



AI in Foreign Language Teaching: Benefits, Risks, and Innovative Classroom Approaches

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence has rapidly become part of foreign language education, especially through chatbots, automated feedback systems, adaptive platforms, and content-generation tools. This article examines how AI is reshaping foreign language teaching by focusing on three dimensions: pedagogical opportunities, educational risks, and classroom strategies for responsible integration. Using an integrative review of recent international literature and policy documents, the article synthesizes current findings on AI-supported language learning. The analysis shows that AI can expand opportunities for individualized practice, immediate feedback, speaking rehearsal, writing support, and teacher productivity. At the same time, significant risks remain, including overreliance on machine-generated content, reduced critical thinking, academic integrity concerns, bias, privacy risks, and unequal access. The article argues that AI should function neither as a replacement for the teacher nor as an unrestricted shortcut for learners. Instead, it should be used as a guided pedagogical assistant within clearly structured tasks, ethical rules, and authentic assessment systems. Practical classroom strategies are proposed, including prompt literacy instruction, process-based writing, supervised speaking tasks, reflective AI-use logs, and assessment redesign. The article concludes that the future of foreign language teaching in the age of AI depends on teacher agency, AI literacy, and a human-centered pedagogy that keeps communication, intercultural competence, and learner development at the center.

Key words: artificial intelligence, foreign language teaching, language learning, generative AI, classroom strategies, assessment

Introduction

The rapid spread of generative artificial intelligence has created a new stage in foreign language teaching. Tools such as ChatGPT, AI chatbots, grammar assistants, speech-based applications, and adaptive learning systems are no longer peripheral technologies; they are becoming part of everyday educational practice. International organizations have emphasized both the promise and the risks of this transition. UNESCO (2023) argues that generative AI can support teaching and learning, but only within a human-centered and ethically regulated framework. Likewise, the OECD (2026) notes that generative AI may function as a tutor, partner, and assistant, yet it may also improve performance without producing genuine learning when students merely outsource cognitive work to the tool.

In foreign language education, AI is especially influential because language learning depends on interaction, feedback, repetition, and access to meaningful input. Recent reviews show rapid growth in studies on generative AI and language education, especially in higher education and English-language contexts (Li et al., 2025). Research on AI-driven chatbots also suggests benefits for practice, motivation, and personalized interaction in second language learning (Wiboolyasarini et al., 2025). However, the same literature also highlights recurring concerns about overdependence, shallow learning, assessment validity, and the weakening of teacher and learner agency.

This article addresses the following research question: How can foreign language teachers use AI productively while reducing pedagogical, ethical, and assessment-related risks? The aim is to examine the main opportunities and risks of AI in foreign language teaching and to propose practical classroom strategies for its responsible integration.

Methods

This article uses an integrative literature review design. The analysis is based on recent policy documents and peer-reviewed studies published between 2023 and 2026 on AI in education, language learning, language assessment, AI chatbots, and AI-supported feedback. Priority was given to authoritative institutional reports and systematic or empirical studies that directly addressed language teaching and learning.

The reviewed material included UNESCO guidance on generative AI in education, OECD reports on effective and governed use of generative AI, systematic reviews of empirical research in language learning and teaching, a systematic review of AI-driven chatbots in second language education, a systematic review of language assessment in the age of generative AI, and one empirical study on AI-assisted feedback in EFL writing. These sources were selected because together they cover policy, pedagogy, classroom practice, teacher roles, and assessment. The materials were coded thematically under three categories: opportunities, risks, and classroom strategies.

Results

The review identified five major opportunities associated with AI in foreign language teaching. First, AI increases access to personalized and immediate feedback. Writing assistants and generative tools can help learners notice grammatical errors, improve vocabulary choice, revise sentence structure, and receive suggestions at the moment of writing. In Mekheimer's (2025) study, postgraduate EFL students using AI-assisted feedback outperformed a control group on post-test writing measures and showed more frequent revision behavior.

Second, AI creates more opportunities for speaking rehearsal and interaction. Chatbots can simulate dialogue, provide low-stress conversation practice, and allow repeated attempts without social embarrassment. According to Wiboolyasarini et al. (2025), AI-driven chatbots are valuable because they support adaptive learning experiences and continuous L2 practice. This is especially useful in contexts where classroom speaking time is limited.

Third, AI supports learner autonomy. Students can use AI tools to generate examples, simplify difficult texts, create vocabulary lists, rehearse pronunciation, or ask metalinguistic questions outside class time. Recent reviews of language learning and teaching research show that much of the literature presents generative AI as a flexible support tool for self-regulated learning, feedback, and content generation (Li et al., 2025).

Fourth, AI can strengthen teacher productivity. Teachers may use AI to draft lesson prompts, create differentiated materials, generate practice questions, adapt texts to different proficiency levels, and prepare formative feedback more efficiently. OECD work suggests that generative AI can support educational work when it is guided by explicit pedagogical principles rather than used as an end in itself.

Fifth, AI may contribute to more inclusive instruction when used carefully. Students with different learning speeds or linguistic backgrounds may benefit from repeated explanations, multimodal support, and scaffolded practice. UNESCO's guidance frames this potential within a broader commitment to inclusion, equity, and linguistic and cultural diversity. At the same time, the review identified five major risks. The first is false mastery and cognitive outsourcing. When students rely on AI to generate answers instead of processing language themselves, apparent performance may increase while actual learning remains weak. OECD (2026) explicitly warns that outsourcing tasks to generative AI can enhance performance without producing real learning gains.

The second risk is academic integrity and assessment instability. Traditional take-home writing tasks, unsupervised assignments, and product-only assessment are increasingly vulnerable in the age of generative AI. Chuang and Yan (2025), in a systematic review of 77 studies, show that AI challenges the reliability, validity, fairness, and practicality of language assessment across contexts.

The third risk is bias, privacy, and data security. UNESCO (2023) highlights the need for regulation, age-appropriate use, and data protection. It also notes that educational institutions have been adopting AI faster than policy frameworks have developed. UNESCO reported that, in a 2023 global survey, fewer than 10% of schools and universities had institutional policies or formal guidance for generative AI use.

The fourth risk is inequality of access. AI may widen the gap between learners who have stable internet access, paid tools, and strong digital literacy, and those who do not. OECD's governance analysis also suggests that policy

responses remain uneven across jurisdictions; as of early 2024, among 18 surveyed countries and jurisdictions, none had issued a specific regulation on generative AI in education, while several were relying on non-binding guidance instead. The fifth risk is teacher deskilling and reduced pedagogical agency. If teachers simply accept AI outputs without critical review, lesson quality, cultural appropriateness, and methodological coherence may suffer. AI-generated language may be fluent but pedagogically unsuitable, factually weak, or culturally shallow. This is particularly problematic in foreign language teaching, where contextual nuance, intercultural meaning, and interactional intent matter as much as accuracy.

Discussion

The findings suggest that AI should not be understood through a simple binary of acceptance or rejection. In foreign language teaching, the more productive question is not whether AI should be used, but how, when, and for what pedagogical purpose it should be used. The evidence indicates that AI is most beneficial when it supplements language learning processes rather than replaces them.

A central implication is that teachers must shift from being the sole source of linguistic input to becoming designers of learning environments. In such environments, AI can provide additional practice, but teachers remain responsible for goal-setting, task design, feedback interpretation, ethical norms, and assessment decisions. This aligns with UNESCO's human-centered approach and with OECD's argument that pedagogical design is the condition under which AI becomes educationally useful.

Another key implication concerns assessment redesign. In AI-rich classrooms, foreign language assessment should move away from product-only tasks that can be easily outsourced and toward process-based, contextualized, and interactive forms of assessment. Students may be asked to submit drafts, revision histories, reflection notes, oral defenses, classroom writing samples, or prompt logs showing how AI was used. Chuang and Yan (2025) argue that questions of validity, fairness, and practicality must guide such redesign.

Based on the reviewed literature, several classroom strategies can help integrate AI responsibly in foreign language teaching. First, teachers should teach AI literacy and prompt literacy explicitly. Students need to learn how prompts shape outputs, how to verify information, how to identify hallucinations or biased language, and how to use AI critically rather than passively. Second, teachers should adopt process-oriented writing pedagogy. Students can use AI for brainstorming or surface-level revision, but they should also submit outlines, first drafts, peer comments, and reflective notes explaining what changes were made and why. Third, teachers should use AI for guided speaking practice, not as a substitute for human communication. Chatbots may support rehearsal, but classroom interaction, spontaneous discussion, and teacher-led communicative tasks remain essential. Fourth, institutions should establish clear ethical use policies. Students should know which uses of AI are permitted, restricted, or prohibited in each task. Transparency is more effective than vague prohibition. Fifth, teachers should practice critical mediation of AI-generated content. Any AI-produced example, dialogue, feedback comment, or cultural explanation should be reviewed for linguistic accuracy, appropriateness, level suitability, and intercultural relevance. These strategies suggest a balanced approach: AI can enrich foreign language learning when embedded in reflective, supervised, and pedagogically meaningful practice. Uncritical adoption, by contrast, risks producing fluent outputs without durable competence.

Conclusion

AI is transforming foreign language teaching by expanding access to feedback, practice, personalization, and content support. At the same time, it creates serious challenges related to shallow learning, academic integrity, privacy, equity, and assessment validity. The evidence reviewed in this article supports a balanced conclusion: AI is most effective when treated as a pedagogical assistant under teacher guidance, not as a replacement for human teaching or learner effort. The future of foreign language education in the age of AI depends on three conditions: teacher agency, AI literacy, and assessment reform. Teachers must remain active interpreters and designers of learning; students must learn to use AI responsibly and critically; and institutions must redesign assessment to value process, authenticity, and demonstrated competence. In this way, AI can support rather than distort the fundamental goals of foreign language teaching: communication, reflection, intercultural understanding, and genuine language development.

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