

The Application of Generative AI in English Learning: Opportunities, Ethical Risks and Standardization Paths

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Abstract: *Driven by the digital wave, generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI), as a cutting-edge branch in the field of artificial intelligence, has brought revolutionary changes to English learning with its powerful capabilities in content generation, natural language interaction and intelligent analysis, effectively addressing many dilemmas in traditional English learning. Based on the technical characteristics of generative AI and combined with the essential needs of English learning, this paper systematically sorts out its application opportunities in personalized learning guidance, learning resource supply, immersive interactive scenario construction and learning efficiency improvement; deeply analyzes the potential ethical risks in its application process, including academic misconduct, excessive technological dependence, privacy disclosure and uneven quality of generated content; and puts forward targeted standardization paths from four subjects: learners, educators, technology providers and educational management departments. The purpose is to promote the in-depth integration of generative AI and English learning, realize the organic unity of technological innovation and educational ethics, and provide theoretical support and practical reference for the healthy and orderly application of generative AI in English learning.*

Keywords: Generative AI, English Learning, Application Opportunities, Ethical Risks, Standardization Paths.

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, generative AI (GenAI), represented by tools such as ChatGPT, has become a transformative force in education, especially in English learning. Its unique capacity to generate contextually appropriate language, provide real-time interactive feedback, and adapt to individual learning needs has reshaped traditional English teaching and learning models, bringing unprecedented opportunities for personalized learning and pedagogical innovation. In a world where technology continuously transforms various aspects of society, education serves as a key field for innovation, ready to employ AI to enhance teaching and learning experiences (Hu, 2022). Nevertheless, the extensive integration of GenAI into English learning is accompanied by a series of ethical dilemmas, technical uncertainties, and standardization deficits, which have attracted widespread attention from both academia and educational practitioners.

The application of GenAI in English learning covers multiple educational levels and scenarios: from ChatGPT use in universities to adaptive games in K–12 education, its scope is expanding, yet so too are the associated ethical risks. In AI-supported teaching and assessment, particularly within the generative AI context, recent studies have raised concerns regarding bias, opacity, data privacy, and the decline of academic integrity (Cotton et al., 2023; Zeb et al., 2024). In addition, issues of equity and accessibility have emerged, as AI-driven educational initiatives may exacerbate existing inequalities if not properly designed and implemented (Brown et al., 2020).

For English learners, algorithmic opacity may result in unbalanced learning guidance, while weakened academic integrity may undermine the core values of language learning—-independent thinking and language application abilities. For educators, the lack of transparency in

algorithmic logic makes it difficult to effectively evaluate the rationality and appropriateness of GenAI tools, thus presenting challenges to the quality of English teaching.

Against this backdrop, three core issues have become the focus of academic exploration and practical practice in the integration of GenAI and English learning. Ethical challenges are contemplated, which address privacy, algorithmic biases and technological trust; regulatory frameworks, focused on the development of adaptive and collaborative policies; and quality of education, focused on how GenAI can improve learning personalization and pedagogical efficiency (García-López & Trujillo-Liñán, 2025, p. X). These three aspects are interrelated and mutually restrictive: ethical challenges are the premise of standardization, regulatory frameworks are the guarantee of ethical practice, and the improvement of educational quality is the ultimate goal of GenAI application in English learning.

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In summary, the application of GenAI in English learning is a double-edged sword: it brings new opportunities for breaking through the limitations of traditional English teaching,

improving learning efficiency, and realizing personalized learning, but it also poses severe ethical risks and standardization challenges. In the context of the increasing integration of GenAI and education, it is urgent to systematically explore the opportunities brought by GenAI in English learning, deeply analyze its potential ethical risks, and construct scientific and feasible standardization paths. This study focuses on these three core dimensions, draws on relevant research results, and combines the practical characteristics of English learning, aiming to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for the healthy, standardized, and sustainable development of GenAI application in English learning.

2. Application of Generative AI in English Learning

With its unique advantages in content generation, natural language interaction and intelligent analysis, generative AI has broken the time and space limitations and mode constraints of traditional English learning, bringing all-round and in-depth changes to English learning. Its application opportunities are mainly reflected in four dimensions: personalized learning, resource supply, interactive experience and learning efficiency. These dimensions support and promote each other, jointly promoting the improvement of English learning quality. AI's capacity to enable personalised learning experiences represents one of its most prominent benefits (Ofosu-Asare, 2026).

2.1 Personalized Learning Guidance

Personalized learning is the core key to solving the "one-size-fits-all" dilemma of traditional English learning, and it is also one of the most prominent application advantages of generative AI. Generative AI can conduct comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of learners' learning behaviors and learning data through intelligent algorithms, accurately capture learners' learning foundations, learning habits, weak links and learning needs, and then formulate tailor-made learning plans for learners, realizing precise personalized learning guidance of "one plan for one person". Different from traditional English learning where teachers can hardly take into account the needs of every learner, generative AI can provide personalized support for learners 24 hours a day, carrying out targeted training for the weaknesses of different learners.

For example, for learners with weak English foundations and insufficient vocabulary, generative AI can formulate a gradual vocabulary accumulation plan according to their current vocabulary level, generate relevant vocabulary learning materials combined with their interests, and help learners deepen their memory through situational association, example expansion and other methods; for learners who are not proficient in grammar, AI can accurately identify the grammar points they are prone to make mistakes, help learners sort out grammar logic and master grammar rules through special exercises, error analysis, real-time error correction and other methods; for learners with weak oral expression ability, AI can simulate real oral communication scenarios, adjust the communication difficulty according to the learners' oral level, and timely correct pronunciation,

intonation, expression logic and other problems, helping learners overcome the fear of oral expression and improve the fluency and accuracy of oral expression; for learners whose writing ability needs to be improved, AI can provide real-time writing guidance, giving comprehensive revision suggestions from topic selection, theme setting, structure arrangement to language expression, helping learners optimize writing content and improve writing level. This precise personalized guidance can not only effectively make up for the shortcomings of traditional English learning, but also fully mobilize learners' learning enthusiasm, allowing learners to improve their learning effect at a learning rhythm suitable for themselves.

2.2 Diversified Learning Resources

Learning resources are the foundation of English learning. The singleness and outdatedness of traditional English learning resources have seriously restricted learners' learning experience and learning effect. With its powerful content generation capability, generative AI can break the limitations of traditional learning resources, provide learners with diversified, personalized and scenario-based English learning resources, and meet the learning needs of different learners in different learning stages and different learning scenarios. Compared with traditional learning resources, the learning resources generated by generative AI have the characteristics of flexibility, timeliness and pertinence, which can be adjusted and updated in real time according to the needs of learners, making learning resources truly serve the learning process of learners.

In terms of resource types, generative AI can generate various types of learning resources such as texts, audio and video materials, dialogue scripts and simulation scenarios, covering all links of English learning: in terms of vocabulary and grammar learning, it can generate targeted exercises, example sentences, grammar analysis and other materials; in terms of listening learning, it can generate listening materials with different accents and speeds, covering various scenarios such as daily conversations, news reports and academic lectures; in terms of oral learning, it can generate simulated dialogue scenarios, such as daily communication, business negotiations and academic exchanges, allowing learners to improve their oral expression ability in simulated scenarios; in terms of reading learning, it can generate reading materials of different difficulties and themes according to the learners' reading level, including literary works, news information and academic papers, helping learners broaden their reading horizons and improve their reading ability; in terms of writing learning, it can generate writing models of different types and themes, providing reference for learners.

In addition, generative AI can also optimize and adjust learning resources in real time according to the learners' learning progress and learning needs. For example, when the learners' vocabulary increases, AI will automatically increase the difficulty of learning resources; when the learners are interested in a certain theme, AI will generate relevant extended resources to help learners deepen their learning. This diversified and personalized resource supply not only enriches the learning content of learners, but also allows learners to choose appropriate learning resources according to

their own interests and needs, improving the initiative and interest of learning.

2.3 Immersive Learning Scenarios

The essence of English learning is a language communication activity, and real interactive scenarios are the key to improving comprehensive English ability. In traditional English learning, due to the lack of real communication scenarios and interactive objects, learners can only conduct passive language input, making it difficult to achieve effective language output, which in turn leads to the widespread existence of “dumb English”. With its powerful natural language interaction capability, generative AI can simulate real English communication scenarios, build an immersive interactive learning environment for learners, and allow learners to improve their comprehensive language ability in interactive communication.

Different from traditional human-computer interaction, generative AI can achieve natural and fluent language dialogue, understand learners’ language expression and learning needs, and give timely responses and feedback, making learners feel a real communication experience. For example, learners can have daily English conversations with AI, simulating real scenarios such as shopping, asking for directions and job hunting. In the process of dialogue, AI will timely correct pronunciation, intonation, grammar and other problems according to the learners’ expression, helping learners improve the accuracy and fluency of oral expression; learners can consult AI about questions in English learning, whether it is vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns or cultural background, AI can give detailed and accurate answers, helping learners solve the key and difficult points in learning in a timely manner; learners can also role-play with AI, simulating different communication scenarios, to improve their language application ability and cross-cultural communication ability.

This immersive interactive learning scenario can not only effectively improve the status of “dumb English”, but also enhance learners’ learning confidence and enthusiasm, allowing learners to improve their comprehensive English ability in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. At the same time, the real-time feedback in the interaction process can help learners find their own shortcomings in a timely manner, adjust their learning strategies, and improve their learning effect.

2.4 Improved Learning Efficiency

The traditional English learning mode is greatly restricted by time and space. Learners often need to study at a fixed time and place, resulting in low learning efficiency. The application of generative AI has broken the limitations of time and space, providing learners with a flexible and convenient learning method, and comprehensively improving the efficiency of English learning. On the one hand, most generative AI tools have the advantage of low cost or even free use, which can greatly reduce the learning cost of learners, allowing more learners to enjoy high-quality English learning resources and guidance, and avoiding the high expenses such as hiring tutors and participating in training courses in

traditional English learning.

On the other hand, generative AI can provide 24-hour uninterrupted learning assistance for learners. Learners can carry out learning activities anytime and anywhere according to their own time arrangement. Whether at home, at school or on the way out, they can use generative AI tools for English learning through mobile phones, computers and other devices, getting rid of the limitations of time and space. In addition, generative AI can also help learners save learning time and improve learning efficiency. For example, AI can quickly sort out the key and difficult points of learning, helping learners avoid wasting time on irrelevant content; it can automatically adjust the learning plan according to the learners’ learning progress, ensuring that learners can make efficient use of learning time; it can timely correct learners’ mistakes, helping learners make up for their shortcomings in a timely manner and avoid the accumulation of mistakes. At the same time, generative AI can also provide learning suggestions and learning strategies for learners through intelligent analysis, helping learners optimize their learning methods and improve their learning efficiency.

3. Ethical Risks of Generative AI in English Learning

While generative AI brings many opportunities for English learning, its application process also hides a series of ethical risks. These ethical risks stem from the limitations of the technology itself, the irregularity of the application process, and the behavioral deviations of multiple subjects such as learners, educators and technology providers. They may not only affect the learning quality and physical and mental health of learners, but also impact the traditional educational ethics system, posing potential threats to the healthy development of English education. Combined with the application scenarios of generative AI in English learning, its ethical risks are mainly concentrated in four aspects: academic misconduct, excessive technological dependence, privacy disclosure and uneven quality of generated content.

3.1 Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is the core ethical criterion of education and the moral bottom line that learners must adhere to in the process of growth. The convenience and intelligence of generative AI, while providing learning assistance for learners, also provide convenient conditions for the occurrence of academic misconduct, triggering serious academic misconduct risks. In the process of English learning, some learners lack a correct view of learning and academic integrity, excessively rely on generative AI to complete learning tasks, and regard AI as a tool to avoid learning and cope with tasks, rather than a means to assist learning.

For example, in English writing learning, some learners directly use generative AI to generate complete essays, papers and other assignments without any independent thinking and revision, and directly submit the content generated by AI as their own learning achievements; in oral English practice, some learners directly recite the dialogue scripts generated by AI without conducting real oral expression practice; in English translation learning, some learners directly use AI for

translation without trying independent translation and understanding, resulting in the failure to improve their own translation ability. This behavior of excessively relying on generative AI to complete learning tasks not only violates the principle of academic integrity, but also is not conducive to the cultivation of learners' independent thinking ability, language expression ability and autonomous learning ability. It will also lead to learners losing their learning initiative and enthusiasm, falling into the dilemma of "passive learning", and ultimately affecting the learning effect and the improvement of their own literacy. In addition, such academic misconduct will also damage the fairness of education and affect the normal operation of the educational order.

3.2 Excessive Technological Dependence

Autonomous learning ability is the core ability of English learning and the foundation for learners' lifelong learning and development. The intelligence and convenience of generative AI are likely to lead to learners' excessive dependence on technology, thereby weakening their autonomous learning ability, which is one of the important ethical risks of generative AI in English learning. In the process of English learning, some learners are used to relying on generative AI to solve all learning problems. When encountering any language problems, they do not try to think and solve them independently, but directly ask AI for help. Over time, their independent thinking ability, memory ability and language expression ability will gradually degenerate, and even lose their autonomous learning ability.

For example, in vocabulary learning, some learners do not try to memorize vocabulary independently, but directly rely on the vocabulary explanations and memory methods provided by AI, resulting in slow vocabulary accumulation and inability to use vocabulary flexibly; in grammar learning, some learners do not try to understand grammar rules, but directly rely on AI for grammar error correction, resulting in inability to master grammar knowledge proficiently and frequent grammar errors in practical application; in writing and oral expression, some learners do not try to organize language independently, but directly rely on AI to generate content, resulting in the failure to improve their own language expression ability, and even unable to write complete English sentences and conduct simple English conversations independently. This excessive technological dependence not only violates the essential purpose of English learning, but also affects the lifelong development of learners, making them unable to carry out English learning independently and difficult to adapt to the needs of social development without the assistance of AI.

3.3 Privacy Breaches

Privacy protection is a basic right of citizens and an important part of educational ethics. In the process of applying generative AI to English learning, learners often need to input a lot of personal information and learning data into the AI system. These information and data include learners' names, ages, learning levels, learning habits, learning records, assignment contents, test scores and other sensitive information. If there are no perfect privacy protection

measures, it is very easy to trigger privacy disclosure risks and infringe on learners' legitimate rights and interests.

At present, some generative AI technology providers lack a perfect data security protection system, and have ineffective management and protection of learners' personal information and learning data, with problems such as irregular data collection, unsafe storage and opaque use. For example, some AI tools arbitrarily collect learners' personal information and learning data without the consent of learners; some technology providers sell learners' personal information and learning data to third parties for commercial interests, leading to the leakage and abuse of learners' privacy information; some AI systems have security vulnerabilities, which are easy to be attacked by hackers, leading to the theft of learners' personal information and learning data. In addition, some educators lack privacy protection awareness when using generative AI tools to carry out teaching activities, and arbitrarily disclose learners' personal information and learning data, which will also trigger privacy disclosure risks. This kind of privacy disclosure will not only infringe on learners' legitimate rights and interests, but also bring psychological distress to learners, affecting their learning enthusiasm and confidence.

3.4 Unstability of the Content Quality

At present, generative AI technology is not yet fully mature, and the content generated by it has the problem of uneven quality, which is easy to mislead learners' cognitive development. This is also one of the important ethical risks of generative AI in English learning. The content generation of generative AI depends on algorithm models and training data. Due to the limitations of algorithm models and the imperfection of training data, the English learning content generated by it may have errors, biases or inappropriate information, which is mainly reflected in three aspects: first, language expression errors, for example, the generated English sentences have grammatical errors, improper word use, inappropriate expression and other problems, which are easy to mislead learners to form wrong language cognition; second, knowledge content errors, for example, the explained English vocabulary, grammar, cultural background and other knowledge are inaccurate or even wrong, affecting the learning effect of learners; third, value deviations, some generated content may involve inappropriate values, cultural biases or bad information, which have a negative impact on the physical and mental health and cognitive development of learners.

Since most English learners (especially middle school students and college students) have limited language ability, it is difficult for them to accurately identify the errors and deviations in the generated content, and they are easy to accept the wrong information generated by AI, thus forming wrong language cognition and learning habits, affecting their English learning effect and the improvement of comprehensive literacy. In addition, the content generated by generative AI is often lack of innovation and diversity. Long-term use may solidify learners' thinking mode and limit the development of learners' innovation ability and thinking ability.

4. Standardization Paths for Mitigating Ethical Risks

To address the ethical risks of generative AI in English learning, we need to adhere to the principle of “equal emphasis on technological innovation and ethical norms”, and build a multi-dimensional and all-round standardization system from four subjects: learners, educators, technology providers and educational management departments. We should strengthen guidance, strengthen supervision, improve protection, promote the healthy and orderly application of generative AI in English learning, and realize the organic unity of technological innovation and educational ethics. AI should not displace educational values but be governed by them, centring equity, autonomy, and human dignity (Ofosu-Asare, 2026).

4.1 Guidance of Concept Cognition

Learners are the direct users of generative AI in English learning, and their view of learning and technology directly affects the application effect of AI and the generation of ethical risks. Therefore, strengthening the educational guidance for learners and helping them establish a correct view of learning and technology is the foundation for addressing ethical risks. On the one hand, strengthen academic integrity education, popularize the important significance of academic integrity to learners through classroom teaching, thematic lectures, case analysis and other forms, clarify the harm of academic misconduct, guide learners to adhere to the bottom line of academic integrity, consciously resist the behavior of excessively relying on AI to complete learning tasks, and establish a learning view of “independent learning and honest learning”.

On the other hand, strengthen the guidance on technology application, help learners correctly understand the role of generative AI, clarify that AI is a tool to assist learning, not a substitute for independent learning, and guide learners to establish a correct view of technology. Educators can teach learners the methods of reasonably using generative AI through special training, practical guidance and other forms, guide learners to use AI to assist in solving key and difficult points in learning on the basis of independent thinking and practice, improve learning effect, and avoid excessive dependence on technology. At the same time, cultivate learners' discrimination ability, guide them to learn to identify the errors and deviations in the content generated by generative AI, consciously resist the misleading of wrong information, and form the ability of independent thinking and independent judgment.

4.2 Enhancement of Professional Competence

Educators are the guides and supervisors of the application of generative AI in English learning, and their professional quality and sense of responsibility directly affect the standardization of AI application and the prevention and control effect of ethical risks. Therefore, improving the quality of educators and strengthening their responsibility of teaching guidance and supervision is the key to addressing ethical risks. On the one hand, strengthen the technical training for educators, help them master the technical

characteristics, application methods and ethical risks of generative AI, improve their ability to carry out teaching activities using AI, and enable them to reasonably design teaching activities according to teaching needs and learners' actual situations, give full play to the advantages of AI, and avoid ethical risks.

On the other hand, strengthen the supervision responsibility of educators. Educators should strengthen the supervision of learners' use of generative AI, timely find and correct learners' irregular use behaviors, and guide learners to use AI reasonably. In the teaching process, educators should pay attention to cultivating learners' autonomous learning ability and independent thinking ability, design targeted learning tasks, encourage learners to think independently and practice actively, and avoid excessive dependence on AI. At the same time, educators should strengthen the cultivation of their own ethical literacy, establish a correct view of educational ethics, adhere to the bottom line of educational ethics when using AI to carry out teaching activities, protect learners' privacy information, and avoid disclosing learners' personal information and learning data.

4.3 Advancement of Technological R&D and Management

Technology providers are the main body of generative AI technology R&D and application, and their technology R&D level and management ability directly determine the quality of AI application and the level of ethical risks. Therefore, improving technology R&D and management, and enhancing the quality of generated content and privacy protection level is the core of addressing ethical risks. On the one hand, strengthen technology R&D. Technology providers should continuously optimize the algorithm models of generative AI, improve training data, and enhance the accuracy, authenticity and appropriateness of generated content, reducing errors and deviations in generated content. Establish a strict content review mechanism to comprehensively review and screen the English learning content generated by AI, ensure the quality and standardization of content, and avoid wrong information and inappropriate content misleading learners.

On the other hand, strengthen privacy protection management. Technology providers should establish a perfect data security protection system, standardize the processes of data collection, storage, use and destruction, and ensure the security of learners' personal information and learning data. When collecting learners' data, clearly inform learners of the scope, purpose and use of data collection, and collect data only after obtaining the consent of learners; when storing data, take security measures such as encryption and backup to prevent data leakage, theft and abuse; when using data, strictly abide by relevant laws, regulations and ethical norms, and shall not arbitrarily sell learners' data to third parties. At the same time, technology providers should strengthen the security maintenance of AI systems, timely repair security vulnerabilities, and improve the security and stability of the systems.

4.4 Improvement of Supervision and Policy

Educational management departments are the main

supervision body for the application of generative AI in English learning. Improving the supervision system and policy guarantee is an important guarantee for addressing ethical risks and promoting the standardized application of AI. On the one hand, formulate relevant policies and regulations, clarify the application scope, standards and ethical norms of generative AI in English learning, define the rights and obligations of various subjects such as learners, educators and technology providers, standardize the behaviors of various subjects, and provide clear policy guidance for the application of AI. For example, formulate the management measures for the application of generative AI in English education, clarify the quality standards of AI-generated content, privacy protection requirements and academic integrity norms, and severely crack down on academic misconduct and privacy disclosure.

On the other hand, establish and improve the supervision mechanism. Educational management departments should strengthen the supervision of the application of generative AI in English learning, conduct regular inspections and evaluations, and timely find and resolve ethical risks in the application process. Establish a multi-subject supervision mechanism, absorb educators, learners, parents and all sectors of society to participate in supervision, form a joint supervision force, and ensure that the application of AI conforms to educational ethics and social morality. At the same time, strengthen policy publicity and guidance, popularize the ethical knowledge and application norms of generative AI, improve the ethical awareness and sense of responsibility of various subjects, and create a healthy, orderly and ethical AI application environment. In addition, educational management departments can also increase investment in research on the integration of AI and English education, promote relevant theoretical research and practical exploration, and provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the standardized application of AI.

5. Conclusion

As a cutting-edge technology in the digital era, generative AI has brought all-round opportunities for English learning. Its advantages in personalized learning guidance, learning resource supply, interactive scenario construction and learning efficiency improvement have effectively solved many dilemmas in traditional English learning, promoted the transformation and upgrading of English learning mode, and injected new vitality into the innovative development of English education. However, we must also clearly realize that the application of generative AI in English learning is not without risks. Its potential ethical risks in academic integrity, technological dependence, privacy protection and content quality may not only affect the learning quality and physical and mental health of learners, but also impact the traditional educational ethics system, posing potential threats to the healthy development of English education. Through proactive and collaborative efforts to address these challenges, the transformative potential of AI can be harnessed to create more inclusive, equitable, and effective learning environments for all learners.

To address the ethical risks of generative AI in English learning, it is necessary for learners, educators, technology

providers and educational management departments to work together and perform their respective duties: learners should establish a correct view of learning and technology, consciously adhere to the bottom line of academic integrity, use AI reasonably, and improve their autonomous learning ability; educators should improve their professional quality and ethical literacy, strengthen teaching guidance and supervision responsibilities, guide learners to use AI correctly, and cultivate their independent thinking ability; technology providers should strengthen technology R&D and management, improve the quality of generated content and privacy protection level, and ensure the safe and standardized application of AI; educational management departments should improve the supervision system and policy guarantee, strengthen supervision, and create a healthy and orderly application environment. Only by adhering to the equal emphasis on technological innovation and ethical norms and realizing the joint efforts of all subjects can we give full play to the positive role of generative AI in English learning, effectively avoid ethical risks, promote the in-depth integration of generative AI and English learning, and realize the high-quality development of English education. In the future, with the continuous maturity of generative AI technology and the deepening of its application, we also need to continuously carry out relevant theoretical research and practical exploration, constantly improve ethical norms and supervision systems, so that generative AI can truly serve English learning, help learners improve their comprehensive English ability, and cultivate compound talents who meet the needs of the times.

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