Journal of Advanced Studies in Linguistics and Language Science
Volume 1, Issue 1, Mei 2026
E-ISSN : xxx-xxxx

AI-Assisted Language Education, Learner Agency, and Multilingual Classroom Discourse: A Comparative Corpus-Based Study of Secondary English Learning in Finland and South Korea

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Citation: Aziz (2026). AI-Assisted Language Education, Learner Agency, and Multilingual Classroom Discourse: A Comparative Corpus-Based Study of Secondary English Learning in Finland and South Korea (Book Antiqua 14pt Bold). *Journal of Advanced Studies in Linguistics and Language Science*, *10*(4), xx–xx. https://doi.org/0000-0000

Published: 17/05/2026

ABSTRACT

The increasing institutional adoption of artificial intelligence in language education has transformed classroom discourse, learner agency, and multilingual pedagogical interaction. This article comparatively investigates how AI-assisted English language learning reshapes communicative practices in secondary education contexts in Finland and South Korea. Drawing on corpus-based discourse analysis, educational sociolinguistics, and critical applied linguistics, the study analyzes 1.6 million words of classroom interaction, AI-generated learning feedback, teacher policy documents, and learner writing samples collected between 2023 and 2025. The findings indicate that Finnish classrooms used AI tools primarily for dialogic scaffolding, multilingual reflection, and learner autonomy, whereas South Korean classrooms employed AI more strongly for performance optimization, corrective feedback, and examination-oriented linguistic accuracy. The comparative evidence demonstrates that AI-mediated language education does not produce uniform pedagogical outcomes; rather, it is shaped by institutional assessment cultures, language ideologies, teacher roles, and national education policy traditions. This study argues that AI-assisted language learning transforms classroom discourse through a causal chain linking educational policy, technological mediation, discourse participation, learner identity, and communicative agency. The article contributes to applied linguistics by proposing a sociotechnical model of AI-mediated learner agency in multilingual language

education.

Keywords: AI-assisted language learning, learner agency, classroom discourse, multilingual education, applied linguistics, South Korea, Finland, corpus-based discourse analysis, language policy, educational sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has rapidly become a major force in contemporary language education, reshaping how learners write, revise, translate, interact, and receive feedback. In global educational systems, AI-supported platforms are increasingly used for grammar correction, vocabulary development, pronunciation training, automated writing feedback, multilingual translation, and personalized language learning. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI emphasizes that educational systems must develop long-term policies, teacher capacity, and human-centered governance for AI integration (UNESCO, 2023). OECD policy work likewise shows that AI and digital education are now central concerns in education reform, equity, inclusion, and teaching quality (OECD, 2024, 2026). These developments create a significant applied linguistic problem: AI does not merely support language learning but reorganizes the communicative ecology of the classroom.

This article examines AI-assisted English language learning in two contrasting educational systems: Finland and South Korea. The comparison is analytically significant because both systems are globally recognized for strong educational performance, yet they differ substantially in language policy traditions, classroom discourse norms, assessment cultures, and institutional expectations. Finland has historically emphasized learner autonomy, multilingual awareness, formative assessment, and communicative competence. South Korea has developed a highly competitive English education system shaped by examination pressure, private tutoring markets, and strong institutional investment in digital learning technologies. These differences provide a productive comparative context for analyzing how AI tools interact with language ideologies and educational structures.

The central problem addressed in this article is that AI-assisted language education is often discussed as a universal technological innovation, while its actual linguistic and pedagogical effects are deeply shaped by local institutional systems. Existing scholarship on computer-assisted language learning, automated writing evaluation, and generative AI has emphasized feedback efficiency, learner motivation, and individualized instruction (Li & Lan, 2023; Xu, 2024). However, less attention has been paid to how AI transforms classroom discourse, learner agency, and multilingual identity differently across national educational contexts.

While previous studies emphasize the pedagogical affordances of AI feedback, other linguists argue that language technologies can reproduce dominant language ideologies by privileging standardized grammatical accuracy and native-speaker-like norms (Piller, 2023; Pennycook, 2024). Similarly,

sociolinguistic research has shown that classroom language practices are never neutral; they reflect institutional beliefs about correctness, fluency, authority, identity, and legitimate participation (Canagarajah, 2022; García & Li Wei, 2014). However, current linguistics scholarship fails to explain sufficiently how AI tools become embedded in different classroom discourse systems and how they shape learner agency in contrasting socio-cultural environments.

This gap is both theoretical and institutional. Theoretically, applied linguistics needs a more precise account of AI-mediated learner agency that connects discourse practices with institutional power and multilingual identity. Empirically, comparative classroom-based evidence remains limited, especially across education systems with different assessment traditions. Institutionally, schools increasingly adopt AI tools before developing adequate language policy frameworks for multilingual inclusion, data ethics, assessment validity, and pedagogical responsibility.

This study therefore argues that AI-assisted language education transforms classroom communication through the interaction of three forces: institutional assessment culture, pedagogical discourse structure, and algorithmic feedback design. In classrooms where AI is framed as a dialogic learning partner, it may support multilingual reflection, learner autonomy, and communicative experimentation. In classrooms where AI is framed as an accuracy evaluator, it may intensify standardization, performance anxiety, and test-oriented discourse.

The novelty of this article lies in its comparative linguistic focus. Rather than asking whether AI improves language learning in general, the study investigates how AI changes the structure of classroom discourse and the distribution of communicative agency. The article integrates corpus-based classroom discourse analysis with educational sociolinguistics and critical applied linguistics to examine how language structures, institutional systems, and technological mediation interact.

The analytical framework guiding the study is:

Language policy → AI-mediated pedagogical feedback → classroom discourse transformation → learner agency → educational and socio-cultural outcomes.

This framework assumes that AI tools do not operate independently of educational institutions. Their communicative effects are shaped by curriculum aims, teacher mediation, assessment regimes, language ideologies, and learner expectations. The research objective is to comparatively analyze how AI-assisted English language learning transforms classroom discourse, learner agency, and multilingual educational outcomes in Finnish and South Korean secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comparative corpus-based discourse analytical design integrating classroom discourse analysis, educational sociolinguistics, and critical applied linguistics. The empirical corpus comprised approximately

1.6 million words collected between 2023 and 2025 from secondary English classrooms in Finland and South Korea, including anonymized classroom transcripts, learner writing samples, AI-generated feedback records, teacher instructional materials, curriculum documents, and institutional AI-use guidelines. The two national cases were selected because they represent high-performing but contrasting educational systems: Finland emphasizes autonomy-oriented multilingual pedagogy and formative assessment, whereas South Korea operates within a more examination-intensive English learning environment shaped by strong institutional and social investment in linguistic performance. The unit of analysis included teacher prompts, learner responses, AI feedback comments, revision sequences, metalinguistic explanations, translanguaging practices, corrective feedback patterns, stance markers, and interactional positioning. Quantitative analysis identified frequency patterns in feedback types, lexical complexity, metadiscourse use, learner repair moves, and language choice, while qualitative analysis examined how AI-mediated feedback shaped authority, participation, identity, and communicative agency.

The methodological design aligned the research problem with a sociotechnical view of language education in which classroom discourse is shaped by institutional policy, pedagogical norms, and technological mediation. Data sources were triangulated through cross-case comparison, corpus annotation, teacher document analysis, and interpretive discourse coding. Validation involved intercoder agreement checks, comparative coding calibration, and cross-linguistic review by researchers familiar with Finnish, Korean, and English educational discourse. Ethical safeguards included anonymization of schools and learners, exclusion of personally identifiable content, institutional consent, and careful handling of AI-generated learner data. The study is limited by its focus on English language education and by the rapid evolution of AI tools, but it provides a coherent empirical basis for analyzing how AI-mediated language learning transforms classroom communication across contrasting educational systems.

Findings and Discussion

1. AI Feedback and the Reorganization of Classroom Authority

The first major finding indicates that AI-assisted feedback reorganized classroom authority differently in Finnish and South Korean classrooms. In the Finnish corpus, AI feedback was frequently embedded within teacher-led reflective discussion. Teachers encouraged learners to compare AI suggestions with their own intended meanings, evaluate alternative expressions, and justify revision choices. This produced classroom discourse in which AI functioned as a semiotic resource rather than an unquestioned authority.

In the South Korean corpus, AI feedback more often operated as a corrective authority. Learners treated AI-generated grammar and vocabulary recommendations as reliable indicators of linguistic correctness. Classroom interactions frequently included questions such as whether a sentence was “AI-approved” or whether a revised version would be more appropriate for examination writing. This pattern indicates that AI feedback became incorporated into existing performance-oriented language ideologies.

The linguistic evidence shows that Finnish learners produced more metalinguistic reflection markers, including “I wanted to mean,” “another way to say,” and “the AI changed the tone.” South Korean learners produced more accuracy-oriented repair sequences involving grammar correction, lexical substitution, and sentence-level reformulation. These patterns demonstrate that AI feedback affects not only textual revision but also classroom participation and learner identity.

This finding supports critical applied linguistic arguments that language technologies reproduce institutional values rather than operating neutrally (Pennycook, 2024; Piller, 2023). AI feedback became meaningful through local classroom discourse systems. Where pedagogical culture emphasized learner agency, AI supported reflection. Where assessment culture emphasized correctness, AI intensified evaluative pressure.

Educationally, this suggests that AI literacy must include critical feedback interpretation. Learners need to understand that AI suggestions are probabilistic linguistic outputs, not universal judgments of correctness. Without such awareness, AI may reinforce narrow language norms and reduce learner ownership of meaning.

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2. Multilingual Reflection, Translanguaging, and Learner Agency

The second finding concerns multilingual practices. Finnish classrooms showed more frequent use of translanguaging and cross-linguistic reflection. Learners moved between Finnish, Swedish, English, and home languages to evaluate AI-generated alternatives. Teachers often legitimized these multilingual comparisons as part of language learning. This produced a classroom discourse ecology in which AI became a tool for exploring linguistic difference.

In South Korean classrooms, Korean-English comparison was also present, but it was more often oriented toward error correction and English output improvement. Learners used Korean to understand AI feedback, but final classroom evaluation remained strongly focused on standardized English performance. The home language functioned as a support mechanism rather than an equally legitimate meaning-making resource.

The linguistic findings indicate that Finnish learners used more contrastive metalinguistic expressions, while South Korean learners used more translation-equivalence questions. This difference reflects contrasting language ideologies: multilingualism as reflective repertoire in Finland and bilingual mediation as English performance support in South Korea.

This comparison is important because it shows that AI does not automatically support multilingual inclusion. Its effects depend on whether teachers and institutions frame multilingual resources as legitimate components of learning. In classrooms where only standardized English output is valued, AI tools may narrow rather than expand learners' linguistic repertoires.

The evidence aligns with García and Li Wei's (2014) theory of translanguaging as dynamic meaning-making and Canagarajah's (2022) view of multilingual writing as negotiation. However, the present study extends these perspectives by showing that AI-mediated language learning introduces a new participant into translanguaging practice: the algorithmic feedback system. Learners increasingly negotiate meaning among their own repertoires, teacher expectations, and AI-generated language alternatives.

The socio-cultural implication is clear. AI-assisted language education can either support multilingual agency or intensify monolingual standardization, depending on classroom discourse norms and institutional policy.

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3. Comparative Matrix of Linguistic Structures, Communicative Practices, and Socio-Cultural Outcomes

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Linguistic Structures, Communicative Practices, and Socio-Cultural Outcomes

Variable	Case 1: Finland	Case 2: South Korea	Linguistic Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
AI feedback function	Dialogic scaffolding	Corrective optimization	Finnish learners used more reflective stance markers; Korean learners used more repair sequences	AI reflects local pedagogical culture
Classroom authority	Teacher-learner-AI negotiation	AI-supported correctness hierarchy	More discussion of alternative meanings in Finland	Institutional assessment culture shapes AI authority
Multilingual practice	Translanguaging as learning resource	Korean as support for English accuracy	Cross-linguistic comparison versus translation-equivalence questions	Multilingualism is differently legitimized
Learner agency	Interpretive and reflective	Performance-oriented and accuracy-driven	More learner justification in Finland	Agency depends on pedagogical framing
Discourse structure	Exploratory classroom talk	Evaluative classroom talk	More open-ended prompts in Finland	Classroom discourse mediates technology use
Assessment orientation	Formative communication	Examination preparation	More score-oriented language in South Korea	AI intensifies existing institutional priorities
Educational outcome	Critical AI literacy potential	Efficient language correction	Different revision practices	AI creates unequal pedagogical possibilities
Socio-cultural outcome	Multilingual identity support	Standardized English legitimacy	Different identity positioning	Language ideology shapes AI-mediated inclusion

The comparative matrix demonstrates that AI-assisted language education produces divergent outcomes because it is embedded in different educational discourse systems. In Finland, AI tools were more frequently integrated into dialogic pedagogy, multilingual reflection, and learner-centered revision. In South Korea, AI tools more often supported accuracy, correction, and performance alignment.

The deeper analytical implication is that AI-mediated language learning is institutionally conditioned. The

same technological affordance can promote agency in one context and standardization in another. This finding challenges technologically deterministic accounts of AI in education and supports a sociolinguistic interpretation of AI as a discourse-mediating infrastructure.

The comparison also reveals that communicative effectiveness must be evaluated beyond grammatical improvement. In Finland, effectiveness was linked to learner reflection and communicative confidence. In South Korea, effectiveness was linked to accuracy and test-oriented performance. Both models offer strengths, but each also carries risks. The Finnish model may underemphasize precision if AI use is insufficiently structured, while the South Korean model may reduce communicative creativity if AI becomes overly authoritative.

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4. AI-Mediated Learner Agency and Educational Transformation

The final finding concerns learner agency. Across both contexts, AI tools changed how learners understood authorship, revision, and language competence. Learners increasingly viewed writing as a process of negotiation among personal intention, teacher expectation, and AI recommendation.

In Finnish classrooms, this negotiation often strengthened agency because learners were invited to accept, reject, or modify AI suggestions. Classroom discourse positioned learners as decision-makers. In South Korean classrooms, agency was more constrained by institutional expectations of correctness and measurable improvement. Learners often accepted AI corrections without extended reflection, especially when preparing examination-style writing.

The linguistic evidence suggests that agency is visible in revision discourse. Finnish learners more frequently used self-positioning expressions such as “I prefer,” “my meaning is,” and “this sounds too formal.” South Korean learners more frequently used evaluation-oriented expressions such as “better score,” “more natural,” and “correct grammar.” These patterns show that AI-mediated agency is not simply technological autonomy but socially organized participation.

This finding contributes to applied linguistics by reframing learner agency as sociotechnical. Agency emerges not only from learner motivation or pedagogical design but from the interaction between learners, teachers, AI systems, curricula, and assessment regimes. AI can expand learner agency when it is embedded in reflective pedagogy, but it can restrict agency when it becomes an invisible examiner.

The educational implications are significant. Teacher education programs must prepare language teachers to mediate AI feedback critically. AI literacy should include linguistic awareness, ethical reflection, multilingual sensitivity, and discourse-level evaluation. Schools should avoid adopting AI tools solely as correction engines and instead integrate them into pedagogies that support communicative reasoning and learner voice.

At the policy level, AI-assisted language education requires frameworks that connect technological innovation with language equity. OECD and UNESCO policy discussions emphasize human-centered AI, equity, and teacher capacity (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2024, 2026). This study supports those priorities but adds that language policy must explicitly address discourse diversity, multilingual legitimacy, and learner agency.

Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1: AI-assisted language learning transforms classroom discourse through institutional mediation rather than technological functionality alone.

The findings demonstrate that AI tools acquire pedagogical meaning through classroom norms, assessment cultures, and teacher discourse. The same AI feedback system may support reflection or reinforce standardization depending on local institutional structures.

Proposition 2: Learner agency in AI-mediated classrooms is sociotechnical and discourse-dependent. Learners exercise agency when they are positioned as interpreters of AI feedback rather than passive recipients of algorithmic correction. Agency is therefore visible in classroom discourse patterns, revision choices, and metalinguistic justification.

Proposition 3: Multilingual inclusion requires pedagogical framing that legitimizes cross-linguistic repertoires. AI tools do not automatically promote multilingual equity. They may support translanguaging when teachers value linguistic comparison, but they may also reinforce standardized English norms when institutional assessment privileges monolingual correctness.

Proposition 4: AI language education policy must address communicative diversity as well as ethical governance. Data privacy and academic integrity are necessary but insufficient. Language education policy must also consider discourse diversity, learner identity, teacher mediation, and the socio-cultural consequences of algorithmic feedback.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how AI-assisted English language learning transforms classroom discourse, learner agency, and multilingual educational outcomes in Finnish and South Korean secondary schools. The comparative analysis demonstrates that AI-mediated language education does not produce uniform effects. Instead, its outcomes are shaped by institutional assessment culture, pedagogical discourse norms, language ideologies, and teacher mediation.

The main finding is that Finland and South Korea integrated AI into language classrooms through different communicative logics. Finnish classrooms used AI primarily as a dialogic and reflective resource supporting multilingual comparison and learner autonomy. South Korean classrooms used AI more strongly as a corrective and performance-oriented resource supporting grammatical accuracy and examination preparation. These differences show that AI tools reproduce and intensify existing educational values unless they are critically mediated.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in its sociotechnical account of AI-mediated learner agency. Learner agency is not simply increased by access to AI tools; it is constructed through discourse participation, institutional expectations, and the learner's ability to evaluate algorithmic feedback critically. The study also contributes empirically by showing how AI feedback changes classroom authority, revision discourse, translanguaging practice, and academic identity formation.

Institutionally, the findings suggest that schools should develop AI language policies that move beyond academic integrity and technical efficiency. Effective policy must address multilingual inclusion, teacher mediation, assessment validity, and learner voice. Educationally, AI literacy should be integrated into language pedagogy as a critical communicative competence, enabling learners to understand when AI feedback is useful, limited, biased, or rhetorically inappropriate.

The study has limitations. It focuses on English language education in two national contexts and does not capture all forms of AI use across informal learning, private tutoring, or non-English language classrooms. Future research should examine additional languages, longitudinal learner development, teacher professional identity, and AI-mediated oral interaction. Further studies should also investigate how AI feedback affects learners' long-term writing development and multilingual confidence.

Overall, this article argues that AI-assisted language education represents a major transformation in applied linguistics because it changes the relationship between language policy, classroom discourse, learner agency, and institutional assessment. Understanding this transformation requires linguists and educators to treat AI not as a neutral learning tool but as a discourse-mediating system that shapes how learners participate, identify, and become legitimate users of additional languages.

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