

Beyond the Perfect Essay: 4 Language Skills Children Need in the Age of AI

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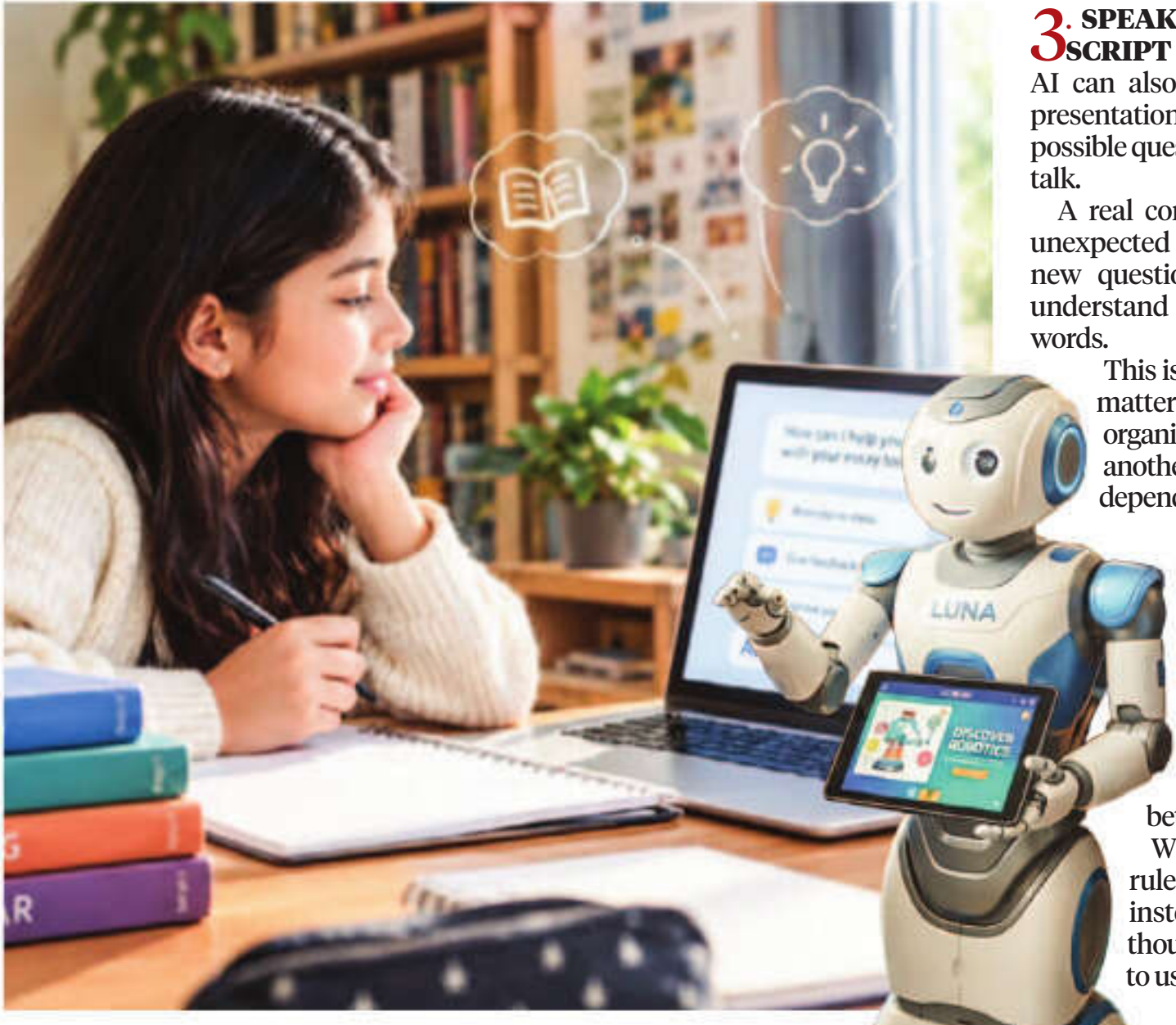
Parent once asked me whether her ten-year-old still needed to learn how to write an essay when a chatbot could produce one in a few seconds. It was a fair question. English language arts has never been only about finishing an essay. Through reading, writing, speaking and grammar, children learn how to understand an idea and express it clearly. This is a useful way for parents to look at AI. Instead of asking only whether it can complete an assignment, we can ask how it can help a child learn. A thoughtful introduction to AI for kids can teach children to use these tools with curiosity, care and good judgement. This thought came back to me when I came across Priya Lakhani's TED talk, This Is How Kids Should Be Learning with AI. She explains that AI should support the "productive struggle" of learning instead of simply giving children an answer.

1. READING TO QUESTION, NOT JUST SUMMARISE

AI can give a child a short summary of a book. The child can then return to the story and notice a sentence that does not fit, wonder why a character changed their mind, or see that an important idea has been missed. A child who understands the book can compare the summary with the original and decide whether it is accurate. This understanding becomes even more important when children use AI to summarise what they read. AI can help a child explore a topic, arrange ideas and improve a draft. It can also offer a new question or a different way of looking at the subject. The child brings personal experience, judgement and context to the task. They decide what matters, make connections and think about the reader. In this way, AI supports the writing process while the child develops the ideas behind it.

2. WRITING TO DEVELOP ORIGINAL THOUGHT

AI can help a child explore a topic, arrange ideas and improve a draft. It can also offer a new question or a different way of looking at the subject. The child brings personal experience, judgement and context to the task. They decide what matters, make connections and think about the reader. In this way, AI supports the writing process while the child develops the ideas behind it.



3. SPEAKING WHEN THERE IS NO SCRIPT

AI can also help a child prepare for a presentation. It can suggest useful points, possible questions and a clear order for the talk. A real conversation may still take an unexpected turn. When someone asks a new question, the child has to listen, understand it and answer in their own words. This is why public speaking for kids matters. It gives children time to organise an idea, say it aloud, listen to another person and respond without depending on a prepared script. Grammar tools can correct a sentence and explain why a change may help. A child can use that guidance to understand when "fewer" fits better than "less". When children understand the rule, they can judge a suggestion instead of accepting it without thought. With practice, they begin to use the rule on their own.

4. UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE BEYOND CORRECTIONS

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This has a special meaning in India. UNESCO's Bhasha Matters: State of the Education Report for India 2025 notes that the country is home to 1,369 languages and supports mother tongue-based and multilingual education. Many children in India move between languages every day. They may hold an idea in one language, turn it over in their mind and then express it in another. This takes patience, thought and practice. AI can support that practice. Confidence grows as children find their own words and use them in real conversations. So, what is left for the child when AI can write, summarise and correct? The answer is not a contest between the child and the tool. AI can support the work, while the child learns to understand, judge, imagine and express.

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School Health Programme Records 32-Percentage-Point Rise in Students' Health Knowledge

SNS

A year-long school health education programme across 15 schools in Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh recorded significant improvements in students' health knowledge, alongside gains in self-reported health behaviour. The evaluation covered 1,513 Class VI students in 12 government schools in Haryana and three private schools in Delhi and Chandigarh. According to Tarang Health Alliance's 2025-26 impact report, average health knowledge scores increased from 42.87 per cent to 75.06 per cent, while average health behaviour scores rose from 0.77 to 0.88 on a scale ranging from zero to one, with one representing the most desirable health behaviour.

Evaluation across 15 schools finds gains in health knowledge, while reported behavioural outcomes differ between government and private schools

average behaviour score remained unchanged at 0.84. In government schools, Tarang Health Alliance employed teachers specifically to deliver the health curriculum and provided continued mentoring through staff meetings during the academic year. In private schools, the programme was taught by designated schoolteachers, typically

established causes. The findings nevertheless point to the potential importance of sustained teacher support and regular engagement with parents in implementing school-based health education programmes. The programme was implemented in 12 government schools in Haryana and three private schools in Delhi and Chandigarh. Class VI students received two 40-minute health education sessions each week, using a curriculum and student workbooks titled On the Way to Being Healthy. Teachers received eight hours of training before the programme began, covering the curriculum and inquiry-based teaching methods. Schools were also encouraged to conduct four sessions for parents during the academic year, focusing on nutrition, hygiene and other health-related topics. To assess the programme, students completed knowledge and behaviour questionnaires before the first session and after the final session of the academic year. The questionnaires were administered using an Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) system. The knowledge assessment measured correct answers to multiple-choice questions, while the behaviour assessment used a score ranging from zero to one. The analysis included 1,028 students from government schools and 485 from private schools. Knowledge scores improved across all 15 schools, while behaviour scores improved in government schools but did not show a statistically significant improvement across the three private schools. The results indicate that improvements in health knowledge may not automatically translate into changes in behaviour. Reinforcement through teaching, opportunities to practise healthy habits and continued engagement with students and families may be important in bridging this gap. School-based health education offers an opportunity to introduce preventive health concepts early, when children are developing habits that may influence their health over time. Topics such as hand hygiene, balanced nutrition and physical activity can help students recognise everyday health risks and understand the steps they can take to reduce them. For schools and policymakers, the findings underline the importance of making health education more than a classroom subject. Regular lessons, ongoing teacher support and meaningful engagement with families may help students apply what they learn in everyday life. Further evaluation would be needed to establish whether improvements in health knowledge and behaviour are sustained over the long term.



"Health education needs to go beyond awareness and equip children with the knowledge and skills to make healthier choices in their everyday lives. Our findings highlight the potential of a structured, school-based approach, supported by trained and motivated teachers, to strengthen health literacy among children," said Dr Rahul Mehra, executive chairman of Tarang Health Alliance. One of the key findings was the difference in outcomes between government and private schools. Students in government schools recorded greater improvements in both health knowledge and behaviour scores. Among government school students, average knowledge scores increased from 35.72 per cent to 80 per cent, while behaviour scores rose from 0.75 to 0.91. Both improvements were statistically significant. In private schools, knowledge scores increased significantly from 55.70 per cent to 65.65 per cent. However, the



science teachers, who had other teaching responsibilities and did not participate in the same mentoring meetings. Parent engagement also differed. Government schools conducted an average of 2.8 parent sessions during the year, compared with 1.7 sessions in private schools. While these factors offer possible explanations for the differences, the report identifies them as hypotheses rather than

Foundation for Excellence: When Merit Meets Opportunity

For many academically promising students, securing admission to a professional course is only half the journey. The other half often begins with a difficult question: how to afford it. For those aspiring to become engineers, doctors or legal professionals, financial constraints can sometimes prove as formidable as the entrance examinations themselves. Seeking to bridge this gap, the Foundation for Excellence (FFE), a non-profit organisation working towards greater access to higher education, has invited applications for its



2026-27 scholarship programme. Open to first-year students pursuing engineering, medicine and law across India, the initiative offers financial assistance of ₹50,000 or more to each new scholarship recipient. The programme is aimed at students who have demonstrated academic merit but require financial support to pursue their professional ambitions. Applications are open until 31 December 2026 through the foundation's official scholarship portal, ffe.org/scholarships. Students entering the first year of B.E./B.Tech., five-year dual-degree M.Tech., MBBS or LLB programmes during the 2026-27 academic year are eligible to apply, provided they have secured admission through a recognised state or national-level entrance examination. Selection is based on academic merit and financial need, with no separate quotas based on caste, community, gender or religion under the general scholarship programme. Yet, the foundation's approach extends beyond paying tuition fees. Recognising that a degree alone may not always prepare students for the demands of professional life, FFE supplements its financial assistance with mentorship, skill development and career guidance through its Beyond Scholarships initiatives. These include one-on-one mentoring by industry professionals, English and aptitude training, advanced English programmes, technical courses through Coursera and mock interviews. Together, these initiatives seek to help students navigate not only the academic challenges of higher education but also the transition from college to the workplace. Behind this effort is a nationwide network of more than 700 facilitators who help identify

prospective scholars, verify their financial circumstances and remain engaged with students throughout their educational journeys. The network also enables the foundation to reach students from rural and semi-urban communities, including women aspiring to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Speaking about the initiative, Ram Kolavennu, CEO of Foundation for Excellence, said, "Over the years, we have seen the difference that timely support can make to a student's educational journey and long-term prospects. This year, we hope to reach even more deserving students and equip them with the financial assistance, mentorship and career support required to translate their academic potential into meaningful professional opportunities." Since its inception in 1994, FFE has awarded more than 1.6 lakh scholarships, disbursing approximately ₹643 crore to students across India. During the 2025-26 financial year alone, 22,440 students received scholarships amounting to ₹116 crore, covering 520 engineering colleges, 370 medical colleges and 79 law institutes. As the cost of professional education continues to weigh on families, initiatives such as these seek to ensure that a student's academic potential is not overshadowed by financial circumstances. For aspiring engineers, doctors and lawyers standing at the threshold of higher education, such assistance could make the difference between securing admission and being able to pursue the opportunity.

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