AI-MEDIATED LISTENING PRACTICES AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF HUMAN INTERACTION AS A PEDAGOGICAL ACT IN THE AGE OF CHATBOTS

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ABSTRACT
The article examines the growing use of AI by young people as a space of interlocution, listening, and support. Recent studies show that chatbots are perceived as accessible, controllable, and non-judgmental environments capable of addressing relational needs often unmet in educational contexts. The paper reflects on the transformation of educational interaction and listening practices in the digital age.

KEYWORDS
artificial intelligence; youth listening; technological mediation; pedagogical interaction; chatbots.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, mental health has emerged as an increasingly relevant dimension with which education is called to engage. Research highlights how the management of psychological distress is often shaped by access to care resources (Auerbach et al., 2018; Evans-Lacko et al., 2018; Vigo et al., 2022). Alongside these structural barriers, subjective obstacles also contribute to making AI a potential first space of support for otherwise unmet needs.

Digital technologies have progressively expanded the conditions of access to expression: blogs, social media, and online communities have enabled the construction of mediated spaces in which users can narrate themselves, seek support, and experience forms of interaction perceived as therapeutic or collaborative (Zehrung & Chen, 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). Consequently, new relational configurations have emerged, introducing unprecedented modes of access to interaction and sharing, while granting chatbots an increasingly significant role in supporting mental health, particularly insofar as they facilitate the self-expression of individuals seeking care and listening (Lee et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021). Their diffusion is linked to their capacity to function as dialogical interfaces through which individuals can narrate their experiences, organize their thoughts, and initiate processes of self-reflection, especially in conditions of marginalization or limited access to traditional services (Li et al., 2023; Choi et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2024).

Technological advancement, however, does not exhaust the issue; rather, it shifts it to a deeper level in which psychological, relational, and pedagogical dimensions intersect. From a theoretical perspective, human–AI interaction can be interpreted through the lens of Media Naturalness Theory (Kock, 2005), according to which face-to-face communication represents the richest form of exchange, whereas mediated interactions are considered less dense due to the absence of nonverbal cues. At the same time, the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm highlights how individuals tend to attribute social characteristics to artificial systems, activating relational patterns typically associated with human interaction (Nass & Moon, 2000).

Accordingly, chatbots operate as devices capable of supporting processes of self-expression, thought organization, and meaning-making. For these reasons, artificial intelligence has increasingly assumed, particularly among young people, the role of an available interlocutor in moments of uncertainty, emotional difficulty, or need for clarification, to which individuals entrust personal experiences that struggle to find space within ordinary relational circuits (McBain et al., 2025; Jung et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2025). The key issue, therefore, is not whether artificial intelligence is replacing human beings;

rather, it is necessary to reflect on the transformation of the trajectories through which individuals express distress, seek listening, and construct the preliminary conditions for dialogue.

It is precisely here that one of the most significant paradoxes highlighted by recent literature emerges: what constitutes the principal limitation of artificial intelligence—namely the absence of intentionality, autonomous decision-making, and authentic emotional participation—may, at the experiential level, become a condition that facilitates self-disclosure by reducing perceived risk and making interaction more controllable and accessible. In this sense, the chatbot becomes a space in which individuals can begin to speak even before being truly understood (Dai et al., 2026).

Thus, the attractiveness of these tools is not primarily explained by the depth of the relationship they provide, but rather by the possibility of accessing a threshold of listening perceived as approachable, where dialogue can be sought, initiated, and sustained. Nevertheless, such attractiveness does not imply their full legitimization as substitutes for human relationships. Indeed, in contexts of greater vulnerability, a preference for face-to-face dialogue clearly emerges, insofar as the embodied presence of the other makes possible forms of responsibility, interpretative depth, and risk management that virtual interaction, by its very nature, cannot sustain (Young et al., 2024; Sobowale et al., 2025).

Questioning why many young people choose artificial intelligence as a space for dialogue therefore means addressing a broader and profoundly educational issue. What is at stake is not the replacement of human relationships, but rather a transformation in the ways individuals express distress and seek listening, since the recourse to such devices signals the search for contexts in which speech may emerge without risk, exposure, or judgment. Pedagogy is thus called upon to reflect on the new forms of dialogue that are reshaping spaces of interlocution, within which digital mediation may at times replace adult presence, contributing to the progressive marginalization of educational contexts precisely where such needs should instead encounter listening, recognition, and response (Dai et al., 2026; Luo et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2026).

2. The Need for Listening Among Young People and Artificial Intelligence as a Space of Interlocution

The need for listening among young people has become, now more than ever, a highly relevant educational issue, particularly in light of the social transformations that have reshaped living contexts, forms of dialogue, and relational dynamics. Family and school environments increasingly appear marked by a reduction in ordinary spaces for dialogue and listening. Even peer

groups seem affected by limitations in their capacity to sustain the expression of distress, while an increasing proportion of interactions is shifting toward digital devices (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

As a result, the possibility of expressing lived experience and attributing meaning to emotions is progressively relocating within digitally mediated spaces, where listening and interaction acquire new configurations, increasingly shifting toward digitally mediated environments, in which the interlocutor is redefined and assumes an ever more frequent presence through chatbots.

Accordingly, if listening constitutes a foundational condition of educational experience—since it is through being listened to that individuals can articulate their lived experience, construct a narrative of the self, and develop awareness by experimenting with forms of action grounded in recognition—pedagogy is called upon to reflect on the ways in which it may position itself even within non-embodied spaces. This requires identifying renewed forms of listening capable of making use of chatbots without shifting the educational horizon from physical relationships toward exclusively virtual ones. A structural tension thus emerges between the centrality of the need to be listened to and the actual quality of the responses available within ordinary relational circuits.

Research in the fields of Social Computing and Human–Computer Interaction shows that online environments constitute privileged spaces in which young people seek support, share experiences, and activate forms of mutual recognition (Zhang et al., 2021). Within these contexts, technological mediation is particularly valued because it reconfigures the relational dimension and introduces specific conditions—such as anonymity, immediate accessibility, and control over self-disclosure—that facilitate openness and make the act of self-narration more practicable, especially when sensitive content is involved.

The need for listening therefore emerges as a search for dialogical conditions in which speech can emerge without excessive exposure or fear of judgment. Artificial intelligence thus becomes an interlocutor to which individuals entrust questions, doubts, emotional states, and complex thoughts requiring interpretation and re-elaboration: a specific channel through which the inner world may be expressed and listening received, particularly in moments of vulnerability (McBain et al., 2025; Shelton, 2025). Indeed, a non-negligible proportion of adolescents and young adults use AI to receive advice or support in situations of distress, perceiving it as useful and accessible within dialogical support practices that often represent a first point of contact in the management of doubts, symptoms, and problematic lived experiences (Shelton, 2025; Wu et al., 2026).

Young people are increasingly engaging in interactions with artificial intelligence that give rise to genuine forms of dialogue (Jung et al., 2025; Luo

et al., 2025), within which they maintain a high degree of control over the communicative process, being able to regulate the quality of the interaction and assess its coherence. This dynamic fosters a perception of safety linked to the possibility that the chatbot progressively learns from interactions and generates responses increasingly aligned with users' expectations and expressed needs (Jialan et al., 2025).

Such dynamics do not imply a replacement of human relationships; rather, they reshape the ecologies of listening. Artificial intelligence is assumed by young people as a preliminary step within help-seeking trajectories, an initial space in which they may explore and organize their lived experiences before turning to an adult or a significant relational figure. Within this framework, AI occupies an intermediate position, proving particularly effective in the initial phases of verbalization, whereas in contexts of greater vulnerability the need for a direct human presence re-emerges strongly—a presence capable of assuming responsibility, engaging in deeper interpretation, and sustaining risk (Sobowale et al., 2025). Listening thus reveals itself to be situated and differential, distributed across a plurality of spaces, thresholds, and mediations.

It therefore becomes necessary to reflect on the fact that the growing recourse to artificial intelligence as a space of interlocution does not signal the disappearance of the desire for relationships; rather, it makes visible a demand for listening that directly challenges the quality of educational and social contexts. Young people do not turn to these devices merely because they are available, but because they intercept a threshold of access to speech that traditional contexts struggle to guarantee consistently, safely, and in ways grounded in recognition. Understanding this phenomenon requires critically interrogating the conditions under which young people's voices may emerge, be welcomed, and become transformed into shared and meaningful experience.

The pedagogical responsibility of adults therefore lies in making spaces of encounter, dialogue, and listening more intentional, so that young people's voices may emerge and be supported. This implies the capacity to recognize needs even when they take shape through technological mediations, valuing these initial passages while subsequently offering an educational presence capable of deepening, re-elaborating, and accompanying lived experience, thereby restoring to relationships their formative and transformative depth.

3. Artificial Intelligence within the Relational Ecologies of Adolescents

A further element that helps illuminate the scope of the phenomenon is represented by the most recent data concerning adolescents' uses of artificial intelligence. Recent studies clearly show that such technologies have now

become firmly integrated into the everyday practices of younger generations and have acquired the characteristics of genuine interactional environments within which emerging forms of relationships take shape.

A report promoted by Save the Children (2025), based on 800 CAWI interviews conducted with a national sample of adolescents aged between 15 and 19, highlights that 74.2% of respondents use artificial intelligence platforms at least weekly, while 30.9% report daily use. Comparison with adults—among whom regular use stands at 25.1%—confirms a marked generational asymmetry.

Within this scenario, chatbots represent the predominant mode of use, followed by automatic translation applications and voice assistants. Alongside these more established uses, there is also the emergence—although still limited—of platforms designed to simulate interpersonal relationships, the so-called AI companions, used by 9.3% of adolescents. Although numerically contained, this figure is qualitatively significant insofar as it signals the entry of artificial intelligence into domains traditionally characterized by human presence, such as affective interaction and emotional support (Save the Children, 2025).

At the international level, several reports indicate a similar trend. Common Sense Media (2025) reports that approximately one-third of adolescents aged between 13 and 17 interact with artificial intelligence systems for purposes related to companionship, social relationships, and emotional support. At the same time, institutions such as the *eSafety Commissioner* (2025) and the *Garante per la protezione dei dati personali* (2024) have drawn attention to the possible effects of these practices, emphasizing how the construction of affective bonds mediated by artificial systems may influence relational forms, generating dynamics of emotional dependency and reshaping social interactions.

Such evidence contributes to outlining a framework in which artificial intelligence emerges not merely as an external support, but as an active element in the reorganization of relationships.

According to the report *Senza Filtri. Voci di Adolescenze* (2025), 48.3% of adolescents consider these tools important, with 16% describing them as very important and 32.3% as fairly important. This finding points not only to the widespread diffusion of AI, but also to its growing recognition within processes of learning, everyday organization, and information management.

With regard to patterns of use, a significant diversification of functions can be observed. While information seeking and academic support remain central, emerging uses of AI extend into the recreational sphere, involving 21.4% of adolescents, into the personal sphere, with 16.4%, and into requests for practical advice concerning everyday life, reported by 15% of respondents. These are accompanied by uses directly connected to well-being and

relationships, with 7.1% using AI to improve their well-being and 4.2% turning to it for companionship. In this sense, artificial intelligence appears as a multifunctional device capable of traversing different domains of experience and integrating transversally into the processes through which everyday life is constructed.

Particularly significant, in relation to the configuration of relational ecologies, is the finding concerning the use of AI in situations of emotional vulnerability. A total of 41.8% of adolescents report having sought help from tools such as ChatGPT during moments of loneliness, sadness, or anxiety, while 42.3% state that they have used such systems to receive advice regarding important decisions related to relationships, emotions, educational pathways, or employment trajectories (Save the Children, 2025), as illustrated in Figure 1. These findings indicate how artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming part of the processes through which lived experience is managed, configuring itself as one of the spaces within which individuals articulate their relationship with difficulties and choices.

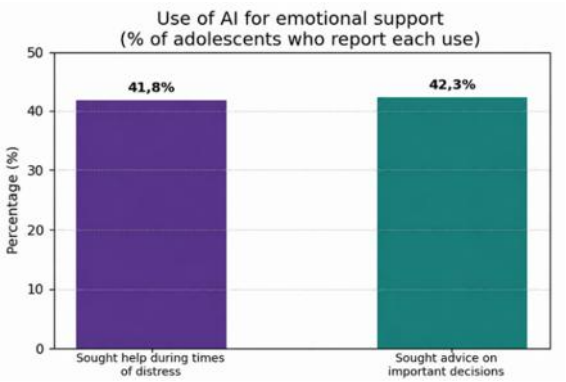


Figure 1: Use of artificial intelligence for emotional support and decision-making guidance among adolescents (Save the Children, 2025).

The proximity between the two percentages shows how AI is being integrated both into emotional support and decision-making processes, prompting pedagogical reflection on emerging forms of listening and guidance.

The intensity of this integration is further confirmed by the frequency with which adolescents turn to AI for significant personal matters. A total of 58.1% report having sought advice regarding serious aspects of their lives, with 14.3% doing so often and 43.8% occasionally, with a higher incidence among those aged between 18 and 19. Moreover, a substantial proportion state that, at least in some circumstances, interaction with artificial intelligence systems has been more satisfying than dialogue with human interlocutors such as family

members, friends, or teachers, with 20.8% indicating that this occurs often and 42.7% occasionally. The phenomenon appears particularly pronounced among sixteen-year-olds, among whom 24.4% report frequent occurrences and 46.8% occasional ones, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of adolescents' use of artificial intelligence for advice-seeking and relational support, with differences by age group (Save the Children, 2025).

Area of Use	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Total (%)	Notes
Seeking advice on serious aspects of life	14.3	43.8	58.1	Higher incidence among 18–19-year-olds
More satisfying interaction with AI compared to real people	20.8	42.7	63.5	-
AI interaction perceived as more satisfying among sixteen-year-olds	24.4	46.8	71.2	Peak among sixteen-year-olds

The data presented here outline a process of the progressive integration of artificial intelligence into the relational ecologies of younger generations. AI is not limited to supporting cognitive or operational activities; rather, it increasingly functions as a space of interaction within which practices of communication, self-expression, and the management of lived experience are articulated.

The phenomenon assumes a distinctly pedagogical relevance, insofar as it directly concerns the transformation of the conditions through which

individuals enter into relationships, construct meaning, and organize their experience. It therefore appears necessary to analyze the phenomenon by highlighting both the main factors underlying the attractiveness of chatbot use and the limitations associated with frequent and prolonged engagement with such systems. These dimensions, which will be explored in the following sections, represent essential steps toward developing a critical and articulated reflection on the educational implications and potential risks of the phenomenon among younger populations.

4. Attractiveness Factors and Critical Issues in the Use of Chatbots within Dialogical Practices

Young people's turning to artificial intelligence cannot be interpreted merely as an expression of interest in technology, but rather as an indicator of a deeper search for dialogical conditions perceived as sustainable and easily accessible. A first relevant dimension concerns the absence of judgment. A study conducted by Dai and colleagues (2026) shows that chatbots are frequently described as interlocutors lacking intentionality, expectations, and emotional reactions, and that precisely this characteristic enables users to express themselves more freely, reducing the fear of being evaluated, misunderstood, or stigmatized.

Data reported by Save the Children (2025) confirm this tendency, highlighting several AI characteristics particularly appreciated by adolescents. According to the report, adolescents especially value AI's informational competence, continuous availability, perceived ability to "understand and treat users well," absence of judgment, and ease of use. These findings configure AI as an accessible, competent, and relationally welcoming device, as summarized in Figure 2.

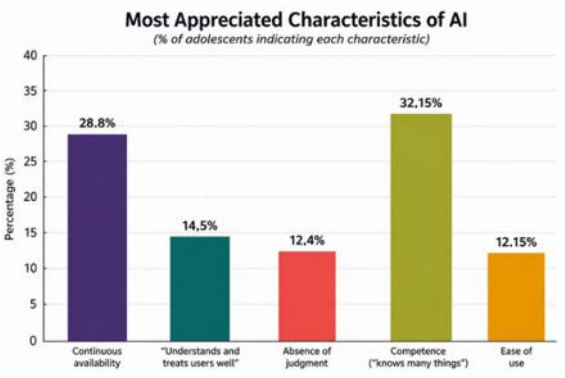


Figure 2: Characteristics of artificial intelligence most appreciated by adolescents. Source: Save the Children (2025).

The absence of autonomous agency, far from representing merely a limitation, thus emerges as a resource capable of lowering the threshold of access to speech and enabling more immediate and less inhibited forms of self-expression, particularly during the initial stages of the dialogical process.
This dimension is intertwined with that of anonymity and identity protection, understood as the possibility of maintaining strict control over one's self-exposure. Artificial intelligence increasingly emerges as a space in which individuals may "attempt to speak" without immediately confronting the social and relational consequences of disclosure. Indeed, 23.9% of adolescents identify as the primary reason for use the possibility of expressing contents they would not share with friends or family members, while 20.2% consider interaction with AI easier than dialogue with human interlocutors, insofar as responses tend to be linear, non-conflictual, and less ambiguous than human interaction.
These motivations are accompanied by elements connected to emotional experience, such as feeling less alone, indicated by 10.4% of adolescents, and the appreciation of the absence of judgment, mentioned by 9.7%. Taken together, these findings outline the principal trajectories underlying recourse to AI within the personal sphere, as summarized in Figure 3 (Save the Children, 2025).

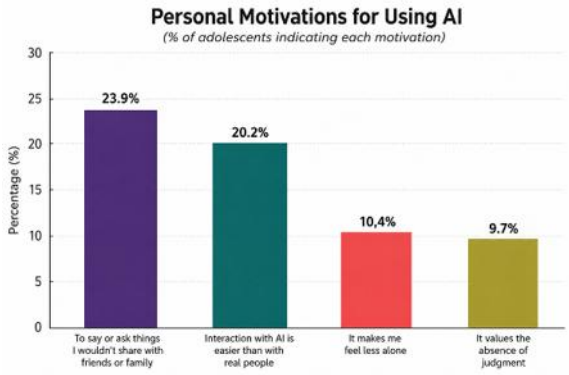


Figure 3: Personal motivations underlying adolescents' use of artificial intelligence. Source: Save the Children (2025).

A further factor underlying the attractiveness of AI concerns immediate accessibility and dialogical continuity. Chatbots function as stable and continuously available presences: they are available at all times, require no

waiting periods, and allow repeated returns to the interaction (McBain et al., 2025; Jialan et al., 2025). It is therefore unsurprising that 28.8% of adolescents identify continuous availability as the most appreciated characteristic of these systems (Save the Children, 2025). This is accompanied by the perception of high informational competence and ease of use, both of which contribute to making such systems immediately accessible and cognitively sustainable. Users thus maintain a dialogical space that is permanently open, adaptable, and customizable, within which they may elaborate their lived experiences and orient the behavior of the system itself (Dai et al., 2026).

This configuration is situated within a framework of highly heterogeneous and articulated uses. On the one hand, instrumental activities predominate, such as information seeking, indicated by 35.7% of adolescents, alongside academic support and content re-elaboration. On the other hand, a plurality of uses emerges that traverses everyday and personal dimensions: 21.4% of users turn to artificial intelligence for recreational activities, curiosity, and entertainment; 16.4% for personal reasons; and 15% to obtain practical advice useful for everyday life (Save the Children, 2025).

These forms of use are accompanied—although to a lesser extent, yet with considerable theoretical significance—by applications directly connected to well-being and relational life, with 7.1% of adolescents indicating the improvement of personal well-being as their primary purpose and 4.2% using such systems to seek companionship. Artificial intelligence thus emerges as a multifunctional device capable of accompanying not only cognitive processes, but also practices of orientation, reflection, and informal support (Figure 4).

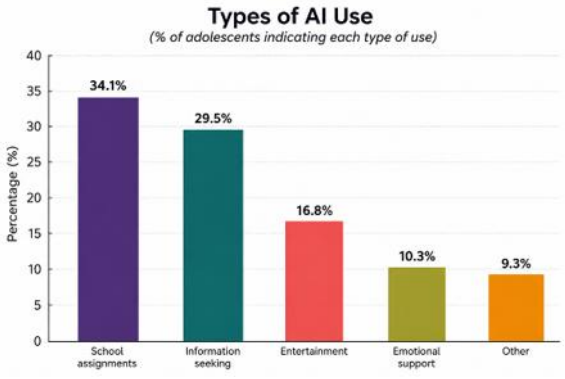


Figure 4: Main patterns of artificial intelligence use among adolescents. Source: Save the Children (2025).

The distribution of uses highlighted in Figure 4 suggests that artificial intelligence is employed as a transversal device capable of traversing cognitive,

everyday, and relational domains. From a pedagogical perspective, this implies a significant shift: AI, generally perceived as a tool designed to support learning, becomes a pervasive mediation that intervenes in processes of orientation, decision-making, and meaning construction, thereby requiring the redefinition of an educational approach capable of integrating cognitive, critical, and socio-relational dimensions.

It must also be considered that recourse to chatbots appears closely connected to experiences of loneliness. AI is used as an interlocutor capable of offering forms of companionship and recognition, particularly in situations in which human relationships are absent, unsatisfactory, or difficult to access (Jung et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2026). Indeed, 48.4% of adolescents report having shared personal information related to their real lives with artificial intelligence systems, including sensitive data (Save the Children, 2025).

Such ease of disclosure, however, does not eliminate perceptions of risk. Only 9.3% state that they have no concerns at all, while the main fears include the loss of human control over technologies, indicated by 23.3% of respondents; the increase in surveillance and privacy violations, reported by 12.6%; and the risk of developing excessive forms of dependency. In addition, 9.3% associate artificial intelligence with fears concerning its negative impact on future employment prospects (Save the Children, 2025).

A particularly significant element concerns the symbolic representation of artificial intelligence. While 32.6% of adolescents tend to identify AI with the figure of an expert, a non-negligible proportion, equal to 13%, associate it with that of a close friend, a perception shared by only 3.5% of adults. Conversely, among adults a more detached representation prevails, with 23.1% considering AI as a stranger, a position that concerns only 5.8% of adolescents (Save the Children, 2025), as illustrated in Figure 5.

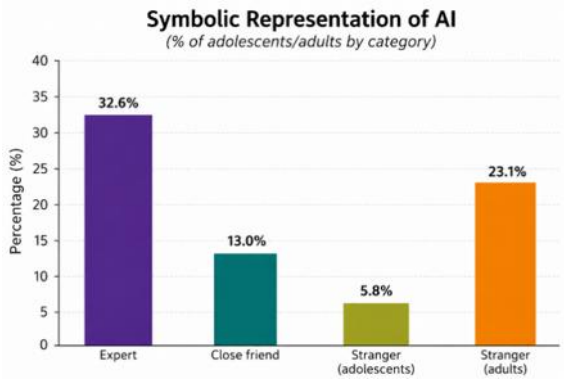


Figure 5: Symbolic representations of artificial intelligence among adolescents and adults (Save the Children, 2025).

The differences highlighted in Figure 5 reveal a distinct positioning of AI within relational ecologies: young people tend to perceive it as a more proximate and familiar presence compared to adults. From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests that AI is increasingly incorporated as a meaningful presence within processes of orientation, dialogue, and meaning-making. Such a transformation directly challenges educational contexts, which are called upon to sustain relationships capable of depth, reciprocity, and responsibility.

First, it is necessary to analyze the very nature of the chatbot. This mediator, characterized by the absence of autonomous decision-making and intrinsic intentionality, creates communicative conditions that reduce exposure and perceived risk, thereby facilitating the emergence of speech. In this sense, it supports processes of verbalization and cognitive reformulation by offering a non-judgmental context that is consequently perceived as safer. Jung and colleagues (2025) show how interaction with ChatGPT facilitates expression and clarity, helping younger users translate confused thoughts into clearer formulations, prepare difficult conversations, and render narratable what initially appears amorphous.

The study by Luo and colleagues (2025) further highlights how interaction with AI configures itself as a co-constructed process, in which the user defines the role of the system and directs its functioning toward activities of self-reflection, journaling, or therapeutic simulation. Altogether, these dynamics facilitate the emergence of speech and support individuals in giving shape and continuity to their lived experience, while also tending to reduce exposure to confrontation and dissonance, since the system predominantly returns responses coherent with the instructions received. AI appears particularly effective when the need concerns clarification and orientation in ordinary situations, whereas it reveals significant limitations when demands require relational responsibility and interpretative depth (Young et al., 2024). Wu and colleagues (2026) further emphasize how such practices, alongside their benefits, may also foster dynamics of dependency and isolation, thereby influencing the ways in which young people learn to express themselves and formulate requests for help.

Overall, the studies considered show that the attractiveness of chatbots, sustained by conditions of accessibility, control, and perceived safety, is accompanied by a set of critical issues affecting the forms of dialogue and listening themselves. A significant paradox thus emerges: although artificial intelligence facilitates the emergence of speech, it does not practice listening in the fullest sense of the term, understood as a presence capable of sharing, interpreting, and responsibly assuming the experience of the other. It therefore becomes necessary to reflect on which forms of interaction, dialogue, and listening may be developed in order to enter into meaningful relationships with

future generations, taking technological mediations into account without renouncing the quality and depth of educational encounter.

5. Limitations and Risks of Artificial Mediation

While, on the one hand, artificial intelligence may configure itself as a threshold of access to speech and as a space of initial support, on the other hand the literature and studies discussed in the previous sections highlight structural limitations and significant risks that prevent it from being assimilated to an educational, therapeutic, or caring relationship in the fullest sense.

A first aspect concerns simulated empathy. Chatbots generate linguistically reassuring and supportive responses, to the point of creating in users the feeling of being understood and welcomed; however, such empathy remains devoid of genuine emotional participation, situated involvement, and authentic interpretative capacity, configuring itself more as a form of functional mirroring than as a shared hermeneutic process (Dai et al., 2026; Jialan et al., 2025). The limitation of artificial mediation lies precisely in this dimension: interaction often remains descriptive, accommodating, or validating, without sustaining a deeper exploration of meanings.

A second fundamental limitation concerns the absence of relational responsibility. The chatbot does not assume the ethical weight of the response, does not share the vulnerability inherent in the encounter, does not expose itself to reciprocity, and cannot authentically take responsibility for the other. Even when AI appears available, empathetic, and coherent, it cannot responsibly sustain the management of the relationship, nor support the interpretative and transformative work that requires presence, risk, and human involvement.

This limitation also becomes evident in the management of critical situations. In contexts of heightened vulnerability, artificial systems frequently prove inadequate: they tend to provide superficial, generic, and predominantly confirmatory responses, often failing to recognize the seriousness of risk signals and thereby exposing users to potentially harmful consequences (Sobowale et al., 2025). In this regard, however, Shelton (2025) notes that many adolescents, despite making extensive use of AI, do not consider it a fully reliable source in serious situations. In contexts characterized by high emotional intensity, such as those involving suicidal thoughts, human responses are clearly preferred over artificial ones, precisely because users perceive the need for a presence capable of assuming relational responsibility rather than merely referring to a protocol.

The risk of a progressive marginalization of authentic relationships must also be considered. For some users, AI use may replace recourse to professionals or

real people (Ueda, 2025). Moreover, although chatbots may alleviate feelings of loneliness in the short term, their medium- and long-term use may become associated with greater isolation, cognitive dependency, and a reduced perception of genuine social support (Wu et al., 2026).

The principal risk lies in the possibility that the accessibility and accommodating nature of AI may lead users to overestimate its capacities, considering it sufficient even in situations where a human relationship capable of listening, interpreting, and containing lived experience would instead be necessary. All this calls for deeper reflection on the part of adults, educators, and care professionals: while AI may facilitate dialogue and encourage openness regarding personal and sensitive contents, it cannot replace the encounter with the other. Which paths, then, should be pursued in order to recover authentic dialogue and active listening between young people and adults? The issue appears complex and far from linear, opening the need to explore and experiment with relational configurations that remain, to a large extent, still unexplored.

6. Conclusions

The use of artificial intelligence as an interlocutor for listening should not be interpreted merely as a consequence of technological diffusion, nor as a disinvestment in human relationships. Although young people increasingly turn to chatbots for doubts, advice, and support, the studies discussed in this contribution show that they continue to seek spaces in which they may name their lived experiences, give form to emotions, and interrogate their own existence.

What appears to have changed is not the need for self-expression nor the desire to be listened to, but rather the availability of contexts within which such speech may emerge without being immediately exposed to judgment, misunderstanding, or closure. Artificial intelligence has therefore progressively assumed a significant position among younger generations insofar as it makes accessible dialogical conditions perceived as more approachable and practicable. Chatbots configure themselves as devices capable of facilitating self-expression, supporting processes of cognitive clarification, and offering forms of emotional support through specific characteristics such as continuous accessibility, anonymity, and absence of judgment, all of which contribute to making self-disclosure more immediate and less inhibited (Dai et al., 2026; Jung et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2025).

A critical issue, however, concerns the level of users' awareness, particularly among very young individuals. The perception of empathy and listening that emerges in dialogue with chatbots does not correspond to genuine emotional

participation or relational responsibility. Although the responses generated may appear coherent and contextually appropriate, they remain structurally devoid of intentionality and of any authentic assumption of responsibility toward the lived experience of the other. Consequently, interaction tends to avoid situations of dissonance or conflict, orienting itself primarily toward forms of confirmation and accompaniment that, while fostering continuity of dialogue, do not encourage the development of competencies related to confrontation, negotiation, and relational complexity.

When the demand requires deep listening, interpretation, and accompaniment, the limitations of such devices become increasingly evident. In these circumstances, chatbots prove inadequate in sustaining complex transformative processes and are, in essence, incapable of guiding users toward forms of elaboration fully appropriate to the nature of the problems expressed (Young et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2026; Sobowale et al., 2025).

It is precisely within this paradox that pedagogy is today called to intervene. The widespread diffusion of chatbots among young people makes visible a deeper transformation in the conditions through which speech takes shape, seeks listening, and attempts to achieve recognition. What emerges clearly is the existence of a demand for listening that does not always find adequate spaces for expression and development within educational and social contexts. The pedagogical responsibility of educators, parents, and adults therefore consists in restoring listening to the center as an intentional, situated, and grounded practice. This means constructing contexts in which speech may dwell, be welcomed, and be accompanied without being immediately reduced or assimilated into predefined categories. Listening requires time, presence, and specific competencies, and presupposes the capacity to sustain uncertainty, tolerate ambivalence, and return to individuals the complexity of their lived experience without simplifying it.

All this requires a reconfiguration of education for dialogue.

If artificial devices facilitate self-expression and the clarification of thought, it becomes even more urgent to support young people in developing the capacity to bring such speech into relationships that are genuinely dialogical. Younger generations must therefore be guided toward dialogical reciprocity, the management of disagreement, the negotiation of meanings, and the possibility of inhabiting interactions capable of challenging their own perspectives and generating transformation.

From this perspective, several directions for academic inquiry and future research emerge. It appears necessary to further investigate how practices of listening may be redesigned within contemporary educational contexts, taking into account the transformations introduced by digital mediations. There is a need to foster dialogical competencies capable of integrating self-expression,

confrontation, relational responsibility, and the management of complexity, while also understanding how young people move between mediated spaces and real relationships.

The issue is not to choose between artificial intelligence and human relationships, but rather to understand how artificial mediations are redefining the conditions of listening and dialogue in ways that increasingly shift communicative experience away from the embodied and relational density of face-to-face interaction described by Media Naturalness Theory. The task of pedagogy is to ensure that speech may find, within educational contexts, spaces in which it can be genuinely welcomed, recognized, and transformed. In this direction lies the possibility of restoring meaning and depth to listening in an age increasingly permeated by artificial mediations.

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