

From Barriers to Possibilities: AI-Assisted English Learning for Students with Special Educational Needs



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Opinion and Ideas

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English language learning is an important part of education because it opens access to communication, knowledge, and wider opportunities. However, for students with special educational needs, English learning often presents many barriers. These barriers may include difficulties in reading, listening, speaking, writing, attention, memory, social interaction, or access to learning materials. In many classrooms, students with diverse needs are still expected to follow the same textbooks, activities, and assessments as other learners. This situation raises an important question: can artificial intelligence help transform English learning from a space of barriers into a space of possibilities?

AI-assisted learning offers new opportunities to make English education more accessible and personalized. Through tools such as text-to-speech, speech-to-text, translation applications, adaptive exercises, visual learning platforms, and automated feedback, AI can support students according to their individual needs. Students with visual impairments can access texts through audio, students with hearing impairments can use captions or transcription, and students with dyslexia can benefit from simplified texts and repeated pronunciation support. In this way, AI can help reduce learning barriers and provide more flexible pathways for students to engage with English.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS



One of the greatest strengths of AI is its ability to support repeated practice without judgment. Many students with special educational needs need more time, more repetition, and more structured guidance before they feel confident using English. AI can provide a safe learning space where students can practice vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, or simple conversations at their own pace. This can increase confidence, reduce anxiety, and encourage greater participation. However, AI should not replace teachers. Teachers remain essential because they provide emotional support, empathy, encouragement, and professional judgment that technology cannot fully offer.

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The use of AI in inclusive English learning also requires ethical and pedagogical awareness. Teachers must ensure that AI tools are used to support learning, not to create dependency. Students should be guided to understand, revise, and practice language rather than simply copy AI-generated answers. Schools also need to consider issues of digital access, data privacy, teacher readiness, and parental guidance. Without careful planning, AI may create new inequalities. With responsible use, however, AI can help teachers design more accessible materials, differentiated assessments, and meaningful learning activities.

Ultimately, AI-assisted English learning for students with special educational needs should be understood as a bridge from barriers to possibilities. It can support accessibility, personalization, communication, feedback, and confidence-building. Yet the heart of inclusive education remains human. AI may provide tools, but teachers provide care. AI may reduce barriers, but inclusion requires commitment. When used with empathy, ethics, and clear pedagogical purpose, AI can help create more humane, flexible, and meaningful English learning experiences for students with special educational needs.