

Exploring pedagogical and ethical dimensions of AI use in EFL classrooms: teachers' views from private high schools

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Suggested citation: Tümen Akyıldız, S. (2025). Exploring pedagogical and ethical dimensions of AI use in EFL classrooms: teachers' views from private high schools. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, 8(4), 409-428

Highlights

- AI helps teachers plan lessons faster and makes students more engaged and independent.
- Teachers worry about privacy, unfair AI feedback, and students using AI to do whole assignments.
- Schools have no clear rules or training, so teachers feel unsure and unsupported when using AI.

Abstract

This study examines EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the pedagogical benefits, ethical dilemmas, and institutional challenges associated with the implementation of AI tools in language classes. The research was conducted at private high schools in a small city, Türkiye, employing a qualitative design within a constructivist framework. Ten teachers were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse array of experiences and expertise with AI tools. Subsequently, they were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Reflexive thematic analysis identified three primary themes: perceived instructional advantages, ethical concerns, and institutional limits. Although educators commended AI for its capacity to assist in lesson design, foster student autonomy, and enhance engagement, they also voiced concerns around data privacy, academic integrity, and students' excessive reliance on AI. Inadequate policies, lack of managerial support, and insufficient professional development opportunities were institutional challenges that hindered the successful utilization of AI. The findings indicate that educators necessitate clear regulations from their institutions, continuous professional support, and ethical frameworks to utilize AI tools responsibly in language instruction.

Article Info: Research Article

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Language Education, EFL Teachers' Perceptions*

1. Introduction

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language education has attracted growing attention because of its ability to change how teaching and learning happen (Bin-Hady et al., 2024; Wei, 2023). One of the most common examples of generative AI is applications based on large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT. These tools can analyze, rewrite, translate, and produce various types of content, including text and images. They work as statistical algorithms that are trained on huge datasets made up of online text, books, journal articles and magazines. By processing this massive amount of data, they learn to guess possible responses and rank them according to how likely they are to be seen as correct by humans (Mitchell, 2019). The increasing integration of them in education and particularly in language education has brought both exciting opportunities and serious ethical challenges. Applications such as grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots are now commonplace in classrooms, helping students receive instant feedback, engage with adaptive learning materials, and develop a sense of autonomy (Vaccino-

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This study was partly presented as a proceeding at the 5th International Conference on Educational Technology and Online Learning held between 26-29 August 2025.

Salvadore, 2023; Pratama et al., 2023; Yedjou et al., 2024). In today's classrooms, AI technologies have the ability to track students' progress and adapt to their individual learning styles. They also offer more personalized learning experiences, which makes them appear even more attractive to teachers who are trying to respond to diverse learner needs. Such innovations are seen as promising tools to make education efficient and more engaging and accessible to diverse learners (Popescu, 2022). This broader shift also reflects what Holmes et al. (2019) describe as the move toward AI-supported learning environments that help teachers redesign instruction and create more responsive classroom practices. As Yen et al. (2024) observed, such tools can offer "an intimate, tutor-guided journey" that helps learners who might otherwise hesitate to ask questions in class. Aljabr and Al-Ahdal (2024) also emphasize that AI-supported environments can promote learner-centered approaches and provide time for teachers to focus on higher-order instructional tasks.

But teachers all across the world are becoming more and more worried that students are relying too much on AI tools, and many of them fear that learners could skip over real challenges and avoid critical thinking because they turn to AI for quick answers (Yen et al., 2024). Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) also warns that heavy use of AI might slowly weaken students' creative problem-solving skills, while Peer Mohamed (2024) points out that teachers often struggle to balance the benefits of AI with its risks, especially when there is not enough support from their institutions.

Ethical issues further complicate AI integration. As AI systems rely on large-scale data processing, concerns about privacy, consent, and transparency are mounting (Alam & Mohanty, 2022). Algorithmic bias can also exacerbate educational inequalities (Vaccino-Salvadore, 2023). Yen et al. (2024, p. 15) found that many university lecturers expressed doubts about the authenticity of student assessments when AI tools like ChatGPT are used, reflecting broader apprehensions about academic integrity. Hwang et al. (2020) suggest that while AI can act as a tutor, partner, or advisor, its integration must be handled carefully to preserve the humanistic aspects of teaching (Yagi et al., 2023). There remains a significant gap in ethical and policy frameworks governing the use of AI in education, which must be addressed to ensure its responsible integration. This urgency stems from the fact that AI introduces complex epistemological and ethical challenges particularly around objectivity, reproducibility, transparency, accountability, responsibility, and trust (Alvarado, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2023). From a broader educational view, this research is also grounded in constructivist philosophy, where learning is understood as a process of building meaning through interaction and personal experience. According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge is not transmitted from teacher to learner but co-constructed within a social environment, while Bruner (1996) emphasized that learning happens when students actively organize and interpret information. In this sense, the role of the teacher in using AI tools becomes similar to a guide who helps learners explore and make sense of language through technological mediation. Moreover, teachers' professional judgment and decision-making remain vital, as Biesta (2015) and Hargreaves (2020) remind that teacher agency is at the heart of educational change and moral responsibility. The ethical reflections in this study are also connected to Floridi's (2018) idea of *soft ethics* and Zuboff's (2019) concern about *surveillance capitalism*, both stressing the importance of human responsibility and autonomy in digital learning environments. These theoretical perspectives together create the background of this study, combining pedagogical, ethical, and humanistic views toward the use of AI in education.

In Türkiye, these global concerns are amplified in smaller cities like Elazığ, where teachers face limited technological infrastructure and insufficient professional development opportunities. In the context of such cities private high schools have shown an increasing interest in integrating AI tools into language education as part of their efforts to improve students' English proficiency levels mainly because these schools are often reported to fall short of desired standards. Unlike larger metropolitan areas—where students usually encounter more opportunities to use English outside the classroom—learners in smaller cities are generally limited to classroom-based interactions, which restricts their exposure and slows down their communicative development. This limited exposure restricts their ability to develop communicative competence and fluency. As a result, private schools in the region are seeking innovative solutions to enhance their English language programs. Their motivation is partly driven by the competitive nature of private education. It is

due to schools aim to differentiate themselves in a relatively small market and meet the growing expectations of parents. They view English proficiency as essential for success in a globalized world. Integrating AI is therefore seen not only as a pedagogical innovation but also as a necessity to align with broader societal and technological shifts. This local dynamic echoes the concerns raised in global discussions about AI in education. As one lecturer in Yen et al.'s (2024) study put it, "It is about finding the right balance. ChatGPT should complement, not replace, teaching." This highlights the need for context-sensitive policies that align with both ethical considerations and pedagogical goals.

This study investigates how EFL teachers working in private high schools in Elazığ view the pedagogical benefits and ethical challenges of integrating AI tools into their teaching practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers (six female, four male) whose teaching experience ranges from 3 to 20 years. Private high schools were selected as the setting since they are generally more open to adopting new technologies like AI. Since they have comparatively better resources than public schools. Yet, despite this advantage, issues such as insufficient teacher training and unclear institutional policies still pose notable barriers, particularly in a relatively under-resourced region. To guide the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do EFL teachers in private high schools perceive the pedagogical utility of AI tools such as grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots?
2. What ethical concerns do EFL teachers associate with the integration of AI tools in their classrooms?
3. What institutional challenges and support gaps do teachers identify regarding the use of AI tools in contexts like Elazığ?

The next section, Background of the Study, provides a detailed discussion of the broader educational and technological context for this research. It examines global trends in AI integration into education, pedagogical opportunities offered by AI tools, ethical concerns raised by educators and researchers, and the specific challenges faced in Türkiye—particularly in cities like Elazığ where institutional support and infrastructure may be limited. This background establishes a foundation for understanding the relevance and urgency of exploring EFL teachers' perspectives in such contexts.

Background of the Study

AI is revolutionizing education all across the world, changing how students and teachers engage with content. The ability of AI tools, such as chatbots and adaptive systems, to offer individualized instruction, real-time feedback, and support for a range of learner needs has led to their widespread adoption (Yen et al., 2024). Learners can have interactive, human-like conversations with conversational AI apps like ChatGPT, which promotes independence and interest in language acquisition. These tools' ease of use is a major factor in their quick uptake. Without the need for sophisticated technical knowledge, students can communicate with ChatGPT using natural language (Vaccino-Salvadore, 2023). According to Yen and his colleagues (2024), this accessibility can be especially helpful for students who are reluctant to take part in conventional classroom discussions. According to them, AI environments are "tutor-like" settings that help students at their own speed.

Opportunities come with practical and ethical challenges such as transparency and data privacy. According to Rohde and his colleagues (2021), a lot of AI systems gather and analyze a lot of user data. Clear consent and transparency regarding the storage and use of this data are lacking. How to safeguard students' rights in digital settings is called into question by this lack of transparency. Algorithmic bias presents another difficulty. Rohde et al. (2021) and Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) argue that AI systems trained on historical datasets may unintentionally perpetuate previous social and cultural preconceptions, potentially marginalizing minority groups in education. This issue goes beyond schooling, since biases in training data can also be seen in AI models. This could lead to unfair methods of assigning grades and allocating learning

resources. This problem happens when data errors allow AI or machine learning systems to provide biased or unjust findings. Hiring practices, criminal justice, healthcare, education, and even targeted advertising might all be affected. As Vică (2023) points out, algorithmic bias remains one of the most significant obstacles in designing safe AI systems. To address it, increased openness, equitable design, and stronger legal frameworks are required to ensure that AI promotes rather than hinders equality. These concerns show how important strong ethical government is. Rohde et al. (2021) say that even though many ethical AI guidelines have been suggested around the world, such as the European Union's "Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI," these high-level principles have not yet been turned into policies that can be put into action at the institutional level. Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) states that thorough institutional policies and teacher training are needed to make sure that AI is used responsibly in language learning as well.

AI techniques in language learning have made many new ways of teaching possible, and many scholars argue that they will change how students use language resources and how teachers run their classes. For example, ChatGPT lets students make their own techniques of learning that are more suited to them. It is known that they give them freedom to explore topics which are interesting to them at their own pace. This type of self-directed learning often supports learner autonomy and makes it easier for teachers to adjust lessons based on individual student needs (Yen et al., 2024). With its natural language processing features AI can also analyze their language use and give feedback tailored to their needs. This helps them move forward on a more personalized path to language mastery (Hwang et al., 2023). AI tools support social interaction by letting learners take part in simulated conversations that feel like real-life situations as well. Such activities also encourage cooperation and build language skills. Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) also adds that ChatGPT encourages active language practice, especially for writing and speaking. With instant feedback and suggestions for alternative phrases, AI writing tools help learners improve their language use and grow more confident. Meniado (2023) also highlights how ChatGPT plays an important role in improving English language teaching. It helps teachers design customized lesson plans, support language learning in different contexts, create personalized materials, assess students' language skills, and give instant, tailored feedback. AI systems are used to track and predict student success while helping teachers do their jobs. Student performance prediction systems use AI, data analytics, and machine learning to estimate academic outcomes and spot factors that affect learning success or challenges. They help teachers and schools adjust their strategies and take early action to support students. Such systems are seen as powerful tools for making education more personalized and for reducing school failure (Marin & Georgescu, 2020). Still, their use needs balance. It is essential to combine these technologies with teachers' professional judgment and to respect ethical and data privacy rules. These tools are also beneficial for teachers because they reduce the time spent on repetitive feedback, allowing them to focus more on higher-level teaching activities (Vaccino-Salvadore, 2023). From the constructivist point of view, learning is not a simple accumulation of knowledge but a dynamic and social process (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). When teachers use AI tools, they act as mediators who help students make meaning through interaction with technology, not as passive users of digital systems. This process also reflects teacher agency, which Biesta (2015) describes as the capacity of teachers to make responsible judgments rather than just following predetermined procedures. As Hargreaves (2020) notes, teachers' agency connects moral purpose with professional action, especially when they deal with new innovations like AI. At the same time, ethical concerns in this field are deeply related to Floridi's (2018) *philosophy of information* and Zuboff's (2019) critique of data-driven education, which both question how power, privacy, and autonomy are reshaped by digital technologies in schools. These perspectives together build the conceptual base for this study, linking constructivist pedagogy, teacher agency, and digital ethics as the main lenses for interpreting teachers' experiences with AI.

Saritepeci and Yıldız Durak (2024), on the other hand, stated how AI-supported learning environments could assist students improve their creative and reflective thinking skills. Their study found that integrating AI tools in design-based learning made students do more than simply passively receive information; they also had to do tasks that were more relevant and focused on the student. So, these results show that AI technologies like ChatGPT can be helpful for teachers and students in creating language learning environments that are dynamic, interactive, and focused on the students. AI technologies like ChatGPT

offer a lot of exciting possibilities for language learning, but they also raise a lot of complicated moral issues when used in schools. One big problem is that kids could rely too much on these technologies. Yen et al. (2024) note that some teachers have seen learners skipping over real learning efforts and instead relying on quick, AI-generated answers. Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) also worries that using AI support too much could hurt students' ability to solve problems and think creatively. Another important problems are the safety and privacy of data. Rohde et al. (2021) stress that AI systems often handle a lot of sensitive user data without being clear about how this data is maintained or used. Ashok et al. (2022) back this worry up. They point out that AI apps often gather personal information without the user's clear permission, which raises fundamental problems about how to ethically handle data.

Because AI systems are so complicated it is especially harder to employ them ethically in schools. Ashok and his colleagues (2022) argue that this lack makes it difficult for teachers. It means, teachers cannot fully trust AI outputs or evaluate their appropriateness for pedagogical decisions. These ethical and teaching concerns become even more important in approaches like outcome-based education. This method focuses on students and aims to help them reach clear and measurable learning goals (Spady, 1994). In language education, authentic assessment practices are prioritized to evaluate students' development of specific skills and competencies crucial for their educational journey (Brindley, 1998). It is essential to ensure that evaluation methods accurately reflect students' knowledge, abilities, and communication skills (Brindley, 2001). Any external influence, such as the use of AI tools, which may potentially misrepresent these outcomes, has therefore become a significant concern among educators. Any external factors like the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT might distort these outcomes. This has now become a major worry for many educators and needs for strong institutional policies.

These practical issues are the main focus of conversations about AI in education, but they are also part of a larger conversation about digital ethics. The interaction between technology forces and cultural moral norms has led some people to say that they are socially manufactured. From this point of view, ethical issues in AI use are not fixed; they change as technology improves and societies figure out what their moral priorities are. As Karlsson (2003) states, "ICT affect human attitudes, values and behaviour, and set conditions for human identity, existence, and change." This viewpoint highlights how the integration of AI tools in education can influence not only learning processes but also fundamental aspects of human agency and identity. Drawing on Floridi's (2018) conceptualization, digital ethics encompasses both hard ethics—concerned with right and wrong actions based on laws and regulations—and soft ethics, which goes beyond compliance to ask "what ought and ought not to be done" in educational contexts. Moreover, Bostrom and Yudkowsky (2014) emphasize the need for AI systems themselves to exhibit ethical qualities such as responsibility, transparency, auditability, incorruptibility, and predictability. These considerations are particularly relevant in education. It is because AI technologies increasingly mediate the relationship between teachers and students. This theoretical framing is especially pertinent when examining how teachers perceive AI tools like ChatGPT. It highlights the dual pressures they face: balancing utilitarian considerations of maximizing learning benefits with the imperatives of respecting students as autonomous agents and protecting their long-term intellectual development. These dynamics create a recursive relationship where technological capabilities influence moral expectations, and vice versa. Understanding this interaction helps put teachers' worries in the context of a worldwide conversation on how to use AI responsibly. It also brings to the front the need to put ethical choices in context in small cities.

This theoretical perspective becomes especially important when looking at how teachers view AI tools. It shows the challenges they are facing. On one hand, trying to get the most out of these technologies in terms of learning benefits (e.g., instant feedback, more student autonomy), and on the other, following ethical principles that respect students as independent learners and protect their long-term intellectual growth. There is a kind of loop between these two forces: progress in technology changes moral expectations, and those expectations change how technology is used. Seeing this back-and-forth relationship helps place teachers' worries into the bigger global conversation on using AI responsibly, while also stressing the need to adapt ethical practices to local contexts. Because of these problems, AI needs strong societal support systems and good teacher training in order to be used in moral and responsible ways. Ashok et al. (2022) recommend that schools and universities develop governance models that fit with international ethical standards to reduce risks and ensure fair access to AI technologies in this respect. Recent international

discussions also highlight that the integration of AI into education should not be understood only as a pedagogical innovation but as a systemic change that involves policy, governance, and institutional culture. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) emphasize that sustainable AI adoption depends on organizational readiness and teacher training at multiple levels of the educational system. Likewise, Luckin et al. (2022) draw attention to the ethical dimensions of classroom AI use, especially transparency, fairness, and the preservation of human agency. These perspectives help position the present study within a broader international discourse on responsible and equitable AI integration. They also provide a comparative backdrop for understanding how the experiences of EFL teachers in Türkiye align with or differ from global educational technology developments.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model/Design

The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is used in this study because it fits with the goal of looking into how EFL teachers feel about using AI tools in their classrooms. This way of thinking is based on the philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics. It focuses on understanding people's experiences through their own meanings and social situations (Eichelberger, 1989, as cited in Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Reality is not objective and fixed but rather co-constructed by individuals through their personal experiences, interactions, and cultural norms. Within this constructivist framework, the study adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate how AI integration influences pedagogical practices and ethical considerations in language education. Qualitative research is a good way to find out about participants' lived experiences and what they mean, as Creswell and Poth (2018) points. This method gives us a good starting point for looking at how teachers deal with the pros and cons of AI tools in different types of classrooms. Researchers that use constructivism generally ask broad, open-ended questions to get participants to share their own views and interpretations (Creswell, 2014). This perspective allowed participants to share their experiences with grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots in their own words. This method captured individual insights and facilitated the co-construction of meaning through dialogue between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In short, this design is believed to support a deeper understanding of how EFL teachers interpret the pedagogical and ethical dimensions of AI in their teaching, shaped by both personal and institutional factors within the unique socio-educational context of a small city.

2.2. Data Collecting Tools

In the study, semi-structured interviews let people talk about their experiences using grammar checkers, writing helpers, and chatbots in their own words. Creswell (2014) says that semi-structured interviews are a way to collect data that includes a series of open-ended questions but still lets the interviewers follow up on answers that come up. These kinds of interviews give participants a clear structure so they can talk about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings in depth (Merriam, 2009). This method captured individual insights and facilitated the co-construction of meaning through dialogue between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In short, this design for the current research is believed to support a deeper understanding of how EFL teachers interpret the pedagogical and ethical dimensions of AI in their teaching, shaped by both personal and institutional factors within the unique socio-educational context of a small city. To guide the interviews, an initial set of questions was developed based on the study's objectives. These questions were then reviewed by two experts in language education and educational technology to ensure their relevance and clarity. Feedback from the experts led to minor adjustments in wording and scope, resulting in the final set of six open-ended questions:

- How do you perceive the role of AI tools (e.g., grammar correctors, chatbots) in supporting your teaching practices?
- Can you give examples of how these tools have influenced your students' learning or your teaching strategies?

- What ethical or practical concerns have you experienced or observed when using AI tools in your classroom?
- In your opinion, how should teachers address issues like student dependency or academic integrity when AI tools are involved?
- Are there any institutional policies or supports in place for integrating AI in your school?
- What kinds of training or resources do you think teachers need to use AI effectively and responsibly?

2.3. *Participants*

The participants in this study consisted of ten EFL teachers (six female, four male) working at five different private high schools in Elazığ, Türkiye. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 20 years, providing a balanced representation of early-career, mid-career, and highly experienced educators. Participants' familiarity with AI tools also varied; some had actively incorporated applications such as grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots into their lessons, while others had more limited exposure, reflecting the diverse levels of technological adoption across schools in the region. Private high schools were intentionally selected as the research setting because they are comparatively better resourced than public institutions, often having more access to technological infrastructure and a greater willingness to adopt innovative teaching tools. Elazığ is not an underprivileged city, and its schools have gotten a lot better, but there are still some things that make it hard to teach English. Students in this area, in particular, don't have many chances to use English outside of school, which limits their exposure to real language use and practice. Teachers have to do more work in this setting because they have to rely more on tactics that work in the classroom to help kids learn language. In this situation, private schools are a good place to look into how EFL teachers feel about and use AI tools in their classrooms because they have better access to resources and are becoming more interested in using new technologies. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could provide rich, detailed insights into the pedagogical and ethical aspects of AI use in language teaching. As Patton (2002) explains, purposive sampling allows researchers to select information-rich cases that offer in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Inclusion criteria required that participants (1) be current EFL teachers at private high schools in Elazığ, (2) have at least three years of teaching experience, and (3) have some level of familiarity with AI tools, even if limited. Demographic data such as gender, years of experience, and prior exposure to AI tools were collected at the start of the interviews to contextualize their responses. This diversity among participants enriched the findings by capturing a wide range of perspectives on the pedagogical benefits and ethical dilemmas associated with AI in language education. The recruitment process was based on voluntary participation. Invitations were distributed through school administrators, and interested teachers contacted the researcher directly. Efforts were made to ensure variation in teaching experience and familiarity with AI tools to achieve a diverse sample representing different perspectives within the same institutional context.

At the analysis stage, participants were anonymized and assigned codes to protect their identities while providing contextual information. Each participant's code consists of three parts: a sequential number, gender (F for female, M for male), and years of teaching experience in parentheses. For example, 1F(5) stands for the first female participant with five years of teaching experience, while 3M(7) refers to the third male participant with seven years of experience. This coding system also allowed patterns related to teaching experience and gender to be observed in the data.

2.4. *Data Analysis*

Using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis method established by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), this study looked at the data within a constructivist qualitative research framework. Many diverse theoretical viewpoints and datasets employ reflexive thematic analysis because it is so flexible. It helps researchers find, explain, and show patterns or stories that keep coming up in qualitative data. With the constructivist paradigm this study examined semi-structured interview transcripts using both deductive and inductive coding approaches. As Finlay (2021, p. 107) emphasizes, reflexive thematic analysis requires the researcher to maintain critical self-awareness throughout the analytical process. This approach acknowledges the

subjectivity of the researcher and encourages a deeper engagement with the data and the meanings constructed during analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Braun and Clarke (2021) changed their original six phases to put more focus on reflexivity. The first step is familiarization, in which researchers read the interview transcripts on their own. After that, rigorous coding is done to find patterns that make sense. Next, initial themes are developed to find key insights, which are then reviewed and refined to ensure they align with the study's aims. Once finalized, themes are named and defined to accurately represent the findings. Finally, the reporting phase integrates these themes into a coherent and meaningful narrative. In this study, data analysis followed these phases carefully, ensuring a structured, reflexive, and rigorous approach to working with the interview data.

The coding process was carried out manually in several iterative rounds. Initial open codes were derived directly from the interview transcripts, followed by axial coding to identify conceptual relationships between categories. The researcher compared and refined codes across all transcripts to ensure internal consistency. After the preliminary coding was completed, two external experts were invited to review the initial codebook and comment on theme coherence. Their feedback helped refine the thematic structure and increase analytical rigor.

In this study, reflexive thematic analysis was preferred not to create a new methodological model but to offer a flexible and context-sensitive way of understanding teachers' lived experiences. The analysis followed an inductive logic while also being informed by existing conceptual frameworks in AI and language education. This means that codes were first generated from the raw data, and then compared with previous themes used in similar research, to see where teachers' experiences agreed or went beyond them. Such an approach makes the interpretation richer, but also keeps the researcher aware of how personal perspectives shape the process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The aim here was not methodological innovation but methodological transparency — showing clearly how meaning was co-constructed between the data, the researcher, and the existing body of knowledge.

2.5. *Trustworthiness*

Several well-known qualitative research methods were used to make the results more trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). First, investigator triangulation was used by getting opinions from outside academic experts. They looked over the process of coding. This outside validation served to lessen the possibility of researcher bias and made the analytical framework stronger (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, all audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored to maintain data integrity and ensure transparency for potential future audits. Additionally, thick description was applied to provide detailed accounts of the study process and participants' perspectives. This process is believed to enhance contextual richness and transferability (Geertz, 1973). Direct quotations from participants were integrated into the findings to support credibility and ensure that interpretations remained firmly grounded in the data (Elo et al., 2014). In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing summarized interpretations with several participants to confirm that the findings accurately reflected their intended meanings. Two experts in applied linguistics and educational technology provided peer debriefing, offering feedback on the alignment between raw data, codes, and emerging themes. These extra procedures improved analytical transparency and ensured that interpretations were consistent with participants' experiences. These combined efforts are believed to contribute to the methodological rigor and increase the validity of the current study's outcomes.

Research Procedures

The research process was designed and carried out systematically to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher first contacted five private high schools in Elazığ to recruit participants. School administrators were invited to meetings to explain the study's goals and gain permission for teachers to take part. After having institutional consent, ten EFL teachers were invited to take part in the study. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their

participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured that their identities would remain confidential and their responses would be used solely for research purposes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between March and April 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face at the participants' schools or via online platforms, depending on their preferences. The researcher recorded all of the interviews with permission and then typed them out word for word. Reflexive notes were also kept throughout the data collection process to document impressions, emerging ideas, and potential researcher biases. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis. This process included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and refining themes, and constructing a coherent narrative. To strengthen analytical rigor, external experts were consulted during the coding process as part of investigator triangulation. Throughout the research process, strict ethical standards were maintained. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely preserved, and participants' anonymity was protected at all stages.

2.6. Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study are organized thematically based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with the participants. For clarity and ease of interpretation, the results are presented in a series of tables. Each table summarizes the main themes, sub-themes, and codes, along with anonymized participant identifiers and illustrative data extracts. The following tables summarize the thematic findings in a condensed, reader-friendly format that presents themes, subthemes, and illustrative excerpts side by side for easier interpretation.

Table 1. Perceived Pedagogical Benefits of AI Tools: Themes, Sub-Themes, Codes, and Sample Data Extracts (RQ1)

Themes *Theme definitions are given in brackets	Sub-themes	Codes	Participant	Sample Data Extract
Perceived Pedagogical Benefits of AI Tools (This theme explores how AI tools (e.g., grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots) contribute to teaching and learning processes. It highlights their role in supporting lesson planning, fostering student engagement, promoting individualized learning, and enhancing learner autonomy in EFL classrooms.)	Teacher-Focused Benefits	Supporting lesson planning	1F(5)	<i>"I've been using ChatGPT lately to come up with creative writing prompts or even some quick reading questions. Just last week, it gave me a nice idea for a story-writing activity, and my students really enjoyed it. It honestly saves me a lot of prep time and makes my lessons feel a bit fresher."</i>
		Saving time for higher-order tasks	4F(12)	<i>"When I use grammar correction tools, I don't have to waste so much time fixing all those little grammar mistakes anymore. For example last week, I could skip the usual error correction part and spend more time doing a classroom discussion activity with my students. It felt good to focus on their critical thinking instead of just grammar."</i>
	Student-Focused Benefits	Enhancing student engagement	3M(7)	<i>"Grammar tools like Grammarly seem to keep my students motivated. For example, one girl said she likes how it underlines her mistakes straight away and suggests corrections. She told me it makes her feel like she's improving every time she writes, instead of waiting days for my feedback."</i>
		Providing individualized learning	2F(4)	<i>"Some of my students actually told me they use chatbots like ChatGPT at home to practice speaking. One boy said he was asking the chatbot random questions just to see how long he could keep the conversation going. I think it really helps with their confidence because they're not afraid of making mistakes, and they can practice anytime they want without pressure."</i>
		Promoting learner autonomy	5M(18)	<i>"I've noticed that my younger students tend to play around with AI tools like ChatGPT outside class. For example, one of them showed me how she used it to practice writing emails and even prepare for a short speaking task. I think it gives them a sense of ownership over their learning. I didn't really see it before with more traditional methods."</i>

The findings summarized in Table 1 indicate that EFL teachers perceive AI tools as valuable in supporting both instructional planning and student learning. Teacher-focused benefits, such as supporting lesson planning and saving time for higher-order tasks, were particularly emphasized by mid-career teachers (e.g., 1F(5), 4F(12)), who appreciated how grammar correctors and chatbots reduced their workload and allowed more room for creative teaching activities. This aligns with Meniado's (2023) findings that AI tools help teachers create customized lesson plans and focus on critical pedagogical tasks rather than repetitive error correction. This also fits with what Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024) found, where students said that AI tools were very beneficial and helpful in speeding up their language acquisition, which shows how useful and easy they are to use. This finding is also in line with what Almegren et al. (2025) found: EFL teachers thought that AI could help with personalized learning, interactive practice, and automatic feedback, which would help students improve their language skills in all four areas while making teachers' jobs easier.

Younger teachers (2F(4), 3M(7)) talked more about how AI technologies like chatbots and grammar checkers helped students stay interested and learn at their own pace. This backs up Popescu's (2022) claim that AI can customize learning experiences to meet the demands of each student, which makes them more motivated and independent. For example, 2F(4) saw her students using chatbots at home to practice speaking outside of class, which shows how AI may be used to make informal learning possibilities.. Similarly, Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024) observed that AI tools fostered learner autonomy by allowing students to choose their own learning paths and practice in a less pressured environment, which aligns with our participants' observations of increased student confidence and independent use of chatbots.

Interestingly, the sub-theme Promoting learner autonomy was identified by an experienced teacher (5M(18)) who noticed younger students exploring AI tools independently. This contrasts with his own earlier teaching experiences and suggests a generational shift in students' learning habits. Such observations echo Hwang et al. (2023), who emphasized that AI-mediated environments can support self-directed learning and reflective thinking.

It's interesting that Korkmaz and Akbıyık's (2024) students were mostly positive, but some also acknowledged the existing limitations of AI and thought its popularity would be short-lived. This is similar to how experienced teachers in the study were apprehensive. Some experienced teachers in the current study said they were cautiously optimistic about AI, seeing it as an extra tool rather than the main part of education. This hesitation is similar to what Yen et al. (2024) found: teachers often feel that they have to weigh the benefits of AI in the classroom against the risks of relying too much on it. Overall, these results show that AI tools can be very helpful for teaching, but teachers need to be comfortable with technology, open to new ideas, and have institutional support mechanisms that help them learn how to use AI tools in the classroom.

At this point, it is important to relate these results to some of the main ideas discussed in educational technology studies. Many of the teachers' comments reflect a kind of mediated learning process, which reminds the constructivist view that learning happens through tools and interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, the ways teachers used AI for planning or supporting autonomy are quite similar to what Vygotsky described as scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development. Recent educational and online technology research also discusses "intelligence augmentation," where AI is expected to support rather than replace human judgment (Luckin et al., 2016). Our findings also point in this direction. Teachers in this study did not see AI as a substitute for their role but more like an assisting tool that helps students explore language at their own pace. In this way, the findings add a small contribution to broader discussions about how AI becomes part of learner-centred classrooms, especially in contexts where students' exposure to English is limited.

At the same time, these findings also speak to wider debates in educational technology and online learning. Some scholars argue that AI-supported environments can create a new form of "shared agency" between teachers, learners, and digital tools (Holmes et al., 2019). In our data, we can see a similar pattern: teachers

still control the pedagogical aims, but AI helps them to reorganize time, feedback, and learner autonomy in more flexible ways. This is not a radical transformation, but rather what Selwyn (2016) calls a “messy” and negotiated process of edtech adoption in everyday practice. In that sense, the present study offers a small, context-based example of how AI is quietly reshaping classroom routines without removing the central role of the teacher.

Table 2. Perceived Ethical Concerns of AI Tools: Themes, Sub-Themes, Codes, and Sample Data Extracts (RQ2)

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Participant	Sample Data Extract
Perceived Ethical Concerns of AI Tools (This theme captures teachers' concerns about the ethical and practical implications of AI integration in language education.)	Data Privacy and Fairness	Concerns about data security	4F(16)	<i>"I sometimes feel uneasy when my students upload their essays to tools like Grammarly. Just the other day, one of my students asked me if it was really safe because she had to log in with her email address. I didn't know what to say, to be honest. It reminded me of a time last semester when another student accidentally linked her entire Google Drive to an app, and we later realized we couldn't be sure where all that data was going. Moments like these make me question how secure these platforms really are and whether we're putting students at risk without even realizing it."</i>
		Algorithmic bias risks	5 M(18)	<i>"AI tools aren't always fair. For example, I read about a case where a grammar checker gave lower scores to essays because it flagged certain sentence structures as wrong, even though they were acceptable in formal English. That made me worry these tools might unfairly mark down students who try to write in more complex ways."</i>
	Impact on Learning Integrity	Student over-reliance on AI	6M(20)	<i>"I've noticed some students using ChatGPT to write their whole assignments. For example, last month one of my students submitted an essay that felt too polished for his usual writing style. When I asked about it, he admitted he had copied most of it from ChatGPT. It makes me worry they're skipping the real learning process and relying too much on ready-made answers instead of thinking for themselves."</i>
		Concerns about AI replacing teachers	6M(20)	<i>"Sometimes I just think, what if AI keeps getting better, do we even be needed anymore? It's kind of scary. I remember last week, one of my students joked, 'Why do we need teachers if ChatGPT can explain everything?' and honestly, it stuck with me. What if one day we really lose our place in the classroom?"</i>
		Belief in the irreplaceable human element of teaching	4F(12)	<i>"Teaching isn't just about sharing information. It's also about showing empathy, understanding students, and building real connections with them. Things in AI simply can't do."</i>
		Erosion of critical thinking skills	3F(7)	<i>"Many students accept whatever answer AI gives without checking. They don't revise or question anymore, which hurts their critical thinking skills."</i>
		Authenticity in student assessments	2F(4)	<i>"It's really hard to tell if work is theirs or if it came straight from ChatGPT. This makes grading and feedback much harder for us teachers."</i>

The results show that teachers' ethical worries about using AI in the classroom depend a lot on how long they've been working and how comfortable they are with technology. Older teachers (4F(16), 5M(18), 6M(20)) were more doubtful about the privacy of data and the fairness of algorithms. Their worries are in line with research that shows that people are worried about the security of student data on commercial AI platforms (Rohde et al., 2021) and the fact that algorithmic biases still exist in educational technology (Vică, 2023). For instance, 5M(18) pointed out that AI systems could unfairly punish students who are not native speakers, which is similar to what Binns (2018) said about how algorithmic decision-making can lead to unfair outcomes. But less experienced teachers (for example, 2F(4) and 3F(7)) had a more balanced view.

They acknowledged the risks but also saw the promise of AI as a teaching tool when supported by institutional regulations. Hwang et al. (2020) found that younger teachers tend to take a more adventurous approach to using technology in the classroom, as long as ethical bounds are evident. This age split is similar to their findings. For example, 2F(4) talked about how hard it is to make sure that assessments are real, which is in line with Hosseini et al.'s (2023) focus on academic honesty in AI-mediated learning environments. The theme "Impact on Learning Integrity" brings up a common worry that students would become too reliant on AI tools, which could hurt their ability to think critically. This concern reflects Alvarado's (2023) argument that over-reliance on generative AI can erode students' ability to evaluate and synthesize information independently. These results are similar to those of Pando et al. (2025), where bilingual teachers similarly stressed the importance of carefully checking AI outputs to make sure they are culturally and linguistically suitable. Like the participants in our study, the study shows that teachers need to act as gatekeepers to check AI-generated content for correctness and bias. They also agree with what Cong-Lem et al. (2024) declare. They reported that Vietnamese EFL teachers perceived AI overuse as detrimental to students' development of critical thinking, creativity, and independent learning skills. Similar to our participants' concerns about academic integrity, Cong-Lem et al.'s teachers noted that excessive reliance on AI complicated accurate assessment and reduced opportunities for authentic intellectual engagement. Similarly, Uwosomah and Dooly (2025) reported that preservice teachers expressed concerns about AI fostering over-reliance among students, potentially diminishing their critical and creative thinking abilities. Their participants emphasized the teacher's role in guiding responsible AI use to mitigate these risks, which aligns with our findings on the ethical challenges of integrating AI in language education. Unlike the participants of this study who expressed strong concerns about data privacy and algorithmic fairness, Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024) reported that only a few learners acknowledged ethical issues in passing. This contrast may indicate that teachers, given their professional responsibilities, approach AI integration with heightened caution regarding student data security.

Another significant finding was teachers' divided opinions about AI's long-term role in education. Some senior teachers (e.g., 6M(20)) expressed anxiety that AI advancements might one day render the teaching profession obsolete. Unlike some participants in our study who feared that AI could eventually replace teachers, Almegren et al. (2025) found a strong consensus among EFL instructors that AI should complement human teaching rather than substitute it. This fear resonates with broader societal debates about automation and job displacement in education (Williamson & Hogan, 2020). Conversely, mid-career and younger teachers (e.g., 4F(12)) emphasized that teaching involves emotional intelligence, empathy, and nuanced interpersonal skills—qualities they believe AI lacks. As 4F(12) noted, "Teaching isn't just about delivering content; it's about understanding students' feelings and building trust, which no machine can replace." This perspective aligns with Floridi's (2018) concept of soft ethics, which highlights the irreplaceable human dimensions of care and judgment in educational settings. Taken together, these findings suggest that institutional frameworks should provide not only technical guidance but also ethical training for teachers to navigate AI integration responsibly. Without such support, experienced educators may resist using AI out of fear or mistrust, while younger teachers might overlook subtle ethical challenges, leading to uneven implementation across classrooms. This finding resonates with Korkmaz and Akbıyık's (2024) study, where EFL learners also emphasized the irreplaceability of teachers in fostering meaningful learning experiences, suggesting a shared belief across both groups in the unique human dimensions of education.

It is important to highlight that the differences between males and females were not very clear; only a small trend was seen. Female teachers regularly talked about ethical concerns that had to do with students, including privacy and security of data. Male teachers were more prone to worry about the possibility that AI could take over their jobs and what that would mean for the profession as a whole. This subtle difference may be due to the fact that male and female teachers see their jobs and duties differently when it comes to using AI. In the same way, Almegren et al. (2025) stressed that AI can help with many parts of education, but EFL teachers are still the best at teaching empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, which AI can't do yet. Their participants also talked about how important it is for teachers to teach pupils how to use

AI in a good and bad way. Unlike our experienced participants who expressed skepticism about AI's long-term role, Uwosomah and Dooly (2025) observed that preservice teachers became increasingly optimistic about AI as a creative partner in language teaching, reflecting a generational openness to technological integration. Interestingly, Cong-Lem et al. (2024) also found that some Vietnamese teachers perceived AI-generated content as copyright violations, reflecting a more restrictive stance towards AI use compared to the balanced view of our participants. Although Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024) did not report gender-based differences, their participants similarly stressed the importance of maintaining genuine connections between learners and educators, which aligns with female teachers' emphasis on student-centered ethical concerns in our study.

Examining these concerns in a broader sense, we can also see that they are connected with some well-known discussions in digital ethics. For instance, Floridi's idea of "soft ethics" reminds that the main problem is not only the technology itself but the way people take responsibility when they use it (Floridi, 2018). In our study, many teachers were trying to protect students from possible risks even when they were not fully confident about the tools, which shows a kind of ethical sensitivity that goes beyond only technical competence. At the same time, what teachers mentioned about fairness and algorithmic bias is quite similar to what Zuboff discusses about the power imbalance created by large data-driven systems and how this situation can influence individuals without them noticing it (Zuboff, 2019). In this sense, I believe our findings make this larger debate more concrete by showing how these ethical questions actually appear in very ordinary classroom moments, especially in a context where institutional guidance is still missing or weak. From the perspective of teacher agency, these ethical worries also show that teachers do not simply accept AI as a neutral tool. Instead, they actively filter, adapt, or even resist it according to their professional values. This is similar to what Priestley et al. (2015) describe as "teacher agency in constrained systems," where educators make practical-evaluative judgments within structural limits. In our case, the limits are related to unclear policies, datafication pressures, and the speed of AI adoption. By showing how teachers try to protect students' autonomy and fairness while still experimenting with AI, the study gives a small but concrete example of how digital ethics and teacher agency become closely connected in real school settings.

Table 3. Institutional Challenges and Professional Development Needs for AI Integration: Themes, Sub-Themes, Codes, and Sample Data Extracts (RQ3)

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Participant	Sample Data Extract
*Theme definitions are given in brackets				
Institutional Policies and Support (This theme explores the institutional-level challenges teachers face in integrating AI tools. It reflects gaps in policy, management support, and organizational structures necessary for effective AI integration.)	Lack of clear AI integration policies	Policy gap, absent guidelines	3F(7)	"We don't have any official policy about using AI tools in teaching. It feels like every teacher is on their own."
		Teacher uncertainty	8F(3)	"Honestly, there's nothing in our school guidelines about how we should use AI in teaching. For example, when I wanted to try a chatbot activity for speaking practice, I wasn't sure if it would be okay or if I needed approval. So I just went ahead and tried it with a small group. Another time, I used an AI grammar checker to give students quicker feedback, but I kept wondering whether the administration would support this or see it as inappropriate. In the end, I feel like I'm left to rely on my own judgment all the time, which can be stressful."
	Insufficient managerial support	Limited leadership initiatives	5M(18)	"To be honest, our management hasn't really encouraged or guided us when it comes to using AI. For instance, I once asked if we could have a short workshop on tools like ChatGPT or Grammarly, but they said it wasn't a priority right now. Another time, I suggested creating a small teacher group to share AI ideas, but it never went anywhere. It feels like there's no clear vision at the school level about how AI should fit into our teaching, so we're all just figuring things out on our own."

	Lack of institutional coordination	Collaboration gap, siloed efforts	4F(12)	<i>"Right now, there isn't a place or platform where we can share our AI experiences or ask our coworkers for help." As an example, last month I tried using a robot for a writing task and I was wondering if anyone else had done the same. But we can't share our thoughts because there's no group, meeting, or other place like that. A regular meeting or even an internet forum where we can talk about what works and what doesn't would be very helpful."</i>
Teacher Training and Professional Development Needs (This theme reflects teachers' perceptions of gaps in professional learning opportunities for developing AI-related pedagogical skills and accessing ongoing support.)	Limited Pedagogical and Technical Competence	Skills gap	1F(5)	<i>"It would be great to use more AI tools in my classes—I can see how they could be useful—but I'm not sure I'd do it correctly." I thought about using a chatbot for a speaking task last week, but I wasn't sure how to set it up or how to help the students do it right. I left it alone for now. Without the right teaching or maybe some real-life examples, I think I'd mess up or not get the most out of it"</i>
		Competence gap	2F(4)	<i>"I really like trying out new tools, but I'm not always sure if I'm using them in the right way—like, in an educational way—or if it's just a trick to make the lesson look cool. One time I used an AI quiz maker to teach words, but I kept asking myself, "Is this really helping them learn, or is it just keeping them busy?" I think I need more help figuring out how to use these tools in a useful way."</i>
	Demand for Sustained Professional Support	Continuous PD demand, mentoring need	6M(20)	<i>"Workshops are helpful, but what we really need is a proper support system. For example, a mentor or even a helpdesk could make a big difference when we face problems later on. Just last month, I tried using an AI tool to create reading comprehension questions and ran into a technical issue I couldn't solve. Since there was no one to ask for help, I ended up dropping the idea. That's why I believe one-off training isn't enough—we need ongoing support to make AI integration sustainable."</i>
		Peer learning need	3M(7)	<i>"It would be great if we had regular sessions where teachers could share how they use AI tools in their classes. I remember last term when I tried an AI writing assistant for a group project, and one of my colleagues later told me she had used the same tool in a completely different way for speaking practice. We only discovered this by chance during a casual chat in the staff room. If we had regular meetings or even an online space to exchange such ideas, I think we could all learn a lot faster and avoid repeating the same mistakes."</i>
	Lack of Practical Resources and Exemplars	Need for exemplars		<i>"If there were model lesson plans using AI, I'd feel more confident trying them out myself. Last month, I wanted to design a reading activity with an AI tool, but I wasn't sure how to structure it or which features to use. I ended up spending hours testing different options, and in the end, I wasn't satisfied with the result. If there had been a few sample plans or guidelines, it would have saved me so much time and frustration."</i>

Table 3 shows that institutional problems and the requirement for professional development have a big impact on how EFL teachers use AI in their classes. Teachers often said that the lack of clear school-wide rules and procedures made it hard for them to know how to use AI tools in a way that was both correct and ethical. For example, 8F(3) talked about how she tried out chatbots and grammar checks on her own, although she often wondered if these things were what the school wanted her to do. This situation reflects Rohde et al. (2021), who emphasized that without actionable institutional frameworks, even motivated teachers may struggle to implement AI effectively. This is further supported by Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024), whose participants emphasized the need for institutional training and tailored curricula to maximize the potential of AI tools in language learning.

Another common issue was a lack of support from management. School leaders turned down requests for workshops or teacher discussion groups because they weren't important enough, according to 5M(18). Peer Mohamed's (2024) observations that teachers in areas with few resources sometimes have to come up with new ideas on their own, without support from the system, are similar to this lack of administrative initiative. Cong-Lem et al. (2024) also observed that Vietnamese EFL teachers advocated for stricter institutional

regulations and teacher training to guide ethical and effective AI use, underscoring the importance of administrative support in managing AI-related challenges. Even in comparatively better-equipped private schools in Elazığ, this inertia seemed to discourage teachers from exploring AI's full potential. Similarly, Korkmaz and Akbıyık (2024) noted that students perceived the absence of structured AI integration policies as a barrier, calling for systemic initiatives to embed AI tools effectively into educational practices.

Notably, teaching experience played a pivotal role in shaping how these challenges were perceived. Senior teachers (e.g., 5M(18), 6M(20)) tended to voice a stronger demand for structured institutional support, highlighting their preference for systematic and risk-averse approaches to technological innovation. For example, 6M(20) underscored the absence of mentoring systems or helpdesks as a significant barrier, pointing to the need for sustainable and ongoing support mechanisms. This cautious stance is consistent with Hwang et al. (2020), who found that experienced educators often hesitate to adopt AI tools without clear policies due to concerns about their ethical and pedagogical implications. These concerns about insufficient institutional support and structured guidance are further validated by recent studies highlighting the limitations of AI tools in assessment contexts. For example, Shabara and his coworkers (2024) showed that ChatGPT only had modest intra-rater reliability and big differences when compared to human teacher scoring. This makes us question its consistency and construct validity in L2 writing evaluation. These results show why the experienced teachers in our study stressed the necessity for clear policies and continuing mentorship programs to help with AI integration. In contrast, less experienced teachers (2F(4), 3M(7), 8F(3)) appeared more willing to experiment independently with AI tools. Yet, their accounts revealed feelings of isolation and uncertainty, often resulting from the lack of institutional coordination. For instance, 3M(7) highlighted how the absence of peer-sharing platforms led to missed opportunities for collaborative learning. These findings align with Yen et al. (2024), who observed that while younger educators are generally more open to exploring emerging technologies, they still rely on supportive networks and exemplar resources to build confidence and avoid ineffective trial-and-error practices. This aligns with Korkmaz and Akbıyık's (2024) finding that learners expressed a need for clear examples and guidelines to navigate AI tools confidently, indicating that both teachers and students benefit from peer support and institutional scaffolding.

Another important finding was that teachers wanted to keep learning and growing in their jobs. Most of the people who took part believed that one-time workshops are not enough for real AI integration. Teachers like 6M(20) pushed for ongoing mentorship systems or technical help desks, while 3M(7) pushed for peer-learning sessions to share best practices. Pando et al. (2025) revealed that bilingual teachers needed a lot of pedagogical knowledge and critical thinking to change ChatGPT results for their pupils. This shows how important it is for our participants to keep getting professional development and institutional support so that instructors can learn how to use AI tools in the classroom. Uwosomah and Dooly (2025) also underscored the necessity of continuous professional development for teachers to effectively integrate AI into language classrooms. Their participants highlighted that while AI can reduce teachers' workload and support lesson planning, it requires adequate training to avoid ethical pitfalls and ensure meaningful student engagement. Cong-Lem et al. (2024) also highlighted the need for comprehensive teacher education, with participants recommending training programs to help both students and educators use AI responsibly and avoid unethical practices. These views are similar to what Creswell and Poth (2018) said about how collaborative professional learning networks can help keep innovation going.

All in all, these generational differences and shared challenges highlight the importance of a dual strategy for successful AI integration: top-down institutional policies to reassure senior staff and bottom-up peer collaboration mechanisms to empower younger teachers. Without such a comprehensive approach, private schools—even those with comparatively better resources—risk perpetuating uneven adoption and inconsistent pedagogical outcomes. This also aligns with recent evidence from assessment research showing that while AI tools like ChatGPT can provide rapid feedback, their scoring patterns often diverge significantly from human evaluators (Shabara, et. al., 2024). These discrepancies reinforce the importance of top-down institutional frameworks to ensure responsible and reliable AI use in educational contexts. At

the same time, the three main themes that emerged in this study are also consistent with new models of AI in education that see teachers as active mediators between human and machine agency (Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin et al., 2022). These models similarly underline that successful AI integration depends on institutional readiness, ethical governance, and collaborative professionalism (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), which overlap with the institutional and professional development needs identified by the teachers in this study. In the educational technology literature, such tensions are often described as signs of a “second-order” change, where technology requires not only new tools but also new roles, routines, and forms of collaboration (Fullan, 2007). Our findings reflect this situation quite clearly. Teachers’ calls for mentoring, peer exchange, and model lesson plans point to the need for what Dede (2014) calls “distributed expertise,” where knowledge about AI-supported teaching is shared across a professional community rather than left to individual experimentation. In this sense, the study suggests that institutional readiness for AI is not only a technical or infrastructural question, but also a question of building sustainable professional networks around new technologies.

These institutional problems also fit into wider discussions in online learning research. Several studies in this field point out that schools sometimes adopt new technologies without preparing the organisational structures behind them. In our case, the absence of clear rules, coordination, and long-term support describes exactly this situation. Teachers were personally motivated, but the system around them was not ready to guide or sustain these practices. This situation is quite similar to what Zawacki-Richter and colleagues describe as “institutional readiness,” which they argue is essential for meaningful technology integration (Zawacki-Richter, 2019). Current findings extend this idea a little further because they show that readiness problems do not only influence technical implementation. They also shape how teachers feel about their work, their confidence, their ethical decisions, and even their sense of professional identity in the classroom.

3. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study set out to gain a better understanding of EFL teachers’ perceptions of the pedagogical benefits, ethical challenges, and institutional barriers associated with integrating AI tools such as grammar correctors, writing assistants, and chatbots into language teaching. Conducted in five private high schools in Elazığ, Türkiye, the study used semi-structured interviews with ten teachers (six female, four male) whose teaching experience ranged from 3 to 20 years. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed three main areas of concern: perceived pedagogical benefits, ethical concerns, and institutional challenges related to professional development. At this point, it is important to relate these results with the broader discussions in the Educational Technology and Online Learning field. Many of the issues teachers raised—especially around pedagogical value and ethical tensions—are actually very close to what recent international studies describe as the early stage of AI adoption in schools. In the educational technology literature, this period is often called a “transitional phase,” where teachers try to integrate AI tools while institutional structures remain underdeveloped.

The results showed that teachers are aware of how AI tools may help with lesson planning, encourage individualized learning, and provide students more freedom. This observation also supports the idea of “intelligence augmentation” proposed in recent AI-in-education research, which argues that AI should not replace the teacher but expand the range of learning opportunities that teachers can offer (Luckin et al., 2022). Young instructors especially talked about how AI can get kids interested and give them chances to study in an informal way. But there were substantial ethical worries about things like data privacy, algorithmic bias, academic integrity, and students relying too much on AI. This was especially true for senior teachers who were worried about how freely these technologies may be used. These worries are also in line with the digital ethics literature. For example, Floridi’s “soft ethics” perspective suggests that the main challenge is not the technology itself but the human responsibility behind its use (Floridi, 2018), and our findings illustrate how teachers internalize this responsibility when making decisions about classroom practices. Additionally, subtle gender-based patterns were observed. Female teachers often focused on student-related ethical issues, especially data privacy and security, while male teachers tended to emphasize

institutional barriers and the broader implications of AI for the teaching profession. These nuanced differences suggest that gender, alongside teaching experience, may influence how educators perceive and respond to AI integration. As for institutional challenges including a lack of clear policies, insufficient managerial support, and gaps in professional development were found to limit teachers' confidence and ability to integrate AI effectively. As senior teachers emphasized the need for structured institutional frameworks and continuous support, younger teachers expressed interest in peer-learning networks and exemplar resources to guide their practice. These institutional challenges are not unique to our context. In fact, they reflect what Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) define as "institutional readiness," meaning that successful technology integration requires organisational structures, leadership support, and clear policies. Our findings show that when such readiness is weak, teachers' confidence and professional decision-making are also affected. In this sense, the study contributes a local example to an international problem that many schools face when encountering emerging technologies like AI.

Several recommendations can be proposed based on the findings of the current study. Educational institutions should prioritize the development of clear policies and ethical guidelines for AI use in classrooms to ensure both pedagogical effectiveness and data security. Teacher training programs should not only focus on technical skills but also on pedagogical strategies and ethical considerations. Sustained professional development initiatives, such as mentoring systems and collaborative platforms, could empower teachers to integrate AI tools responsibly and confidently.

It has to be admitted that this study has several clear shortcomings. First, it only looked at private high schools in one city (Elazığ), which could make it hard to apply the results to public schools or other areas. Second, the modest sample size (n=10) shows that this is exploratory qualitative study. It might not show all points of view. Finally, teachers' answers may have been affected by how well they knew AI tools, which could mean that the opinions of people who are really good with technology were not fully represented.

Future research could expand the scope by including teachers from public schools and larger urban centers to examine how institutional contexts influence AI integration. Longitudinal studies might also provide insights into how teachers' perceptions and practices evolve over time as AI technologies become more embedded in education. Additionally, quantitative approaches could complement qualitative findings to offer a broader understanding of the factors shaping effective and ethical AI integration in language classrooms. In this regard, the present study not only reflects the realities of a small-city context but also links with wider theoretical debates on teacher agency, institutional readiness, and ethical AI use in education. Although the study is grounded in the experiences of EFL teachers working in private high schools in Türkiye, the patterns we observed show clear parallels with international discussions on the systemic, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of AI integration (Luckin et al., 2022; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In this sense, the local insights gained here may offer a modest contribution to the broader understanding of how AI is reshaping teaching and learning practices.

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