

Guidelines for AI-Based Language Learning Apps

This section outlines key considerations for evaluating AI-based language learning applications, with particular emphasis on speaking skill development and user experience. The criteria are grounded in teacher evaluations and student feedback, and are intended to guide informed, thoughtful choices when selecting an app and integrating it into language learning routines.

1. Speaking Skill Development

Pronunciation Feedback

What to Look For:

- ✓ Clear, detailed feedback on pronunciation, including phoneme-level corrections.
- ✓ The ability to listen to model pronunciations and compare them to your own speech.
- ✓ Features that highlight errors, provide actionable suggestions, and allow for review.

Limitations to Consider:

- ⚠ Some apps only provide vague feedback or simply indicate correct/incorrect pronunciation.
- ⚠ Voice recognition may be overly lenient and not detect certain pronunciation errors.
- ⚠ Most apps lack suprasegmental pronunciation feedback, including stress, intonation, linking, and rhythm.
- ⚠ Speech-to-text software often auto-corrects mispronunciations, making it difficult to identify specific pronunciation errors and areas needing improvement.

Conversation Practice

What to Look For:

- ✓ Options for open-ended free-talk practice.
- ✓ A variety of conversation topics or the ability to create custom scenarios.
- ✓ Role-playing exercises with clear conversation tasks and goals.
- ✓ The ability to review transcripts and feedback from past conversations.
- ✓ Feedback on grammar and vocabulary use with explanations.

Limitations to Consider:

- ⚠ AI chatbots often struggle with topic management, so users may need to actively introduce new topics.
- ⚠ AI-driven conversations can often feel rigid and closer to an interview than a natural conversation.
- ⚠ Most AI chatbots cannot mimic natural conversation dynamics, such as backchanneling, mirroring, topic management, repairing misunderstandings, and turn management.
- ⚠ Some feedback focuses on writing mechanics (punctuation, capitalization) rather than spoken features.

Fluency Enhancement

What to Look For:

- ✓ Features that encourage natural pacing and options to hide text prompts
- ✓ Voice-based interaction without requiring text input
- ✓ Shadowing exercises, guided conversations, or controlled repetition practice

Limitations to Consider:

- ⚠ Most apps do not enforce natural pacing, allowing users to take unlimited time to respond.
- ⚠ AI-driven conversations rarely have requirements for response length. Minimal and undeveloped responses are accepted.

2. User Experience

Ease of Use and Customization

What to Look For:

- ✓ Intuitive navigation and clear explanations of features
- ✓ Native language display settings for the interface and feedback
- ✓ Ability to adjust difficulty settings based on proficiency level
- ✓ Options for how to interact with the AI chatbots (text vs speech only)
- ✓ Settings for personalization, such as speech speed, areas of interest, and learning objectives

Limitations to Consider:

- ⚠ Some apps have a learning curve before users can maximize their use.
- ⚠ In conversations, users may need to press a button to speak, which disrupts the flow of conversation.
- ⚠ Most apps are mobile-only and lack a website version.
- ⚠ High data usage and technical issues (e.g., delayed and unreliable voice recognition, audio not loading) may hinder usability and frustrate users.

Engagement & Motivation

What to Look For:

- ✓ Gamification features, leaderboards, streak counters, and rewards to encourage regular practice
- ✓ Progress tracking tools or records that provide a sense of achievement
- ✓ Study reminder notifications and adaptive exercises to maintain engagement
- ✓ Personalized learning summaries or insights into progress
- ✓ Structured learning paths and goal-setting features to maintain motivation
- ✓ Positive reinforcement features (e.g., achievement badges, encouraging messages, point systems)

Limitations to Consider:

- ⚠ Not all users will find the motivation features (e.g., streaks, notifications) encouraging or helpful.
- ⚠ Frequent notifications and reminders to study may become a nuisance.

Tips and Best Practices for Using AI Language Learning Apps

Set Clear Goals

Before committing to an app, take time to reflect on your learning objectives—whether it's improving fluency, expanding vocabulary, or refining pronunciation. Choose an app with features that align with your goals. Most apps offer a free trial period, so take advantage of this to see if the platform suits your needs before subscribing.

Develop a Consistent Routine

Language improvement requires regular practice. Aim for at least 15–20 minutes per session, several times a week. Just like with exercise, the best method is the one you'll actually stick to. You don't need the most expensive or advanced AI app—what matters most is consistency. Becoming a confident speaker doesn't happen overnight, so trust the process and don't be discouraged by setbacks.

Balance Free Talk with Structured Practice

AI chatbots provide valuable conversation practice, but structured exercises—such as role-plays, pronunciation drills, and shadowing—help reinforce skills, expand vocabulary, and solidify grammar structures. A combination of both will provide the best results.

Use AI Conversations Intentionally

Engaging with AI should be an active learning experience, not just passive participation. Simply going through the motions without focus or effort won't lead to lasting improvement. Treat each conversation as a serious practice opportunity: push yourself to give full, thoughtful responses, and interact as if you were speaking with a real person. AI chatbots are typically lenient and can carry the conversation, but you'll get the most out of it by taking the lead and feeling free to make mistakes.

Remember, It's a Conversation—Not a Writing Assignment

Many AI language apps offer features like instant grammar feedback, vocabulary suggestions, and the option to switch between speaking and texting. While these tools can be helpful, they can also interrupt the natural rhythm of conversation. In real life, you can't pause a conversation to find the perfect word or double-check your grammar, and you shouldn't do that with AI chatbots either. Try to keep the interaction moving—respond promptly and don't worry about making everything perfect. Most apps provide conversation transcripts or feedback summaries, so save the detailed corrections and self-checks for after the conversation ends. That's the best time to reflect and review, without breaking the momentum of the conversation.

Actively Engage with Feedback

Instead of skimming AI-generated corrections, take the time to actually repeat corrected sentences, practice problem areas aloud, and apply feedback in new contexts. If the app offers review tools like flashcards or spaced repetition, take advantage of them to reinforce learning. Revisiting mistakes and corrections regularly will help solidify your improvement.

Don't Rely Solely on AI

AI-driven chats can be a great starting point for building confidence and fluency in a low-pressure environment. Like training wheels, they help you gain balance and control—but to truly master spoken English, you'll eventually need to move beyond them. Many essential communication skills—such as managing conversation flow, reading social cues, using body language, and adapting to different speaking styles—can only be developed through real-life interactions. So, while AI chats are a valuable tool for practice, be sure to bring what you've learned into the real world: speak up in class discussions, practice with peers, or join a conversation group. After all, language lives between people, not in apps.