

CHATBOTS IN EFL TEACHING: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

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English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a crucial part of contemporary higher education, aiming to equip students with linguistic skills for academic mobility and international interaction. The ongoing digital transformation of higher education has reshaped the academic environment and fostered the systematic incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI), specifically chatbots, into English teaching practices.

In language acquisition, chatbots represent a fundamental transformation in teaching strategies that shift from teacher-led to technology-driven, learner-specific approaches. The emergence of chatbots has democratized access to language education, “enabling adaptive systems that tailor feedback and resources to individual learner needs” (Hosseini & Amirkhani, 2025, p. 683).

Chatbots have changed not only the learning process itself but also the patterns of student-teacher interaction: the teacher is no longer considered a traditional instructor, but a facilitator or coach along with computer technology (Danesi, 2024, p. 14).

Given the ever-expanding application of chatbots and the significant impact they have been making on the field of language education, the need to understand their strengths and limitations as a tool of EFL teaching becomes essential.

This article aims to examine what a chatbot is. Moreover, it seeks to analyze the advantages and disadvantages linked to the adoption of chatbots in English language teaching.

To specify and substantiate the conceptual and categorical framework of the study, as well as to compare, classify, and organize the theoretical data, this study used analysis of psychological and educational literature.

Today, a chatbot is interpreted as an AI-powered software application that enables interactions with users through text or voice functionality (Tram et al., 2024); a computer program that intends to imitate the discursive behaviour of humans (Schmidt & Strasser, 2022, p. 171); a powerful communication tool that can be an effective way to engage and support students in their studies (Serman et al., 2024, p. 36); a computer program that simulates real-world conversations, offering practice opportunities beyond traditional classrooms (Hosseini & Amirkhani, 2025, p. 684); a software application powered by AI that can assist English teachers in developing students’ language proficiency by providing interactive practice, immediate feedback, and personalized learning support (Hosseini & Amirkhani, 2025, pp. 683-686).

As implied by the definitions above, the major strength of chatbots is their ability to instantly adjust to student interactions and teacher needs. In Danesi’s (2024, pp. 17-

18) opinion, of the advantageous functions that are now offered by chatbots, the following are particularly significant to EFL teaching:

- *New information.* Depending on what is needed for a course of study, chatbots can either introduce or supplement new information related to the English language.

- *Differentiated instruction.* Students might come from different backgrounds; moreover, their learning styles may vary. Chatbots can instantly adjust to them by analysing both the various prompts and the students' actual performance in particular English language areas. Based on the analysis, chatbots can produce individualized instruction and exercise materials for learners of different proficiency levels.

- *Materials.* With the suitable prompts and training on real course materials, chatbots can create tests, quizzes, and other classroom activities.

- *Personalized teaching.* As previously stated, chatbots can provide resources and exercises that are tailored to individual needs and proficiency levels of every student.

- *Expanded exposure.* Due to their ability to navigate relevant websites and platforms on the Internet, chatbots like ChatGPT can give students access to a wide range of learning resources in the English language, including those that incorporate authentic language use and real-life scenarios.

- *Immediate feedback.* Students receive instant feedback on their English, including the errors they make, along with recommendations for corrections and an explanation of the nature of errors.

- *Motivation.* A chatbot in the classroom can contribute to a friendly, motivating learning atmosphere where students can feel safe and unconcerned about losing face (Danesi, 2024, p. 18). Moreover, students who are particularly nervous and eager to avoid face-to-face interaction in a real-life classroom may benefit from engaging in written or spoken communication with a chatbot (Schmidt & Strasser, 2022, p. 171).

Despite their many benefits, there are also certain limitations to chatbots. Concerning EFL teaching, the following stand out as especially relevant:

- *Threats to academic integrity.* Chatbots may facilitate academic dishonesty. Students can misuse them to complete home assignments without meaningful engagement in the learning process.

- *Inaccurate or incorrect responses.* Chatbots may generate incorrect information without being “aware” of the error.

- *AI hallucinations.* Chatbots may generate invented information commonly referred to as “hallucinations”. These are confident, plausible-sounding but false and, thus, misleading responses, often caused by insufficient training data.

- *Limitations in assessment and grading.* “Student work that involves subjective evaluation (such as creativity, style, etc.) might not be suitable for the AI system to guide and effectuate” (Danesi, 2024, p. 19).

○ *Need for human supervision.* Due to potential inaccuracies and hallucinations, it is crucial to maintain a human teacher in the EFL classroom. “Unlike AI, only humans can interpret content, not just generate it” (Danesi, 2024, p. 19). Students with limited knowledge of the foreign language may find chatbot hallucinations convincing, as its response is coherent and confident-sounding.

Being adaptive, interactive tools, chatbots can promote language acquisition through immediate feedback, differentiated instruction, personalized teaching, expanded exposure to new information, and authentic learning materials. However, their effective integration depends on careful human supervision and awareness of their limitations. Balancing the strengths and limitations of chatbots is essential for maximizing learning outcomes.

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