



Using ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini to Identify Research Directions in the area of English Communication

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Abstract

The current study was carried out to use ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini to identify future research directions. Research articles that were most related to English communication were selected from ScienceDirect. Titles, abstracts, and keywords of the research articles were entered into the chat boxes of ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini. The AI technologies were requested to provide one consolidated set of future research directions across the studies. The request yielded three sets of responses. Then ChatGPT was asked again to analyze the thematic patterns emerging across the three sets of recommendations. The results suggested eight areas of research, including (1) expansion across contexts, populations, and disciplines; (2) methodological innovation and triangulation; (3) longitudinal and developmental perspectives; (4) affective and psychological dimensions; (5) integration of artificial intelligence in language learning; (6) curriculum alignment and workplace relevance; (7) corpus and discourse-based research; and 8) informal learning and digital ecosystems. The suggestions appeared to be a robust alignment with scholarly trends in contemporary research. However, the suggestions were rather too general, and researchers need to investigate more specific, interesting research topics before research conduction. Identifying future research directions is actually more about critical evaluation of individual researchers for particular settings.

Keywords: AI, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, research directions, English communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are revolutionizing and accelerating research processes in many ways. Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) identify six areas of academic writing and research in which AI may play a part: (1) idea development and research design, (2) content development and structuring, (3) literature review and synthesis, (4) data management and analysis, (5) editing, review, and publishing support, and (6) communication, outreach, and ethical compliance. ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini are among the AI technologies (Araujo et. al., in press; Drummon, et. al., in press). A question arose in the current study as to whether AI could be proven useful for identifying future research directions, which can be an effective start for research conduction.

Acceptance of AI use in research conduction may vary from discipline to discipline. Goyanes et al. (2025) examined how top-ranked journals across eight disciplines, i.e., communication, economics, education, ethics, healthcare, linguistics, sociology, and political science, were adapting their author guidelines in response to the coming age of AI. The examination revealed that 61.3% of the journals mandated transparency regarding AI usage in research. Notable differences across disciplines in their acceptance and regulation of AI use were found. Journals in communication and sociology showed greater openness to the use of AI, while economics remained more conservative. A journal System (2026), which publishes research articles from the applications of educational technology and applied linguistics to problems of foreign language teaching and learning, for example, reports that Elsevier, its publisher, recognizes the potential of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies. Authors may use AI to help researchers work efficiently, gain critical insights quickly, and achieve better outcomes. Therefore, the journal needs its authors to declare the use of generative AI in the manuscript preparation process upon submission of the paper. The current study goes with the trends in communication and applications of AI technologies in research conduction. It particularly focuses on English communication, which is a vastly investigated area in professional settings around the globe.

While AI-assisted technologies can increase research efficiency, it has been cautioned that researchers must consider the limitations of AI-driven insights, verify their outputs, and address related ethical concerns. In other words, AI must not substitute humans' critical thinking, expertise, and evaluation (e.g., Goyanes et al., 2025; Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). The current study responded to the call for verification of AI outputs through humans' discernment. It focused on three popular AI technologies, that is, Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, and highlighted future research directions specified by the three AI technologies. Future research directions were emphasized because they could lead to the most influential discoveries.

This paper particularly requested ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini to predict future research directions by examining titles, abstracts, and keywords of research articles in English communication. The trio, generally speaking, is in the most prominent position in research articles, engaging the maximum influence and visibility of knowledge seekers. Titles particularly reflect the study to allow readers a quick and proper identification of studies that are relevant for their purpose (Afonso et al., 2026). Abstracts provide research purposes, cover research methodology, and key findings. The rationale for the study and important suggestions are also sometimes presented in the abstracts. Keywords are concepts that are closely related to each research study (Kaewneam, 2025). Readers mostly read the first three elements of research articles, particularly the first two, before delving into the full body of the research.

2. OBJECTIVE

To use ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini to identify future research directions based on titles, abstracts, and keywords of research articles in English communication.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) has quickly spread its influence to many medical fields, including asthma care, dentistry, and neuroimaging, as well as social sciences, including translation and testing.

Drummond et al. (in press) examined studies on the role of commercially available LLMs, including ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, in childhood asthma care and found that LLMs were able to generate medically accurate and comprehensible responses to asthma-related queries.

Araujo et al. (in press) evaluated the ability of 11 large language models (LLMs) used in dentistry. It was found that most LLMs demonstrated high accuracy and reproducibility when benchmarked against authoritative endodontic guidelines. However, all-correct accuracy varied among the LLMs. ChatGPT 4o and Claude Opus 4 achieved the highest accuracy, followed by ChatGPT 5, Claude Sonnet 4, Gemini 2.5 Flash, Gemini 2.5 Pro, and ChatGPT o3.

Pluimer et al. (2026) examined the research methodology of fMRI articles comparing Gemini 2.5 Pro, Claude 4 Sonnet, and ChatGPT-o3-pro against human expert ratings. When comparing total scores across papers, Gemini showed a strong positive correlation with human consensus, Claude showed moderate positive correlation, while ChatGPT showed negative correlation. Gemini maintained high reliability when added to human raters, while ChatGPT and Claude showed weaker, more variable performance.

Pinto et al. (2026) evaluated the performance of generative AI tools with a focus on their suitability for non-native English-speaking researchers. Non-English texts with the length of 150–300 words across technical, academic, and descriptive genres were translated by six AI tools, that is, ChatGPT-4.0, Claude 3.7, Copilot, Gemini 2.0, DeepSeek-V3, and Perplexity using standardized prompts. The translations were assessed via Grammarly® for correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. It was found that DeepSeek achieved the highest overall score, significantly outperforming Claude and Copilot, while matching Gemini. Correctness varied significantly, with Copilot excelling, while DeepSeek led in clarity, engagement, and delivery.

Huang et al. (2025) evaluated whether LLMs could correctly answer the multiple-choice questions selected from the Taiwan national dental technician licensing examination and whether ChatGPT-4, Gemini, and DeepSeek-V3 had the self-learning ability to improve their performance on correctly answering the exam questions over a three-week period. It was found that DeepSeek-V3 outperforms ChatGPT-4 and Gemini in terms of accuracy rates. However, Gemini showed notable progress in several subjects, while ChatGPT-4 showed limited improvement, and DeepSeek-V3 remained stable overall.

The studies suggest that AI technologies, including ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, can be usefully and carefully employed for academic purposes. They have been investigated mostly in areas related to medicine. Studies on the use of the

technologies that are related to research on English communication are somewhat scarce. The current study caters to the research gap.

3.2 The Ability of ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini: Self-reports

While studies have analyzed features, techniques, performance, and future prospects of AI technologies (e.g., Rahman et al. (2025)), questions should also be asked to the technologies themselves to ensure up-to-date information. As to a question about what they can do to accelerate research processes, ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini have answers for themselves.

ChatGPT (2026a) reports that it can accelerate research by (1) clarifying and framing research questions, for example, refine vague ideas into precise and suggest variables, definitions, and conceptual distinctions; (2) rapid background synthesis, for instance, compare theories, models, or schools of thought and identify gaps, tensions, or debates in a field; (3) literature review support, such as summarize given articles and extract themes, methods, and findings from multiple sources; (4) critical thinking and evaluation, e.g., analyze strengths and weaknesses of arguments and identify logical fallacies or methodological flaws; (5) methodology design, including help choose appropriate research methods and suggest survey questions or interview guides; (6) data work, for example, help write code for analysis, and explain statistical techniques; (7) writing and editing, for instance improve clarity and academic tone and suggest stronger transitions and argument flow; (8) idea expansion & creativity, such as identify practical applications and propose future research directions; and (9) productivity multiplier, e.g., break large projects into step-by-step plans and prepare presentation slides or speaking notes. It also recognizes its own limitations in that it may produce incorrect information, cannot independently verify paywalled sources, should not replace expert judgment, and must be used ethically. Finally, it reminds us that it works best as a research accelerator and thinking partner, not as a substitute for scholarly rigor.

To the same prompt, Claude (2026a) reported that its ability covered six areas: (1) information gathering and synthesis, for example, search the web for current papers, studies, and data and synthesize findings across multiple sources quickly; (2) analysis assistance, for instance, run statistical tests, identify patterns, and create visualizations; (3) writing and documentation, for instance, draft literature reviews, methods sections, or initial paper drafts based on research findings; (4) code development such as write data processing pipelines and implement algorithms from papers; (5) brainstorming and problem-solving, including suggest alternative approaches and identify gaps in reasoning; and (6) document processing, e.g., extract key information from PDFs, compare multiple papers, create summary tables, or convert data between formats.

Gemini (2026a) reported on four main areas that it could help to accelerate research, that is, (1) automated information discovery, including autonomous browsing, structured reports, and market and competitor analysis; (2) long-context data synthesis, i.e., literature reviews, video and audio analysis, and "needle-in-a-haystack" retrieval; (3) advanced reasoning and hypothesis testing, including adversarial reviewing, neuro-symbolic loops, and cross-disciplinary discovery; and (4) seamless workflow integration, e.g., Google Workspace (Docs, Drive, Gmail), NotebookLM, and Custom Gems.

All three of the AI technologies offered further help at the end of the reply. Among the three, ChatGPT (2026a) gave the most and Gemini (2026) the least detailed reports on themselves. ChatGPT (2026a) was outstanding in that it was the only AI reporting on an evaluation of itself on its role as a research accelerator and thinking partner, rather than a human substitute. This look at itself is in line with Goyanes et al. (2025) and Khalifa and Albadawy's (2024) reminder about not using AI to replace humans' critical thinking, expertise, and evaluation. Focusing on the potential of the three AI technologies to assist in the research processes, the AI technologies' reports on themselves and an exploration of research papers in English communication (Kaewneam, 2025) suggest that they cover absolute components and processes of research conduction, i.e., title, abstract, keywords, introduction, objective(s), literature review, research methods/methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and references, including the identification of research gaps and future directions investigated in the current study.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study is a small-scale project but an important step in research on English communication that is concerned with the use of AI technologies for the benefit of research. The methods included the selection of the research materials and the analysis of future research directions by three AI technologies, that is, ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini.

4.1 Materials: Titles, Abstracts, Keywords of Research Articles

Peer-reviewed research articles related to English communication were explored on ScienceDirect, a high-stakes database, to provide materials for further analyses by the three AI technologies. The key word 'English communication' was entered into the search box around the middle of February 2026. The search results were then sorted by relevance, publication year 2026, the English language, and open access, regardless of journal titles and subject areas. The first five most relevant articles to English communication were selected, and their titles, abstracts, and keywords became the sources of data for the present study (see Ji et al., 2026; Rahaman et al., 2026; Shahid et al., 2026; Wang & Fang, 2026; Yu & Wong, 2026 in the Appendix). The researchers proofread the data to ensure the accuracy of the information and the content validity, i.e., the contents of research in the area of English communication, before entering the texts into the AI technologies.

4.2 Instruments: ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini

Three AI technologies, i.e., ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, were employed in the current study to predict future research directions in English communication. After the selection of the materials (see section 4.1), the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the five research articles were entered into the chat boxes of the three technologies. Firstly, all three AI technologies were asked to provide one consolidated set of future research directions across all of the given five studies. The request yielded three sets of responses. Then ChatGPT was asked again to analyze the thematic patterns emerging across the three sets of recommendations. ChatGPT was chosen over the other two AI technologies because it is one of the most often investigated, employed, and reported as a research tool that draws accurate results (e.g., Aufricht et al., 2025; Drummond et

al., in press; Ho et al., 2023). In addition, it was also found to be the only AI able to evaluate itself during the literature review in the present study (see section 3).

5. FINDINGS

ChatGPT's analysis (2026c) over the three sets of responses from ChatGPT (2026b) itself, Claude (2026b), and Gemini (2026b) on future research directions in English communication is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Future Research Directions
Identified by ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini**

An Academic analysis of consolidated future research directions in English language learning research 1. Expansion Across Contexts, Populations, and Disciplines A dominant theme across all three responses is the call for broader contextual and demographic representation in SLA research. Both ChatGPT and Claude emphasize cross-cultural and cross-population studies, advocating for inclusion beyond traditionally overrepresented groups (e.g., Chinese STEM learners). Gemini reinforces this by proposing cross-disciplinary comparisons, particularly in corpus-based studies. This convergence signals a recognition that language learning is highly context-dependent, shaped by sociocultural, institutional, and professional variables. The emphasis on including non-STEM professions and diverse learner populations suggests a move toward ecological validity and generalizability. Furthermore, the attention to workplace diversity highlights the growing importance of English as a lingua franca in varied professional domains. 2. Methodological Innovation and Triangulation All three models strongly advocate for methodological diversification. The integration of mixed-method approaches—combining self-reports, behavioral data, corpus analysis, and experimental designs—emerges as a central priority. ChatGPT and Claude explicitly call for triangulation using objective measures such as test scores and speech analytics, while Gemini highlights advanced designs such as structural equation modeling (SEM) and diary studies. This shared emphasis reflects a critique of overreliance on self-reported data in SLA research. By incorporating objective and longitudinal data, future studies can enhance reliability, validity, and explanatory power. The inclusion of quasi-experimental and longitudinal designs further indicates a shift toward causal inference and developmental analysis. 3. Longitudinal and Developmental Perspectives Longitudinal research is consistently prioritized across all responses. ChatGPT and Claude stress tracking learners over extended periods to examine the evolution of motivation, emotional states, and skill development. Gemini adds a nuanced dimension by proposing the study of sustained AI-mediated relationships (e.g., “AI friendship”) and their long-term effects on willingness to communicate (WTC). This alignment underscores the need to move beyond cross-sectional snapshots toward dynamic models of language learning. Longitudinal designs enable researchers to capture trajectories, turning points, and sustained impacts of interventions, particularly in areas such as motivation (e.g., ideal L2 self) and affect. 4. Affective and Psychological Dimensions Another major area of convergence is the expansion of affective frameworks. Claude provides the most comprehensive list of emotional variables (e.g., boredom, pride, frustration, shame), while ChatGPT and Gemini emphasize the interplay between positive and negative emotions in both formal and informal learning contexts. Gemini introduces the concept of “psychological and emotional mapping,” linking affect to social-cognitive processes such as perspective-taking and cognitive flexibility. This complements ChatGPT's suggestion to integrate emotional frameworks with motivational and socio-cognitive theories, pointing toward holistic models of learner psychology. Collectively,

these directions reflect an emerging consensus that affect is not peripheral but central to language learning, influencing engagement, persistence, and performance across contexts.

5. Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning

All three responses identify artificial intelligence (AI) as a transformative force in ELT research. ChatGPT provides the most systematic framework, categorizing AI roles (e.g., tutor, peer, evaluator) and emphasizing ethical considerations. Claude and Gemini extend this by focusing on affective AI, particularly its potential to reduce negative emotions such as shame and enhance motivation.

The concept of AI as a social agent—capable of forming “friendships” with learners—represents a novel research frontier. This aligns with broader trends in human-computer interaction and raises important questions about agency, authenticity, and long-term engagement.

6. Curriculum Alignment and Workplace Relevance

A strong emphasis on aligning ELT curricula with workplace demands is evident across all three responses. ChatGPT and Claude highlight the need to map real-world communication practices to instructional design, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Gemini adds specificity by advocating for a focus on transactional and informative language functions relevant to technical professions.

This convergence reflects the increasing instrumentalization of English in globalized labor markets. The integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) into professional training further underscores the need for learners to navigate diverse communicative environments.

7. Corpus and Discourse-Based Research

Corpus-based approaches are prominently featured, particularly in relation to academic writing and genre analysis. All three responses call for expanding corpus studies across disciplines and genres, with a focus on linguistic features such as nominal group complexity. This reflects a growing interest in data-driven pedagogy, where empirical insights into language use inform instructional practices. The linkage between linguistic features and communicative effectiveness represents an important step toward applied relevance.

8. Informal Learning and Digital Ecosystems

ChatGPT uniquely emphasizes the role of informal learning environments, including social media, gaming, and online communities. While less prominent in Claude and Gemini, this direction complements the broader focus on out-of-school exposure and digital engagement.

This highlights the need to reconceptualize language learning as a lifelong, context-spanning process that extends beyond institutional boundaries.

(ChatGPT, 2026c)

Although the original sources of data, i.e., the five research articles, were found through the search for English communication, the results of the analysis by ChatGPT (2026c) found that the titles, abstracts, and keywords were in the area of English language learning. ChatGPT (2026c) organized the future directions by eight themes, including (1) expansion across contexts, populations, and disciplines; (2) methodological innovation and triangulation; (3) longitudinal and developmental perspectives; (4) affective and psychological dimensions; (5) integration of artificial intelligence in language learning; (6) curriculum alignment and workplace relevance; (7) corpus and discourse-based research; and (8) informal learning and digital ecosystems. It also identified areas of convergence and divergence among the three AI technologies and conceptual expansion in the analysis.

The future research directions proposed by ChatGPT (2026b, c), Claude (2026b), and Gemini (2026b) in fact revealed a converging yet multifaceted agenda for advancing research in both English language teaching and learning. The directions

reflected a shift toward integrative, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive paradigms that responded to globalization, technological innovation, and evolving workplace demands.

6. DISCUSSION

The five research articles were found to be the most relevant to English communication through the search on ScienceDirect (see section 3.1), and ChatGPT (2026c) identified more specifically that they were most relevant to English language learning. Both the search results and specifications appeared to be applicable when examining the research titles, that is, “Understanding the impact of out-of-school English exposure on self-perceived listening gains: An insight into the activation mechanism” (Ji et al., 2026, p. 1), “Use of English in engineering workplaces: Frequency, skill hierarchy, and functions” (Rahaman et al., 2026, p. 1), “Complexity in academic discourse: A corpus-based analysis of nominal groups in English research articles” (Shahid et al., 2026, p. 1), “Friendship with human vs. AI peers: Enjoyment mediates college students' willingness to communicate in spoken English learning” (Wang & Fang, 2026, p. 1), and “Preparing Chinese higher vocational students to succeed in a globalized and multicultural world: Enhancing their oral English competence and intercultural competence” (Yu & Wong, 2026, p. 1).

The future research directions proposed by ChatGPT (2026b, c), Claude (2026b), and Gemini (2026b) regarding a converging and multifaceted agenda for furthering research in English language teaching and learning and a shift toward integrative, interdisciplinary, context-sensitive paradigms that respond to globalization, technological innovation, and evolving workplace demands most possibly suggest a robust alignment with scholarly trends in contemporary research. Therefore, the three AI technologies can be employed to assist in choosing future research topics. However, the suggestions were rather broad and general and appeared to be suitable for an academic paper. Researchers need to investigate more specifically interested research topics before research conduction. It is important to point out here that when Pluimer et al. (2026) compared Gemini 2.5 Pro, Claude 4 Sonnet, and ChatGPT-o3-pro against human expert ratings, only Gemini 2.5 Pro showed strong positive correlation with human consensus and maintained high reliability.

Rahman et al.'s (2025) survey of the use of AI by undergraduate students from various academic years: DeepSeek, ChatGPT, and Gemini found that ChatGPT was the most widely used tool for academic purposes, while Gemini and DeepSeek exhibited unique strengths in specific tasks. The present study did not compare the AI technologies or evaluate their accuracy but identified future research directions by using ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini first, followed by an analysis on top of the analysis in the first round by only ChatGPT, the most widely used tool. The analysis yielded satisfactory results in terms of academic ideas, not accuracy like in studies carried out by Drummond et al. (in press), Araujo et al. (in press), and Pluimer et al. (2026). In fact, accuracy is not applicable in a study such as the current project because identifying future research directions is more reliant on critical evaluation of individual researchers and settings.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study suggest ideas for more research on the use of ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and other AI technologies, particularly in the area of English communication, which remains to be hard to find. The next projects should be carried out on a larger scale and in other sections of research articles. A more comprehensive method to analyze the data than that employed in the current study may also bring about fruitful knowledge of research conduction with assistance from AI technologies. It is believed that the findings of the current study as well as continuous projects will be essential for peers working in the same field as well as in other areas of social studies.

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APPENDIX**Research Article 1**

Title Understanding the impact of out-of-school English exposure on self-perceived listening gains: An insight into the activation mechanism

Abstract This study investigated the role of ideal L2 self, self-efficacy, emotions in self-perceived listening gains in out-of-school English exposure contexts. Data were collected from English majors in central China, and multi-group structural equation modeling approach was employed to analyze the data. Results showed that participants with a stronger ideal L2 self-demonstrated increased out-of-school exposure to English, heightened self-efficacy, greater enjoyment, and enhanced self-perceived listening gains compared to those with a weaker ideal L2 self. Out-of-school English exposure positively influenced self-efficacy; self-efficacy positively affected enjoyment, which in turn positively affected self-perceived listening gains for both high- and low-ideal L2 self groups. The findings suggest ideal L2 self may activate the mechanism transforming incidental learning into autonomy supportive learning, and this mechanism is stable across groups. It offered insights into pedagogical implications for language learning.

Keywords Out-of-school English exposure, self-efficacy, emotions, ideal L2 self, enjoyment, listening anxiety

(Ji, et. al., 2026, p. 1)

Research Article 2

Title Use of English in engineering workplace: Frequency, skill hierarchy, and functions

Abstract The existing body of research on workplace English for engineers highlights the significance of English in the engineering work. However, there is limited understanding of the use of English in the engineering profession in terms of the frequency of English use, the relative importance of macro skills such as speaking and writing, and the functions of the English language. This study examined diaries written by 97 in-service mechanical engineers regarding their experiences with English language use in their workplaces. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a sub-sample for triangulation. A summative content analysis of the diary data was carried out to identify the frequency of the use of English and the hierarchy of the use of the four skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, speaking). In addition, thematic analysis and summative content analysis were employed to identify the functions of English in the engineering workplace. Findings reveal that the majority of the participants used English on 21–25 days during the 30-day data collection period. ‘Writing’ is the most frequently used skill, and ‘informative’ is the dominant function. Besides, in the engineering workplace, English primarily serves transactional functions while interactional uses remain limited. We conclude with implications for language educators and policymakers in relation to the use of the English language in the engineering sector.

Keywords Workplace English, English for engineers, functions of English, ESP pedagogy, diary study

Research Article 3

Title Complexity in academic discourse: A corpus-based analysis of nominal groups in English research articles

Abstract The present study examines the use of nominal groups, focusing on their types and functions in academic writing, by analyzing a corpus of Pakistani English Research Articles (PERAC). The corpus has been compiled by taking 52 English research articles written by Pakistani scholars in the field of linguistics. After categorizing the nominal groups into simple, pre-modified, and post-modified, the corpus was annotated with the help of TagAnt (2.1.1), and further analysis was carried out through AntConc (3.5.9). The findings of the study show that pre-modified nominal groups (52.79 %) are more frequent than simple nominal groups (39.38 %) and post-modified nominal groups (7.83 %). The analysis of the examples has given the following types of premodification: adjectival (44.5%), noun (25 %), adverbial (17 %), and participial (13.5 %). While prepositional phrases (51 %), clausal (20 %), infinitival (17.5 %), and adjectival (11.5 %) post-modification were also used in PERAC to provide additional richness and accuracy to the texts. This distribution follows the developmental pattern of structures advanced in nominal group complexity, as postulated by Biber et al. (2011). The findings of the study offer future researchers and academic writers the opportunities to work with implications and suggestions to help students use premodifiers and postmodifiers in nominal groups to enhance their academic writing skill. The present investigation underscores the imperative for additional research comparing the use and role of nominal groups across different disciplines and genres.

Keywords Corpus based, nominal groups, research articles, systemic functional linguistics, PERAC

(Shahid, et al., 2026, p. 1)

Research Article 4

Title Friendship with human vs. AI peers: Enjoyment mediates college students' willingness to communicate in spoken English learning

Abstract As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes embedded in higher education, it is significant to test whether students form parasocial, friendship-like relationships with AI and how such ties shape emotional engagement and learning motivation. However, few studies have compared the emotional and motivational outcomes of student–AI versus human–peer friendships in educational contexts via experimental methods. Within the context of Chinese college students' spoken English learning, this study, drawing on self-determination theory, conducted a five-week controlled experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to either an AI-peer group ($n=44$) or a human-peer group ($n=44$). Data were collected through a three-wave questionnaire, yielding 238 observations. Group-wise Multilevel Modeling (MLM) revealed that friendship significantly affects enjoyment and shame in both groups. Enjoyment consistently mediated the effect of friendship on Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English in both groups (indirect effect: AI-

peer = 0.088; human-peer = 0.154) with no significant difference between groups ($\Delta = 0.066$, 95% CI [$\square$ 0.047, 0.180]). Contrary to expectations, shame did not mediate the relationship between friendship and WTC in both groups. Additionally, heterogeneity analyses revealed that the effects of gender were not significant in the AI-peer group, indicating that human-AI friendships were less sensitive to gender differences. However, AI-peer friendship significantly reduced shame among students from rural backgrounds, highlighting AI's potential to promote emotional equity in spoken English learning. These findings offer new empirical insights into affective AI design, suggesting that AI can serve as a meaningful companion that supports students' WTC.

Keywords Artificial intelligence, friendship, willingness to communicate, enjoyment, shame

(Wang & Fang, 2026, p. 1)

Research Article 5

Title Preparing Chinese higher vocational students to succeed in a globalized and multicultural world: Enhancing their oral English competence and intercultural competence

Abstract In response to pedagogical reforms in English language teaching (ELT) within Chinese higher vocational education, growing attention has been placed on cultivating students' professional oral English competence alongside intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which are global skills required in the educational and workplace contexts. This study evaluates the effect of an ELT module incorporating ICC into the teaching of professional oral English to students at Chinese higher vocational colleges (CHVC). A quasi-experimental design with non-equivalent control groups and a pre-test—post-test structure was employed. Two groups of third-year higher vocational students majoring in aircraft maintenance, with 30 students in each group, were given an eight-week intervention, with the control group using the regular ELT module and the experimental group using the ELT module incorporating ICC. Findings show that the experimental group achieved greater improvements in professional oral English proficiency and ICC in intercultural workplace contexts compared to the control group. These results suggest that the ELT module incorporating ICC is more effective in enhancing students' professional oral English competence and ICC than the regular ELT module at CHVC and it provides a paradigm for how to integrate professional oral English teaching and ICC in vocational education. From a psychological perspective, the study also sheds light on learners' social-cognitive processes in intercultural communication, particularly in relation to perspective-taking, cultural sensitivity, and cognitive flexibility, which are essential for effective interaction in multicultural workplace contexts.

Keywords Oral English competence, intercultural communicative competence, ELT module, Chinese higher vocational colleges, social cognition

(Yu & Wong, 2026, p. 1)