

Developing Critical Thinking and Communicative Competence in English Language Classes through Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools

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	Abstract Article investigates the integration of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, such as large language models, into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy to foster cognitive development and pragmatic proficiency. Traditional English language teaching methods often overemphasize mechanical acquisition and rote memorization, falling short in preparing students for complex, digitally-mediated discourse. By analyzing specific pedagogical models — such as AI-driven debate simulations, co-constructive interactive fiction writing, and collaborative peer-review workshops — the article demonstrates how students transform from passive content consumers into active critical thinkers. Furthermore, the role of prompt engineering is explored as an essential metacognitive practice.
Keywords: Generative AI, critical thinking, communicative competence, EFL pedagogy, sociocultural theory, cognitive scaffolding, academic integrity.	

Introduction

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается интеграция инструментов генеративного искусственного интеллекта (ИИ) — таких как большие языковые модели — в процесс преподавания английского языка как иностранного (EFL) с целью стимулирования когнитивного развития и формирования прагматической компетенции. Традиционные методики обучения английскому языку зачастую делают чрезмерный упор на механическом усвоении материала и механическом заучивании, не обеспечивая при этом достаточной подготовки студентов к участию в сложном дискурсе, опосредованном цифровыми технологиями. На примере анализа конкретных педагогических моделей — включая симуляцию дебатов с использованием ИИ, совместное создание интерактивных художественных текстов и практикумы по взаимному рецензированию работ, — в статье показано, как студенты переходят от роли пассивных потребителей контента к позиции активных субъектов, обладающих навыками критического мышления. Кроме того, рассматривается роль промпт-инжиниринга как важной метакогнитивной практики.

Ключевые слова: генеративный ИИ, критическое мышление, коммуникативная компетенция, методика преподавания английского языка, социокультурная теория, когнитивный скаффолдинг, академическая честность.

Annotatsiya

Maqolada kognitiv rivojlanish va pragmatik mahoratni rivojlantirish uchun generativ sun'iy intellekt (SI) vositalarini, masalan, katta til modellarini, xorijiy til sifatida ingliz tili (EFL) pedagogikasiga integratsiyalashuvi o'rganiladi. An'anaviy ingliz tilini o'qitish usullari ko'pincha mexanik o'zlashtirish va yodlashni haddan tashqari ta'kidlaydi, bu esa talabalarni murakkab, raqamli vositachilik asosidagi munozaraga tayyorlashda kamchilikka olib keladi. Maqolada AI asosidagi munozara simulyatsiyalari, hamkorlikdagi interaktiv badiiy adabiyot yozish va hamkorlikdagi tengdoshlar tomonidan ko'rib chiqish seminarlari kabi muayyan pedagogik modellarni tahlil qilish orqali talabalarining passiv kontent iste'molchilaridan faol tanqidiy fikrlovchilarga qanday aylanishi ko'rsatiladi. Bundan tashqari, tezkor muhandislikning roli muhim metakognitiv amaliyot sifatida o'rganiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: generativ sun'iy intellekt, tanqidiy fikrlash, kommunikativ kompetensiya, ingliz tilini o'qitish metodikasi, sotsiomadaniy teoriya, kognitiv skaffolding, akademik halollik.

The landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is undergoing a seismic paradigm shift driven by the democratization of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms. Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Google Gemini have evolved past simple grammar checkers and automated translators; they are now fully interactive, dialogic agents capable of producing contextualized, nuanced prose. Consequently, the traditional pedagogical emphasis on mechanical language acquisition — defined by structural drills, spelling worksheets, and rote memorization — has rendered itself insufficient. In an era where flawless linguistic forms can be generated with a keystroke, the true metric of a learner's capacity is no longer mere lexical retention, but rather cognitive fluency: the interconnected development of critical thinking and high-order communicative competence [2].

Critical thinking in the language classroom entails the ability to analyze information, question assumptions, evaluate textual biases, and synthesize distinct perspectives. Communicative competence, on the other hand, spans linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic domains, enabling students to employ speech acts effectively within shifting cultural and situational contexts. Generative AI stands uniquely at the crossroads of these dual educational requirements [1]. Rather than substituting human cognitive labor, AI can serve as a highly responsive dynamic partner that challenges, prompts, and scaffolds the learner's journey. This paper delineates the theoretical synthesis of AI with language learning, conceptualizes the redefinition of communication in digital spaces, and provides concrete pedagogical architectures for cultivating sophisticated thinkers and speakers in the modern EFL classroom.

To ethically and effectively integrate generative AI into EFL curricula, educators must anchor technological usage within validated learning theories. Two primary theoretical frameworks support this integration: Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning and Benjamin Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives [4]. Under Vygotsky's sociocultural framework,

language acquisition occurs through social interaction and mediated dialogue within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) — the psychological distance between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish under expert guidance. Traditionally, the instructor or a highly proficient peer fulfilled the role of the expert mediator. Generative AI alters this dynamic by establishing a 'digital ZPD.' Because an LLM can calibrate its lexical complexity, register, and feedback parameters based on specific prompt constraints, it functions as a personalized, infinitely patient conversational partner. The AI provides real-time, dynamic scaffolding, offering immediate, customized correctives and textual variations that challenge the learner just beyond their current linguistic thresholds [5]. Simultaneously, the introduction of AI necessitates an inversion of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy in language activities. In traditional classrooms, lower-order cognitive skills (LOTS) —such as remembering vocabulary and understanding basic syntax — occupy the vast majority of instructional time. Higher-order cognitive skills (HOTS), including analyzing arguments, evaluating style, and creating original syntheses, are frequently relegated to advanced stages or omitted entirely due to time constraints. Generative AI disrupts this hierarchy by automating or rapidly optimizing the LOTS layer. Students can utilize AI to clarify basic definitions, verify grammatical structures, or translate idioms instantaneously [3]. This automation liberates cognitive bandwidth, allowing students to dedicate their mental focus entirely to the HOTS layer: examining the logical coherence of AI-generated text, identifying structural biases, adjusting stylistic tones, and co-creating complex communicative scenarios.

The classic model of communicative competence, formulated by Bachman and Palmer, segmentizes language ability into organizational knowledge (grammatical and textual) and pragmatic knowledge (illocutionary and sociolinguistic). In traditional human-to-human exchanges, communication succeeds when these components are synchronized between two speakers. However, the omnipresence of generative AI alters the communicative ecosystem, adding a distinct layer: human-to-AI and AI-mediated human interaction. Pragmatic competence now requires students to understand how language choices alter automated outputs. In human communication, context is implicitly inferred through shared cultural norms and non-verbal cues. In human-AI communication, context must be explicitly encoded through linguistic precision. Miscommunication with an AI tool does not result in a confused expression; it results in a 'hallucination' or an irrelevant text output. Therefore, to achieve communicative intent, a student must develop a highly heightened sense of audience awareness, learning to modulate tone, structure, specifications, and rhetorical parameters within their prompts. Communicative competence in 2026 is inherently linked to digital literacy — the capacity to negotiate meaning through and alongside synthetic entities.

One of the most profound pedagogical misconceptions regarding generative AI is that it should be used as an absolute, flawless authority. If students perceive the AI as an infallible source of knowledge, their critical faculties atrophy, leading to automated compliance and intellectual passivity. True critical thinking is cultivated precisely when educators highlight and exploit the imperfections, biases, and structural limitations of LLMs.

Large language models are probabilistic machines predicting the next most likely sequence of tokens based on historic training data. Consequently, they are prone to “hallucinations” — the fabrication of false facts, incorrect citations, or logically flawed deductions. By explicitly

designing lessons around AI hallucinations, educators can transform the classroom into an analytical laboratory. For instance, instead of asking students to write an essay on historical events, instructors can task them with prompting an AI to write the essay, and subsequently conducting a rigorous line-by-line “fact-checking audit”. Students must verify claims using academic databases, identify logical non-sequiturs within the AI’s argumentation, and uncover underlying ideological biases or Anglo-centric cultural slants embedded in the training model. This practice moves the student from a passive recipient of information to an active evaluator of digital epistemic claims [1-2]. To move beyond theoretical abstractions, this section outlines four structured, classroom-tested pedagogical interventions that seamlessly merge generative AI with critical dialogue and communicative skill-building.

Table -1. Overview of AI-Driven Pedagogical Activities

Activity Name	Primary AI Role	Target Skills Developed
The AI Debate Arena	Devil's Advocate / Opposing Team	Argumentation, real-time rebuttal, identifying logical fallacies, refutation.
Co-Constructive Interactive Fiction	World-builder, NPC Simulator	Narrative coherence, stylistic descriptions, collaborative decision-making.
AI-Human Peer Review Workshop	Formative Critic, Structural Editor	Metacognitive editing, evaluating critique, stylistic modulation.
Professional Dilemma Simulations	Cross-cultural Employer / Client	Pragmatic appropriacy, high-stakes negotiation, strategic problem-solving.

In this model, the generative AI is deployed as a sophisticated, relentless debate opponent. Students select a controversial societal topic (e.g., The ethical implications of universal basic income or Mandatory space exploration funding) and formulate their initial stance. They prompt the AI to act as a world-class debater representing the opposing viewpoint, utilizing strict rules of engagement (e.g., parliamentary debate styles). The student inputs an argument, and the AI generates a counterargument in real-time. To succeed, the student cannot rely on pre-scripted remarks; they must actively analyze the AI’s response, scan for weaknesses or logical fallacies, formulate immediate counter-rebuttals, and express their thoughts using high-level persuasive vocabulary and complex conditional structures. This exercise forces continuous real-time negotiation of meaning and rapid cognitive processing under pressure.

Moving away from individual essay writing, this methodology tasks groups of students with co-authoring a branch-narrative text-adventure game alongside the AI. The students prompt the AI to act as a game master, designing a complex historical or professional scenario. The AI describes the setting and presents a dilemma; the student group must verbally debate their options amongst themselves, build consensus, and compose a grammatically precise, stylistically rich response outlining their next course of action. The AI processes their action, updates the narrative world, and presents a new dilemma. This architecture stimulates intensive peer-to-peer communicative interaction (during group discussions) alongside critical foresight and creative writing skills, as

students must constantly evaluate the long-term thematic and logical consequences of their narrative choices.

This activity restructures the traditional writing workshop into a tripartite collaborative feedback loop consisting of the Student Writer, the Generative AI Critic, and the Student Editor. The student writer drafts a composition and submits it to the AI with a prompt requesting formative critique based on specific rubrics (e.g., structural cohesion, argument validity, or rhetorical elegance). The AI generates a detailed critique. Crucially, the text and the AI critique are then passed to a human student editor. The human editor's task is not to fix the essay, but to evaluate the validity of the AI's criticism. The student editor must determine which of the AI's suggestions genuinely improve the text and which recommendations misunderstand the author's voice or intention. This model directly addresses metacognitive editing skills, teaching students to treat automated feedback as an opinion to be analyzed rather than a command to be blindly obeyed [3-5].

To foster advanced pragmatic competence, students engage in immersive, high-stakes professional simulations. The AI is prompted to assume the persona of an uncompromising international client, an aggrieved employee, or a rigorous venture capitalist. The student is placed in a scenario where they must negotiate a contract, manage a corporate crisis, or pitch an innovative solution. The AI is explicitly programmed to react negatively to register mismatches, ambiguous phrasing, or culturally insensitive idioms. Students must carefully construct their spoken or written discourse, ensuring that their communicative strategies align perfectly with the sociolinguistic expectations of the target persona. The activity concludes with the AI exiting the persona to provide a detailed diagnostic report on the pragmatic efficacy of the student's negotiation techniques.

Within an AI-mediated educational ecosystem, prompt engineering — the practice of structuring, refining, and optimizing inputs to elicit specific outputs from LLMs — must no longer be viewed as a technical IT skill. In the context of language acquisition, prompt engineering is a highly sophisticated metacognitive process that mirrors the cognitive processes of advanced composition and rhetorical planning. Constructing a highly effective educational prompt requires a comprehensive command over linguistic attribute. A student must systematically define: (1) Role/Persona (e.g., Act as an objective investigative journalist), (2) Contextual Boundaries (e.g., Given the current socioeconomic constraints of developing nations), (3) Task Specifics (e.g., Analyze this editorial for implicit rhetoric), and (4) Output Constraints (e.g., Organize your response using an academic, non-emotional register with bullet points). This process requires students to think deliberately about language before they even begin writing or communicating. It demands that they conceptualize the macro-structure of information, anticipate potential communicative barriers, and consciously select lexical registers. Prompt engineering is, fundamentally, the externalized, visible manifestation of a student's internal cognitive layout and rhetorical planning.

The implementation of generative AI tools is not without severe pedagogical risks. The most immediate threat is the erosion of academic integrity via automated plagiarism, where students outsource their entire writing process to AI, leading to cognitive stagnation. To mitigate this, educators must shift their assessment paradigms away from the final text product and towards the learning process. Grading metrics should be heavily weighted towards the evolutionary stages of writing: prompt logs, reflection journals, interactive screencasts, and verbal vivas where students explain the linguistic decisions and structural revisions, they made alongside the AI tool.

Furthermore, systemic issues of data privacy and algorithmic biases present ongoing ethical dilemmas. LLMs frequently reinforce mainstream socio-cultural biases, Western-centric epistemologies, and historical prejudices present in their training datasets. Educators must explicitly teach students how to identify these algorithmic biases, encouraging them to treat AI outputs with systematic skepticism. Additionally, institutions must ensure that students utilize platforms that respect data privacy laws, preventing the unauthorized harvesting of student intellectual property for commercial AI training. The overarching goal is to establish an educational ecosystem where technology remains firmly subservient to human agency and critical awareness.

Conclusion

Generative Artificial Intelligence represents neither the absolute salvation nor the inevitable destruction of modern English language education. Instead, it serves as a powerful cognitive amplifier. When properly integrated, AI tools dismantle the need for outdated, mechanical educational methods, allowing instructors to redesign classrooms into dynamic centers of intense intellectual inquiry and pragmatic negotiation. By utilizing AI as an adaptive cognitive scaffold, exploiting its inherent flaws to teach critical fact-checking, and viewing prompt engineering as a core metacognitive skill, educators can cultivate a generation of EFL learners who are not merely linguistically accurate, but are deeply analytical, culturally sensitive, and structurally proficient communicators. The future of language education belongs to those who can seamlessly navigate the interface of human intellect and artificial synthesis, utilizing the power of technology to elevate the depth of authentic human thought.

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