contribution to oral skill development. A meta-analytic review of AI in English instruction for speaking and listening reported a substantial overall effect of AI-enhanced instruction, with particularly notable gains in speaking proficiency. Studies on automated pronunciation evaluation also show that speech technologies can assess features such as intonation, speed, and rhythm, helping learners compare their speech with more standard models and correct errors through repeated listening and practice . Taken together, the literature suggests that AI tools are increasingly relevant to spoken English learning because they combine immediate feedback, individual pacing, and emotionally safer practice opportunities.

Concept of AI in Language Learning

Artificial intelligence in language learning refers to digital systems that can simulate aspects of human intelligence in order to support language practice, feedback, correction, and interaction. In educational contexts, AI includes tools that can analyze learner input, respond conversationally, adapt tasks to learner needs, and generate feedback in real time. This makes AI especially useful in language learning because language development depends not only on memorization but also on interaction, repetition, noticing errors, and meaningful communication.

In the field of English language learning, AI is now used for writing support, vocabulary development, pronunciation training, reading assistance, and interactive conversation practice. Conversational chatbots, automated speech recognition systems, and adaptive mobile apps all represent different expressions of AI in language learning. What makes these tools important is their ability to create individualized learning experiences, allowing each learner to practice more frequently and with less fear of embarrassment than in many face-to-face settings.

Importance of Spoken English Skills

Spoken English is one of the most visible indicators of communicative competence because it connects classroom learning with real-life use. Learners need spoken English not only for academic presentations and classroom participation, but also for interviews, workplace communication, social mobility, and global interaction . When learners cannot express themselves clearly in speech, they may appear less capable than they actually are, even if their reading and writing skills are strong.

The importance of spoken English also lies in its relationship with confidence and identity. Speaking is immediate and public, so learners often experience stress when they fear making mistakes or being judged for their accent, grammar, or hesitation. Research on conversational AI highlights that increased opportunities for patient interaction and practice can improve willingness to communicate, which is central to successful spoken language use . This makes spoken English not just a linguistic skill, but a human and social capability that shapes participation in education and society.

Challenges Faced by Non-Native Learners

Non-native learners face several obstacles while trying to improve spoken English. One major difficulty is pronunciation, because learners may find it hard to hear, produce, and maintain sounds that do not exist in their first language . They may also struggle with stress, rhythm, and intonation, which affect how natural and understandable their speech sounds even when the words themselves are correct.

Another challenge is the emotional burden attached to speaking. Many learners fear making mistakes in front of others, and this anxiety reduces participation and speaking frequency. Conversational AI research notes that learners benefit from environments where they can practice without judgment, receive immediate correction, and repeat tasks as often as needed . In addition, non-native learners may lack regular speaking partners, especially in contexts where English is not used in everyday life, which further limits oral development and confidence-building.

Role of AI Tools in Language Learning

AI tools support language learning by making practice more flexible, immediate, and personalized. Unlike many traditional learning environments, AI tools can respond instantly, repeat activities without fatigue, and adjust to different learner levels and needs. This is especially useful in spoken English learning, where improvement depends on regular practice and feedback rather than passive exposure alone.

The role of AI tools is not simply to correct mistakes, but to create conditions in which learners feel able to practice more often and more freely. By reducing fear of judgment and by offering accessible support outside class hours, these tools can increase both the quantity and quality of learner engagement with spoken English. Their value is strongest when they are used as companions to teaching rather than substitutes for human guidance.

Speech recognition tools

Speech recognition tools are designed to listen to spoken input, compare it to target forms, and provide feedback on accuracy, pronunciation, rhythm, or fluency. Research on pronunciation learning suggests that well-designed automatic speech recognition activities can effectively support pronunciation improvement because they allow repeated oral practice and targeted feedback that learners rarely receive in large classes . Studies on pronunciation evaluation also show that AI-based systems can assess speech through features such as intonation, speed, and rhythm, helping learners notice specific areas for improvement.

These tools matter in human terms because they allow learners to practice privately and repeatedly. A learner who is embarrassed to speak in front of classmates may be willing to rehearse a sentence many times with a speech recognition tool until the pronunciation becomes clearer. In that sense, the tool becomes less like a machine and more like a patient listener that supports gradual growth in oral accuracy.

Chatbots and virtual assistants

Chatbots and virtual assistants support spoken English learning by creating interactive conversation spaces where learners can ask questions, respond to prompts, and engage in simulated communication. Research on conversational AI in EFL education reports that chatbots can improve speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and willingness to communicate because they provide immediate feedback and unlimited practice without the pressure often felt in human interaction . They also allow learners to control pace, choose topics, and practice in a non-judgmental environment that supports motivation and autonomy.

From a human perspective, chatbots can reduce the loneliness and hesitation that many learners experience during self-study. A learner who has no partner to practice with at home can still carry on

a conversation, rehearse answers, and refine expression through chatbot interaction. This does not replace real human conversation, but it can prepare learners for it by making them feel more ready and less afraid.

Impact of AI on Spoken English Skills

The impact of AI on spoken English skills can be understood through three interrelated areas: pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. Current research suggests that AI tools can provide structured support in all three areas by enabling repeated speaking practice, immediate correction, and private experimentation with language. These gains are particularly meaningful for non-native learners because spoken English improvement often depends on both technical correction and emotional support.

Improvement in pronunciation

Pronunciation improvement is one of the clearest areas where AI tools can make a difference. Speech technologies can detect pronunciation errors and guide learners toward more accurate production through repeated listening, imitation, and comparison. Research on pronunciation evaluation confirms that AI systems can analyze intonation, speed, and rhythm, which are central to understandable spoken English.

For non-native learners, pronunciation improvement is not simply about sounding native-like. It is more importantly about becoming understandable and comfortable while speaking. AI tools help by making pronunciation practice more frequent and less embarrassing, especially for learners who feel self-conscious about their accent in public settings.

Development of fluency

Fluency develops when learners can speak more smoothly, with fewer long pauses and less dependence on mental translation. Conversational AI research indicates that learners using chatbots show gains in fluency and coherence because they practice speaking more often and in more interactive ways than they usually would in traditional settings . Regular chatbot exchanges and app-based speaking tasks encourage learners to retrieve language more quickly and to respond in real time.

Fluency also grows through habit. AI tools make that habit easier to build because learners can practice every day, even for a few minutes, without waiting for formal classroom sessions. Over time, this repeated engagement can turn hesitant speech into more natural communication.

Advantages of AI Tools in Learning

AI tools offer several advantages for spoken English learning. They are available beyond classroom hours, provide immediate feedback, support individualized pacing, and create emotionally safer spaces for repeated oral practice. They also help learners who may not have access to fluent speakers or regular speaking partners in their daily environment.

Another key advantage is learner autonomy. AI tools allow students to choose what to practice, how often to practice, and where to focus improvement, whether on pronunciation, vocabulary, or conversational response. Research suggests that this personalized and adaptive quality is one of AI's strongest educational benefits, especially when learners use it with awareness and purpose.

Limitations of AI Tools

Despite their promise, AI tools also have important limitations. Research points to concerns about overreliance, reduced independent thinking, inaccuracies in output, privacy issues, and uneven quality of responses depending on the tool and task. Some students in AI-related studies reported that

heavy dependence on AI made them less likely to think for themselves or express ideas independently.

In spoken English learning, AI also cannot fully replace human communication. It may support rehearsal and correction, but it cannot entirely capture the social richness, emotional nuance, and cultural unpredictability of real conversation. For this reason, the most balanced view is that AI should supplement, not replace, teachers, peers, and authentic human interaction.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and descriptive research orientation suitable for a short research paper written in paragraph form. The purpose is not to present statistical tables or numerical percentages, but to examine the role of AI tools in spoken English learning through interpretation of recent scholarly literature and learner-centered educational perspectives. A descriptive research approach is especially appropriate because it helps explain how AI tools function in practical teaching-learning contexts and how learners experience them in relation to pronunciation, fluency, and confidence.

Research design

The research design may be framed as descriptive and analytical. It draws on secondary sources, especially recent studies and reviews on AI, pronunciation technologies, conversational chatbots, and language learning applications, to build a coherent understanding of the issue. This design is suitable for a 7- to 8-page paper because it allows the writer to synthesize concepts, findings, and educational implications without requiring extensive statistical treatment.

Sampling technique

For a future primary study, purposive sampling would be suitable because it would allow the selection of learners who actively use AI tools for spoken English practice. This technique is useful when the researcher wants to understand the experiences of a specific group, such as non-native learners who use chatbots, pronunciation tools, or mobile applications for English speaking development. In the present literature-based paper, sampling functions through source selection rather than human subject recruitment.

Data collection methods

The paper relies on document-based data collection, using recent scholarly articles, reviews, and educational analyses related to AI in language learning. The selected sources discuss student perceptions, language-learning support, pronunciation feedback, chatbot interaction, and speaking improvement, which together provide a strong foundation for the present analysis. This method is appropriate because it allows the writer to present a well-supported academic argument in paragraph form without depending on tables or numerical reporting.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of the collected literature indicates that AI tools contribute to spoken English development in ways that are both technical and human. On the technical side, they help learners notice pronunciation problems, practice speech repeatedly, and receive immediate feedback on oral production. On the human side, they lower the fear of speaking by offering a space where learners can make mistakes privately and try again without shame.

The interpretation of the literature further suggests that different AI tools support different parts of the speaking process. Speech recognition tools are more directly related to pronunciation and articulation, chatbots are strongly associated with fluency and willingness to communicate, and language learning applications support regular engagement by turning practice into a daily routine. At the same time, the literature consistently warns that AI is most beneficial when used with

guidance and reflection. When learners depend on it passively, the same tool that supports growth may weaken independent thinking and authentic expression.

Findings of the Study

The study finds that AI tools have meaningful potential to improve spoken English skills among non-native learners. Across the reviewed literature, the most visible benefits include better pronunciation awareness, more frequent speaking practice, greater fluency through regular interaction, and stronger confidence to communicate in English. AI tools appear especially useful for learners who need individualized feedback and emotionally safe practice opportunities that may not always be available in conventional classroom settings.

The findings also suggest that conversational AI and speech-based tools are most effective when they are used consistently and purposefully. Learners benefit when AI becomes a practice partner, not a shortcut. The literature further shows that while AI can strengthen language learning, it must be accompanied by learner awareness, teacher support, and opportunities for real human communication to avoid overdependence and shallow learning.

Conclusion

AI tools are playing an increasingly important role in improving the spoken English skills of non-native learners. Current research shows that they can support pronunciation improvement, fluency development, and confidence-building by offering personalized feedback, repeated oral practice, and low-pressure conversational opportunities. Their contribution is especially valuable for learners who need more speaking time and more emotional safety than traditional classrooms can always provide.

At the same time, the real educational value of AI lies in balanced use. AI should not be treated as a replacement for the teacher or for authentic human communication. It should be used as a supportive companion that helps learners practice more, fear less, and move gradually toward clearer, more confident spoken English. In this way, AI becomes most meaningful when it serves a human goal: helping learners find their voice.

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