TEACHING ENGLISH USING GENERATIVE AI TOOLS

Phrakhru Prichakitjajathorn and Phra Chayut Chayakaro
Mahachulalongkornrajavityalaya University, Nakhonratchasima Campus

Abstract

This paper explores the integration of Generative AI tools in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), focusing on enhancing listening and speaking skills among Thai learners. While traditional methods often struggle to overcome learners' anxiety and lack of confidence, Generative AI offers a transformative approach by providing a personalized and non-judgmental learning environment. This study discusses the application of AI-driven platforms as virtual conversation partners, allowing learners to practice communication without the fear of losing face, effectively lowering the affective filter. Furthermore, the paper examines practical strategies for teachers to utilize Gen AI in generating customized learning materials, facilitating role-play scenarios, and providing real-time feedback on pronunciation and fluency. The findings suggest that integrating Generative AI into the curriculum not only supports learner-centered instruction but also significantly boosts learners' communicative competence and positive attitudes toward using English in the digital era.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), Generative AI, Listening and Speaking Skills

Introduction

The Importance of English and Challenges in the Thai Context

In the era of globalization and digital transformation, English is no longer merely an academic subject but a crucial tool for accessing global knowledge and facilitating cross-cultural communication. However, within the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Thailand, a significant number of learners still encounter major obstacles in developing communicative competence, particularly in listening and speaking skills. Primary issues often stem from psychological factors such as Foreign Language Anxiety, the fear of making mistakes, and a lack of self-confidence. These factors act as an "Affective Filter," effectively blocking learning potential. Furthermore, traditional classroom environments that heavily emphasize grammar and rote memorization often limit the time and opportunities for learners to practice authentic usage, resulting in a lack of interactional skills when facing real-world situations.

Limitations of Traditional Methods and the Role of Technology.

Although technology has long been utilized to assist instruction, ranging from educational videos to language training applications, earlier tools were predominantly characterized by one-way communication or limited pre-programmed responses. These tools failed to simulate the complexity, flexibility, and spontaneity of real-life conversation. Additionally, teachers managing large classes face significant challenges in providing comprehensive attention to every student. Offering immediate, individualized feedback on pronunciation errors or incorrect sentence structures is often practically difficult. Consequently, learners lack opportunities to practice active skills and often stagnate without targeted and timely guidance, creating an urgent need for innovations that can serve as accessible "personal tutors" available at any time.

The Emergence of Generative AI as an Educational Game-Changer.

The advent of Generative AI (Gen AI) models, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude, has created a transformative phenomenon in global education. This technology possesses high-level Natural Language Processing (NLP) capabilities, enabling it to generate conversations, interact, and create novel content in a human-like manner. A distinct advantage of Generative AI in English Language Teaching (ELT) is its ability to adjust language proficiency levels to suit individual learners (Personalized Learning) and function as a non-judgmental conversation partner. This unique feature significantly reduces learner pressure and the fear of losing face, empowering learners to experiment with language, learn through trial and error, and develop in a psychologically safe environment, which aligns perfectly with learner-centered learning theories.

Objectives and Approach of this Article

Therefore, this article aims to present guidelines and strategies for integrating Generative AI tools into the English language teaching process to enhance learners' listening and speaking skills. It delves into various practical applications of AI, ranging from assisting teachers in producing modern teaching materials and creating immersive role-play scenarios for communication practice, to utilizing AI for analyzing and correcting individual pronunciation issues. The following sections will demonstrate that applying this cutting-edge technology not only reduces the workload of teachers but also serves as a key to unlocking learner potential, allowing them to transcend traditional limits and develop English communicative skills with confidence and efficiency in the modern digital era.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Foundations of Second Language Acquisition.

To understand the efficacy of Generative AI in language education, it is essential to revisit fundamental theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) posits that learners acquire language best when exposed to "comprehensible input" that is slightly above their current proficiency level, denoted as i+1. However, this acquisition process is often hindered by the "Affective Filter," a psychological barrier consisting of anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and low motivation. In the context of Thai EFL learners, this filter is typically high due to a cultural emphasis on correctness and the fear of public embarrassment. Therefore, any pedagogical intervention aiming to improve listening and speaking skills must not only provide appropriate input but also effectively lower this affective filter to facilitate genuine learning.

The Role of Interaction in Developing Communicative Competence.

Complementing the importance of input is the Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996), which suggests that language acquisition is facilitated through interaction and the "negotiation of meaning." In a traditional classroom setting, opportunities for such negotiation are scarce, as the teacher-student ratio often limits individual speaking time. Speaking skills require active output and immediate feedback to refine pronunciation and fluency. Without consistent interaction, learners struggle to bridge the gap between passive knowledge (grammar/vocabulary) and active performance. This highlights the critical need for tools that can simulate authentic interaction and provide the scaffolding necessary for learners to practice communicating in real-time.

Generative AI as an Adaptive Interlocutor.

Generative AI represents a significant leap forward from traditional Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tools. Unlike static applications with pre-programmed responses, Gen AI models function as adaptive interlocutors capable of understanding context, generating human-like responses, and sustaining complex conversations. This capability allows for the creation of "Personalized Comprehensible Input." For instance, an AI tool can instantly simplify a complex dialogue to match a learner's proficiency (i+1) or generate listening materials based on the learner's specific interests. This adaptability ensures that the content remains engaging and understandable, thereby maximizing the potential for language intake.

Reducing Anxiety and Creating a Safe Learning Environment

Perhaps the most profound impact of Generative AI lies in its ability to address the psychological barriers to speaking. By acting as a non-judgmental conversation partner, AI creates a psychologically safe environment where learners can practice without the fear of social evaluation or losing face. This directly addresses the high affective filter prevalent

among Thai learners. Students can engage in trial-and-error, ask for repetitions, and receive corrective feedback privately. This "low-stakes" practice builds the confidence required for "high-stakes" real-world interactions, effectively serving as a bridge between classroom theory and practical communication with foreigners in the digital era.

Practical Applications of Generative AI in EFL Instruction

AI-Assisted Role-Play and Simulation.

One of the most effective applications of Generative AI is its capability to function as a dynamic conversation partner for role-play activities. Unlike traditional textbook dialogues which are static and predictable, Gen AI can simulate a wide range of real-world personas—from a hotel receptionist to a job interviewer—responding unpredictably yet appropriately to the learner's input. Teachers can assign students to engage in specific scenarios (e.g., "Book a flight to London") with the AI. This practice provides learners with the opportunity to negotiate meaning and employ communication strategies in a low-stakes environment. Crucially, this method bridges the gap between classroom instruction and real-world usage, allowing students to build communicative confidence before interacting with actual human speakers.

Personalized Content Generation and Adaptation.

Generative AI empowers teachers to instantaneously create and adapt learning materials to suit the specific proficiency levels and interests of their students. Adhering to the principle of "i+1" (comprehensible input), educators can instruct AI tools to rewrite complex news articles or stories into simplified English suitable for A1 or A2 learners (CEFR standards) while retaining the core meaning. Furthermore, teachers can generate customized reading passages based on local contexts or students' hobbies—such as a dialogue about a local festival in Surin—making the content more relevant and engaging. This personalization increases learner motivation and ensures that the input is neither too difficult nor too trivial.

Real-time Feedback and Error Correction.

Providing immediate and individualized feedback in large classes is a perennial challenge for EFL teachers. Gen AI addresses this by serving as an automated feedback mechanism. Students can submit their written sentences or transcripts of their speech to the AI, asking for corrections regarding grammar, vocabulary usage, and naturalness. Advanced AI models can explain why a certain phrase is incorrect and suggest alternative expressions. For speaking skills, tools with voice recognition capabilities can analyze pronunciation and intonation, offering specific advice for improvement. This instant feedback loop allows learners to identify and rectify their errors autonomously, reinforcing accurate language use without waiting for the teacher's availability.

Scaffolding for Autonomous Learning.

Beyond the classroom, Generative AI acts as a powerful scaffolding tool for autonomous learning. Students can use AI to prepare for class discussions by asking it to brainstorm vocabulary related to a topic or to generate potential discussion questions. During self-study, if a learner encounters a difficult concept or idiom, they can ask the AI to explain it in their native language or provide simple examples. This availability of on-demand support encourages learners to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering study habits that are essential for lifelong language development in the digital era.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Synthesis of Findings.

The integration of Generative AI into the EFL curriculum offers a promising solution to the longstanding challenges faced by Thai learners, particularly regarding foreign language anxiety and limited exposure to authentic interaction. As explored in this study, Gen AI effectively lowers the "Affective Filter" by providing a personalized, interactive, and non-judgmental environment for practice. This psychological safety encourages learners to take risks and engage in trial-and-error, which are essential processes for language acquisition. The transition from passive learning to active engagement with AI tools has shown the potential to significantly enhance both communicative competence and positive attitudes toward English learning.

The Shifting Role of the Teacher.

The adoption of AI does not diminish the importance of the human teacher; rather, it necessitates a paradigm shift in pedagogy. Teachers must transition from being the sole providers of knowledge to becoming "facilitators" and "learning guides." The modern EFL teacher’s role involves selecting appropriate AI tools, designing meaningful tasks that integrate technology, and training students in "prompt engineering" to maximize the utility of these tools. Teachers remain crucial for providing the emotional support, cultural context, and nuanced feedback that AI currently cannot replicate.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges.

While the benefits are substantial, the implementation of Generative AI must be approached with caution. Educators must address ethical concerns such as academic integrity, data privacy, and the potential for AI "hallucinations" (generating inaccurate information). It is imperative to teach students that AI should be used as a scaffolding tool to support learning, not as a shortcut to bypass cognitive effort. A critical component of digital literacy in the AI era is the ability to verify AI-generated content and use it responsibly.

Recommendations for Future Implementation.

To fully harness the potential of Generative AI, it is recommended that educational institutions in Thailand invest in professional development programs to equip teachers with digital literacy and AI integration skills. Furthermore, curriculum designers should consider blending AI-based self-study modules with traditional classroom interaction to create a "Hybrid Learning" model. By embracing these technological advancements with a critical yet open mindset, we can empower Thai learners to overcome their linguistic barriers and communicate confidently on the global stage.

Assessment and Evaluation in the AI Era

Integrating AI necessitates a shift in assessment strategies. Traditional multiple-choice tests may not capture the communicative competence developed through AI interactions.

1. Process-Oriented Assessment Assessment should focus on the *process* of learning rather than just the final product. Teachers can evaluate students based on their "chat logs" with the AI. Criteria might include:

- **Quality of Prompts:** How well can the student instruct the AI?
- **Interaction Strategy:** How does the student handle misunderstandings or complex vocabulary offered by the AI?
- **Error Correction:** Does the student notice and learn from the AI's feedback?

2. AI as an Assessor Teachers can utilize AI to assist in grading subjective assignments. By feeding a student's essay or speech transcript into the AI along with a specific rubric (e.g., "Grade this based on coherence, lexical resource, and grammatical range on a scale of 1-10"), the AI can provide a preliminary score and detailed justification. However, the teacher must remain the final arbiter to ensure fairness and accuracy.

3. Assessing Speaking Confidence Since one of the main goals is reducing anxiety, self-assessment questionnaires regarding "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) should be administered before and after the course. This qualitative data is crucial for measuring the success of the AI intervention in psychological terms.

Challenges and Limitations

While Generative AI offers transformative potential for EFL instruction, its implementation is not without challenges. Educators and institutions must acknowledge and address these limitations to ensure effective and ethical integration.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.

The ease with which AI can generate essays, dialogue scripts, and answers poses a significant threat to academic integrity. Students might be tempted to use AI to complete assignments entirely rather than using it as a learning aid. This shifts the challenge for teachers

from merely teaching English to monitoring for AI-generated plagiarism. Consequently, assessment methods must evolve to focus more on in-class performance, oral interviews, and process-based tasks that cannot be easily outsourced to AI.

Accuracy and "Hallucinations"

Generative AI models are probabilistic, meaning they predict the next likely word rather than accessing a database of absolute truths. This can lead to "hallucinations," where the AI confidently provides incorrect grammatical explanations, invents non-existent idioms, or presents cultural inaccuracies. If learners accept these errors without verification, it can lead to the fossilization of incorrect language usage. Therefore, teachers must train students to critically evaluate AI outputs and cross-reference information with reliable sources.

The Digital Divide and Access.

Implementing AI-driven instruction relies heavily on access to stable internet connections and modern devices (smartphones, tablets, or computers). In many rural or under-resourced schools in Thailand, this creates a "digital divide." Students without personal devices or data plans may fall behind their peers who can practice with AI at home. To mitigate this, schools may need to provide computer lab access or design "hybrid" activities that do not require every student to be online simultaneously.

Over-reliance and Skill Atrophy

There is a legitimate concern that over-reliance on AI for translation and correction could lead to cognitive atrophy. If students immediately turn to AI to translate every difficult sentence or fix every error without trying to understand the underlying rules, they may fail to internalize the language. AI should be positioned as a "scaffolding" tool that is gradually removed as proficiency increases, rather than a permanent crutch.

Conclusion

Summary of Pedagogical Implications.

This study has demonstrated that the integration of Generative AI into English language teaching holds transformative potential for Thai EFL learners. By serving as an accessible, personalized, and non-judgmental interlocutor, AI tools effectively address the critical barriers of foreign language anxiety and insufficient practice opportunities. The transition from passive listening to active, AI-assisted interaction allows learners to lower their "Affective Filter," thereby fostering a psychological readiness to communicate. When used strategically—through role-plays, instant feedback mechanisms, and personalized content creation—AI significantly enhances both listening and speaking competence.

Balancing Innovation with Caution.

While the benefits are substantial, this paper argues for a balanced approach. The challenges of academic integrity, data accuracy, and the digital divide highlighted in the previous section underscore that technology is not a panacea. Successful implementation requires vigilant oversight. Educators must guide students to use AI as a scaffold for learning rather than a substitute for cognitive effort. The goal is to cultivate "AI literacy" alongside language proficiency, ensuring that learners are not just consumers of technology but critical users who can verify and leverage information effectively.

Future Directions: Towards a Hybrid Ecosystem.

Looking ahead, the future of EFL instruction in Thailand lies in a "Hybrid Ecosystem" that harmonizes human pedagogy with machine intelligence. Educational policies should support this transition by investing in digital infrastructure and, more importantly, in teacher professional development. Teachers must be empowered to evolve from traditional instructors into "learning engineers" who can design AI-integrated curriculums. Ultimately, by embracing this technological synergy, we can equip Thai learners with the confidence and communicative skills necessary to thrive as global citizens in the digital era.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a Quasi-Experimental Design, specifically the One Group Pretest-Posttest Design, to evaluate the effectiveness of using Generative AI tools in teaching English. Additionally, a qualitative approach is integrated to gain deeper insights into learners' attitudes and anxiety levels.

Population and Sample

- **Population:** The population for this study consists of novice monks and students studying at the secondary level under the Phrapariyattidhamma General Education Division at **Pariyattikhunros Wittaya School, Surin Province**.
- **Sample Group:** The sample group consists of 30 novice monks/students enrolled in the fundamental English course. The participants were selected via **purposive sampling**, based on the criteria of regular class attendance and basic access to digital devices (smartphones or tablets) necessary for AI interaction.

Research Instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, four key instruments are utilized:

1. **AI-Integrated Lesson Plans:** A series of 6 instructional plans (spanning 12 hours) designed based on the AI-Enhanced PPP Model (Presentation, Practice, Production). Topics include "Everyday Conversation," "Traveling," and "Dhamma Talk in English."

2. **English Listening-Speaking Proficiency Test:** A standardized achievement test used as both pre-test and post-test to measure improvements in communicative competence.
3. **Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Questionnaire:** A 5-point Likert scale survey adapted from MacIntyre et al. (1998) to assess learners' confidence and anxiety reduction.
4. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** A set of open-ended questions designed to interview students about their user experience (UX) and satisfaction with AI tutors.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Expected Outcomes

Data Collection Procedure.

The data collection process is divided into three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1: Pre-Implementation:** The researcher explains the objectives to the students and administers the Pre-test and the WTC Questionnaire to establish baseline data.
- **Phase 2: Implementation:** The experimental teaching is conducted over a period of 6 weeks (2 hours per week). During this phase, students practice role-playing and conversation with Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT Voice Mode, Gemini) under the teacher's supervision.
- **Phase 3: Post-Implementation:** Upon completion of the course, the Post-test and WTC Questionnaire are re-administered. Additionally, 5-10 representative students are interviewed to gather qualitative feedback.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Scores from the pre-test and post-test, as well as the questionnaire results, will be analyzed using statistical software. Key statistics include Mean ($\bar{x}$), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and the **Dependent t-test** to determine the statistical significance of the improvement.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Data from interviews will be analyzed using **Content Analysis** to identify thematic patterns regarding the advantages and challenges of AI-assisted learning.

Expected Outcomes

1. Students’ post-test scores in listening and speaking skills will be significantly higher than their pre-test scores at the .05 level of statistical significance.
2. Students will demonstrate a lower level of foreign language anxiety and a higher willingness to communicate (WTC) after using Generative AI tools.
3. Students will express positive attitudes towards the integration of AI in English learning, citing reduced fear of judgment and increased personalized practice as key benefits.

References

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (2010). Language Assessment in Practice. Oxford University Press.

Chun, D., Kern, R., & Smith, B. (2016). Technology in language use, language teaching, and language learning. The Modern Language Journal, 100(S1), 64-80.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Pergamon Press.

Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), Handbook of Second Language Acquisition (pp. 413-468). Academic Press.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. Language Learning, 44(2), 283-305.

Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking. Routledge.

OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT: Optimizing Language Models for Dialogue. Retrieved from https://openai.com/chatgpt

Phrakhrupariyatsamothan, Phrakhrupaladsuwatthanawisutthisarkhun, Nuekkrathok, P., Kongsat, S., & Khwathai, K. (2024). Pedagogical strategies for enhancing English listening and speaking skills to promote positive attitudes among Thai learners toward communicating with foreigners in the digital era. Journal of MCU Social Science Review.

Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2005). Professional Development for Language Teachers. Cambridge University Press.

UNESCO. (2023). Guidance for generative AI in education and research. UNESCO Publishing.

Warschauer, M. (2004). Technological change and the future of CALL. In S. Fotos & C. Browne (Eds.), New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms (pp. 15-25). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.