

The human face of innovative teaching: EFL teachers' emotional vulnerability in AI-assisted teaching through the lens of Technology Acceptance Model

Behrokh Abdoli * 

University of Tehran, Iran

Suggested citation: Abdoli, B. (2026). The human face of innovative teaching: EFL teachers' emotional vulnerability in AI-assisted teaching through the lens of Technology Acceptance Model. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, 9(3), 334-349.

Highlights

- EFL teachers show both positive and negative vulnerability in AI-assisted teaching environments.
- Perceived usefulness of AI drives teachers' willingness to take risks.
- Supportive environments and self-disclosure enhance ease of use and integration
- Low technology acceptance leads to AI avoidance

Abstract

This narrative inquiry explored the emotional vulnerability experienced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in the context of AI-assisted teaching, informed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The narratives and interviews of twenty-one EFL teachers were analyzed, focusing on their accounts of emotional vulnerability as they integrated AI into their teaching practices. Specifically, the analysis examined positive emotional vulnerability, characterized by openness to risks and challenges in a supportive AI-assisted teaching environment, and negative emotional vulnerability, defined by distress arising from AI implementation challenges in anxiety-provoking teaching contexts. A deductive thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes related to emotional vulnerability and TAM constructs. Findings revealed that EFL teachers' perceived usefulness of AI technologies significantly contributes to their willingness to take risks in implementing AI in their classrooms. Moreover, it was shown that EFL teachers' self-disclosure in safe working environments facilitates the quality of their AI integration and contributes to their perceived ease of use. In contrast, their negative vulnerability is characterized by a sense of powerlessness when encountering AI and a tendency to withdraw. It was concluded that EFL teachers' acceptance of technology plays a crucial role in shaping their openness to the challenges associated with AI implementation, particularly by addressing their emotional vulnerabilities. This study has implications for EFL teacher education programs, which should address teachers' technology acceptance to foster greater willingness to embrace the challenges of AI integration and ultimately enhance positive vulnerability.

Article Info: Research Article

Keywords: *AI-assisted teaching, EFL teacher, emotional vulnerability, technology acceptance model*

1. Introduction

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed second language (L2) education by creating both challenges and opportunities for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and learners (Chiu et al., 2023). More broadly, rapid developments in digital innovation, cloud technologies, and AI-enhanced learning environments are reshaping contemporary educational systems and enabling new forms of technology-supported teaching and learning (Papadakis et al., 2024a). These emerging digital infrastructures facilitate access to large repositories of educational resources, intelligent tutoring systems, and collaborative learning environments that can enhance both teaching practices and learner engagement. At the same time, the expansion of AI-driven educational technologies requires teachers to continually update their digital competencies and pedagogical strategies as part of ongoing professional development and lifelong learning

* Corresponding author. University of Tehran, Iran.
e-mail address: behrokh.abdoli@ut.ac.ir

Doi: <http://doi.org/10.31681/jetol.1790881>

Received 25 Sep 2025; Accepted 20 Jun 2026

ISSN: 2618-6586. This is an open Access article under the CC BY license.



processes (Papadakis et al., 2024b) As educational systems increasingly embrace AI-enhanced information and communication technologies (ICT), teachers are expected not only to adopt new tools but also to critically evaluate their pedagogical value and align them with instructional goals.

Within this evolving technological landscape, teachers have begun to integrate AI tools into their classes for a variety of objectives, including material development, classroom management, and automated scoring (Viberg et al., 2023). Applications of AI in teaching have opened new paths for EFL teachers to make teaching and learning more engaging while reducing their workload and providing more personalized learning opportunities for students. However, the rapid advancement of AI in education has also made it difficult for many EFL teachers to effectively adapt to new teaching trends. The continuous emergence of digital tools, combined with increasing expectations for technology integration, can create pressure for teachers to modify long-established instructional practices. As a result, many teachers remain hesitant to accept and integrate AI in their everyday teaching routines, and their emotional responses to fast-changing technology have created a wide gap between their actual and ideal selves (Xu et al., 2024). This gap is referred to by Lasky (2005) as emotional vulnerability.

Research has shown that technology integration in teaching functions as a double-edged sword, presenting both positive emotions, such as job satisfaction, excitement, professional growth, and confidence, and negative emotions, including fear, anxiety, and isolation caused by conflicts in professional identity, inability to meet the demands of technology-assisted teaching, and emotional vulnerability (Jang, 2024). Emotional vulnerability in teaching is considered teachers' sensitivity to challenges associated with personal and contextual risks confronting their existing practices, beliefs, and identities. Hence, AI-induced changes in education can drastically trigger teachers' emotional vulnerability (Jang, 2024). Since teachers' level of acceptance of technology influences their interpretation of the risks and benefits of technology-assisted teaching, it can reshape their emotional vulnerability (Viberg et al., 2023). Teachers' acceptance of technology can be explained by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which has two key elements: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989). EFL teachers with higher levels of technology acceptance tend to be more resilient and confident in dealing with newer technologies and experience less anxiety, whereas lower levels of technology acceptance can lead to negative vulnerability, isolation among colleagues, increased workload, and diminished job satisfaction (Hsu, 2016; Mercader & Gairín, 2020).

The present study is guided by the following research question:

What is the role of EFL teachers' technology acceptance in their emotional vulnerability within AI-assisted teaching environments?

2. Literature

2.1 *Technology Acceptance in Educational Technology*

The increasing integration of digital technologies into educational environments has generated significant scholarly interest in understanding how teachers adopt and use technological tools in their professional practice. Technology acceptance research seeks to explain the factors that influence individuals' decisions to adopt or reject new technologies. In educational contexts, teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences play a critical role in shaping the successful implementation of technological innovations in teaching and learning processes (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Tondeur et al., 2017).

Research consistently indicates that technology adoption in educational settings is influenced not only by technological infrastructure and access but also by teachers' pedagogical beliefs, professional values, and perceptions of how technology supports learning. Teachers often evaluate digital tools in terms of their perceived usefulness for enhancing teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes, as well as the perceived effort required to learn and integrate these tools into classroom practices (Davis, 1989; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). These cognitive evaluations influence teachers' attitudes toward technology and shape their intentions to incorporate digital resources into their instructional practices (Hermans et al., 2008).

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence technologies, these insights into technology acceptance have become increasingly relevant. AI-powered tools, including intelligent tutoring systems, automated feedback applications, and generative AI platforms, offer new possibilities for supporting teaching and learning. However, their successful integration depends largely on how educators perceive their usefulness, usability, and relevance to their instructional needs (Holmes et al., 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Consequently, research on technology acceptance provides an important foundation for examining how teachers evaluate and adopt emerging AI technologies in educational settings.

2.2. EFL Teachers' Emotional Vulnerability in AI-Assisted Teaching

Any reform in the landscape of education can influence teachers' emotional vulnerability. Therefore, advancements of AI in EFL teaching and learning are central to understanding the dynamic nature of emotional vulnerability. Lasky (2005) describes emotional vulnerability as a multidimensional experience influenced by individuals' perceptions of their current identity, situation, beliefs, and values. Emotional vulnerability is divided into two categories: negative (or protective) and positive (or open). Negative vulnerability arises when individuals experience feelings of risk and insecurity in unfriendly environments, while positive vulnerability involves openness to new experiences and a willingness to take risks (Kelchtermans, 2005). Research by Chen and Tsai (2021) demonstrated that teachers with greater openness to technological innovations reported lower levels of emotional distress and employed more adaptive coping strategies in digital learning environments. This openness facilitated smoother transitions to AI-assisted teaching, enhancing both their professional satisfaction and emotional well-being. Additionally, a study by Shen et al. (2025) emphasized that repeated positive experiences with educational technology contribute to increased acceptance and, consequently, to improved emotional states and resilience among teachers. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments that encourage positive interactions with AI tools, thereby mitigating emotional vulnerabilities and promoting sustained engagement in AI-assisted teaching contexts.

Studies show that the integration of technology into EFL classrooms can significantly impact teachers' emotional vulnerability. In their journey to adapt to rapid educational technology developments, EFL teachers experience diverse emotions, including excitement, professional growth, anxiety, and uncertainty about usefulness and job insecurity. In a study conducted by Jang (2024), it was revealed that while emotional vulnerability emerged mostly in online teaching contexts, it also encouraged professional reflection and agency. Xu et al. (2024) similarly found that language teachers' appraisals of online classroom events are directly linked to their emotional responses and instructional practices: negative appraisals were associated with emotional vulnerability and instructional challenges, while positive appraisals fostered resilience and effective teaching.

2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Study: Technology Acceptance Model

This study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a widely used framework for explaining how individuals evaluate and adopt new technologies (Davis, 1989). TAM proposes that technology acceptance is primarily shaped by two key beliefs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a particular technology will enhance job performance, while perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which the technology is perceived as easy to learn and operate. According to the model, these perceptions influence individuals' attitudes toward a technology and their behavioural intention to use it, which in turn predicts actual technology use (Davis, 1989).

TAM has been widely used in educational technology research because it provides a relatively clear and focused way of understanding how teachers evaluate new technologies in relation to their everyday professional tasks (Scherer et al., 2019). In many cases, teachers' decisions about whether to adopt a technology are closely connected to practical considerations, such as whether the tool can support their teaching and whether it can be used without creating additional workload or complexity. For this reason, TAM is particularly helpful for examining how teachers assess the usefulness and usability of emerging technologies in educational settings.

While TAM provides the primary analytical lens for this study, it is important to acknowledge that technology acceptance can also be examined through other theoretical perspectives, focusing on factors such as social influence, subjective norms, and facilitating conditions. These perspectives provide broader explanations of how social and organisational contexts may shape individuals' behavioural intentions. However, the focus of the present study is specifically on how teachers themselves interpret and evaluate artificial intelligence tools in their professional practice. In this regard, TAM offers a useful analytical starting point because it focuses directly on the individual cognitive evaluations that often guide technology-related decisions.

Importantly, this study also recognises that teachers' responses to new technologies are not purely cognitive or technical. Educational change often involves emotional and professional challenges, and teachers may experience feelings of uncertainty, pressure, or exposure when confronted with new expectations related to technology use. Drawing on research on teachers' professional identity and emotions, the concept of emotional vulnerability is therefore used in this study to provide additional insight into how teachers interpret and respond to AI technologies. Emotional vulnerability can influence how teachers perceive the usefulness or ease of use of a tool, as feelings of confidence, hesitation, or concern may shape how they engage with technological innovations in their work (Kelchtermans, 2005). Recent research has increasingly applied TAM to the context of artificial intelligence in education. For example, Acquah et al. (2024) found that preservice teachers' intentions to use artificial intelligence in lesson planning were strongly influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Similarly, Joshi et al. (2025) showed that TAM-related factors play a significant role in predicting teachers' intentions to integrate AI-generated content in educational settings. These findings suggest that TAM remains a relevant framework for examining how educators evaluate and adopt AI-based tools.

By combining TAM with insights from research on teachers' emotional experiences, the present study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of teachers' engagement with AI technologies. While TAM helps explain how teachers evaluate the usefulness and usability of these tools, the lens of emotional vulnerability helps illuminate the emotional and professional contexts within which these evaluations take place. Together, these perspectives allow the study to explore both the cognitive and emotional dimensions that shape teachers' responses to emerging AI technologies in educational practice.

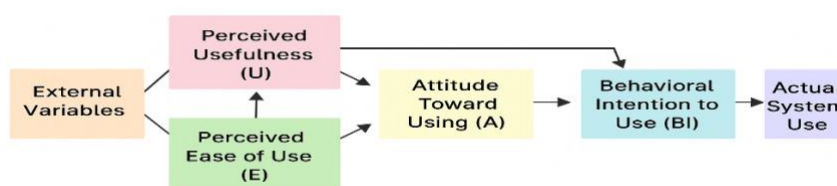


Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (adapted by Davis, 1986)

2.4. Artificial Intelligence in EFL Contexts

Artificial intelligence (AI) has increasingly become a significant component of educational technology, offering new possibilities for language teaching and learning. In an EFL context like Iran, opportunities to use English outside the classroom are limited, which places greater responsibility on teachers to create meaningful language learning experiences within the classroom environment (Chapelle, 2001). As a result, teachers play a central role in mediating the use of instructional technologies, including AI tools, to support students' language development. AI-powered applications can provide additional practice opportunities, feedback, and exposure to language use; however, their effectiveness depends largely on how teachers adapt these tools to classroom needs and pedagogical goals. Consequently, EFL teachers often need to carefully evaluate and integrate AI technologies in ways that align with students' learning needs and the specific constraints of classroom-based language instruction (Kohnke et al., 2023). Despite its potential

benefits, the integration of AI into EFL classrooms also raises important pedagogical and practical challenges. Teachers often need to adapt their instructional strategies to effectively incorporate AI tools, while also considering issues such as academic integrity, data privacy, and the reliability of AI-generated content (Kasneci et al., 2023), particularly for students whose primary exposure to the language occurs in the classroom and who therefore may have diverse learning needs that teachers must address. In EFL contexts, teachers often serve as gatekeepers of technological innovation, deciding whether AI tools align with curricular goals, students' needs, and classroom realities. Consequently, understanding teachers' perceptions of AI, including perceived benefits, challenges, and limitations, is essential for examining how AI technologies are adopted and used in language education (Valiao, 2025).

Although existing research has explored the potential of AI in language learning, many studies focus primarily on technological capabilities or learner outcomes. Comparatively less attention has been paid to teachers' emotional experiences and perceptions, such as emotional vulnerability, particularly in EFL settings where institutional resources, digital literacy, and pedagogical expectations may vary widely. This gap highlights the importance of examining how teachers interpret and respond to AI technologies within their professional contexts, which provides an important foundation for understanding the factors influencing AI adoption in language education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Explanatory narrative designs are qualitative approaches used to explore the underlying causes and development of personal and professional phenomena by carefully investigating individuals' life stories (Edmond & Kennedy, 2017). This design aligned with the purpose of this study because it allowed the researcher to explore in depth the role of EFL teachers' technology acceptance in their emotional vulnerability within AI-assisted teaching environments.

3.2. Participants

Twenty-one EFL teachers were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure that those included in the study had direct experience with AI-assisted teaching and could provide rich narrative accounts of their professional and emotional experiences. The selection criteria required participants to (a) be practicing EFL teachers at the time of the study, (b) have prior experience using or experimenting with AI tools for instructional purposes, and (c) be willing to reflect on and narrate their experiences with AI integration in their teaching practice. The participants had varying levels of experience in teaching and integrating AI into their practice, which enhanced the transferability of the study. There were 12 male and 9 female participants, all of whom were pursuing their master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The participants received forms outlining the general purpose of the study, procedures, and confidentiality issues before taking part in the research (Klykken, 2021). It was confirmed that all participants consented to participate, agreed to share their data openly, and understood their right to withdraw at any time.

Participant	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Educational degree	Institution type	AI-integrated teaching experience
Participant 1	Male	13	PhD	Public school	20 months
Participant 2	Female	15	MA	Private language institute	18 months
Participant 3	Female	11	MA	Private language institute	18 months
Participant 4	Male	14	PhD	Public school	17 months
Participant 5	Female	10	BA	Public school	15 months
Participant 6	Female	9	BA	Private language institute	15 months
Participant 7	Male	14	MA	Public school	15 months
Participant 8	Male	16	PhD	Public school	13 months

Participant	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Educational degree	Institution type	AI-integrated teaching experience
Participant 9	Male	6	PhD	Private language institute	13 months
Participant 10	Female	8	PhD	Public school	12 months
Participant 11	Female	9	MA	Private language institute	12 months
Participant 12	Male	5	MA	Public school	12 months
Participant 13	Male	12	BA	Public school	11 months
Participant 14	Female	10	MA	Public school	10 months
Participant 15	Male	12	PhD	Public school	10 months
Participant 16	Male	8	MA	Private school	10 months
Participant 17	Female	7	BA	Public school	9 months
Participant 18	Female	11	BA	Private school	9 months
Participant 19	Female	14	MA	Private school	9 months
Participant 20	Male	10	BA	Public school	9 months
Participant 21	Male	13	BA	Public school	9 months

Table 1. The demographic information of participants

3.3. Data Sources

Two qualitative data sources were used in this study: autobiographical narratives and semi-structured interviews. Both instruments were designed to address the study's central research question concerning how EFL teachers experience emotional vulnerability in relation to their level of technology acceptance when integrating AI tools into their teaching. Autobiographical narratives served as the primary data collection instrument in this study, since narrative inquiry commonly relies on participants' autobiographical accounts because they enable individuals to construct and interpret the meanings of their lived experiences over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). To complement the narratives, semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify ambiguities and gain a clearer understanding of participants' experiences. Interviews allowed the researcher to probe issues that were not fully elaborated in the narratives and thus provided additional depth to the data (Rabionet, 2011). The details of these data Sources are presented below:

Autobiographical narratives served as the primary data source for this study, which aimed to explore EFL teachers' emotional vulnerability in relation to their level of technology acceptance. The narrative prompts were developed based on the literature on technology acceptance, emotional vulnerability in digital environments, and teachers' lived experiences with the challenges and benefits of AI integration in teaching. In line with Riessman's (2008) narrative approach, the prompts encouraged participants to construct story-like accounts of meaningful experiences and reflect on events, emotions, and interpretations connected to their encounters with AI technologies. The prompts also invited teachers to describe situations in which AI tools appeared useful or challenging, moments when using these technologies felt easy or difficult, and experiences that affected their confidence, professional identity, or sense of vulnerability as teachers, thereby reflecting key constructs of this study such as the components of the Technology Acceptance Model (e.g., perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use), the emotional dimensions of AI integration, and teachers' experiences of emotional vulnerability (Index 1). To obtain Riessman's (2008) fully formed model of narratives, the researcher explained its components to the participants. The model includes an abstract addressing the overall point of the story, a specification of the situations experienced, a detailed explanation of the emotional crises encountered, an evaluation of experiences, a statement of results, and additional comments if any. Sixteen participants shared their narratives orally, while five submitted written accounts.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to complement the data and further clarify the research purpose, following Rabionet's (2011) framework of six stages of semi-structured interviews. First, the

researcher justified the use of semi-structured interviews, selected due to the dynamic nature of emotional vulnerability (Kuran et al., 2020), which requires flexibility beyond predetermined questions. Second, ethical guidelines were established through discussion of data use and confidentiality with participants. Third, the interview protocol was developed, with questions reflecting literature on EFL teachers' emotional vulnerability in AI-assisted environments, the challenges and opportunities related to protective versus open vulnerability, and the mediating role of technology acceptance. In accordance with Rabionet's approach, the questions included both guiding and follow-up prompts that encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences with AI tools, their perceptions of the usefulness and ease of using these technologies, and the emotional reactions associated with integrating AI into their teaching practice (Index 2). These questions were designed to further explore themes emerging from the narratives and to reflect key constructs of the study, including the core components of the Technology Acceptance Model as well as the emotional aspects of AI integration and teachers' experiences of emotional vulnerability. Each interview lasted 20–25 minutes, was recorded, and then transcribed. The interviews were analyzed, and data segments relevant to the research questions were identified and prepared for the findings section.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the six phases of deductive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify recurring patterns and themes within participants' accounts and experiences (Barkhuizen, 2011). In this study, a deductive approach was applied, linking the emerging themes to two categories of emotional vulnerability—positive and negative (Lasky, 2005)—as well as to the two determinants of the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989). Data were collected through autobiographical narratives and semi-structured interviews. All narratives and interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and integrated into a single dataset prior to analysis. Treating the narratives and interview transcripts as one corpus enabled the researcher to examine patterns across participants' written reflections and interview accounts, allowing themes to emerge from the combined dataset. In the first phase, the researcher carefully examined the data to identify relevant content, which was then organized using MAXQDA 24, a qualitative analysis software. In the second phase, potential themes were identified and coded. During the third phase, MAXQDA's Creative Coding feature was used to generate and descriptively define preliminary codes and themes. Where appropriate, codes were merged to align more closely with existing literature. To enhance credibility, participants were consulted to verify the accuracy and relevance of the reported themes. The fourth phase involved reviewing the emerging themes to ensure internal consistency and coherence across the dataset, with minor adjustments made as necessary. In the fifth phase, themes were named based on relevant literature and metaphors drawn from participants' own accounts, enhancing both clarity and relevance. Finally, in the sixth phase, a comprehensive report of the findings and their broader implications was compiled.

3.5. Rigor of the Study

To ensure the rigor of the findings multiple strategies were employed. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from autobiographical narratives and semi-structured interviews, thereby addressing the study's credibility. Member-checking was conducted, allowing participants to review and confirm interpretations of their narratives and interview transcripts. Transferability was supported by providing a comprehensive description of data collection and analysis, enabling replication of the study in other contexts. Dependability was ensured by involving a second coder to analyze both the narrative and interview data, following O'Connor and Joffe (2020). The second coder, a professor of applied linguistics familiar with the study's objectives and analytical framework, participated in a calibration session to harmonize coding procedures before formal analysis began. Using MAXQDA's Teamwork feature, both coders independently coded a randomly selected subset of the dataset to reach code-level agreement, as the purpose was to assess the consistency with which the predefined deductive codes were applied across the two coders. The subsequent discussion of discrepancies led to the refinement of code definitions and strengthened the consistency of the deductive coding scheme. The MAXQDA 24 inter-coder agreement was 85%, indicating a satisfactory level of dependability.

4. Findings

Data for this study were gathered through autobiographical narratives and semi-structured interviews. To ensure accurate interpretation, the collected data were first transcribed, reviewed, organized, and coded using MAXQDA 24. The Code Matrix Browser (CMB) was employed to validate the presence of pre-existing codes aligned with elements of the TAM and the categories of emotional vulnerability (Figure 2). Afterwards, emerging themes were identified using the Code Map system, applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to deductive thematic analysis. The Code Map provides a visual representation of code co-occurrence, facilitating theme discovery by grouping related codes. As depicted in Figure 3, the codes reflecting TAM components and emotional vulnerability categories were arranged into three distinct zones within the Code Map. An in-depth examination of these zones led to the emergence of the following themes:

Perceived value as a motivator for AI integration

Perceived ease of use and openness in AI adoption

Emotional barriers and perceived limitations in AI adoption

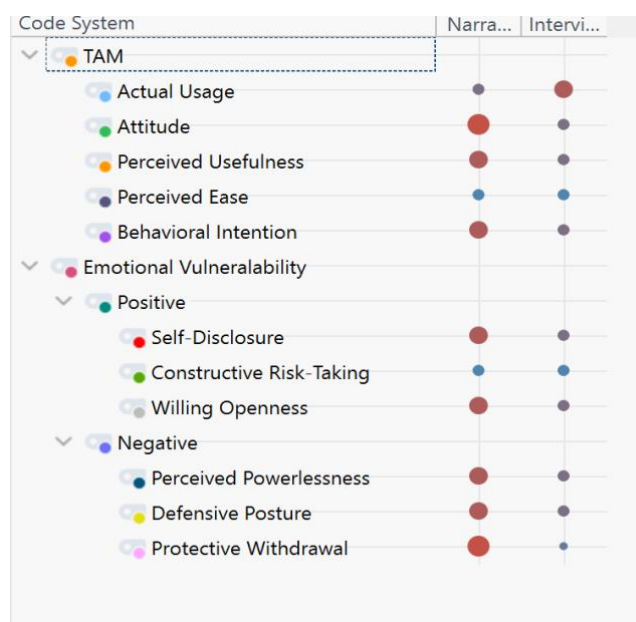


Fig.2. Code matrix browser showing the frequency of codes

The co-occurrence of perceived usefulness, risk-taking, actual system use, and behavioral intentions led to the emergence of the first theme, Catalyzing Action Through Perceived Value. This theme illustrates that teachers who recognize the value of AI tools were more motivated to deliberately engage in their use. As one teacher reflected, “[I] felt encouraged to take risks and try new AI tools only when [I] truly believe AI could enhance [my] teaching and students’ learning outcomes” (Narrative). Another participant similarly explained that “When [I] see [I] can use AI tools in preparing materials and generating ideas [I] become more motivated. Glamour in AI never would have impressed me, if I hadn’t found it practical” (Narrative). Likewise, another EFL teacher noted that “For me, the most important part of teaching is the tasks and exercises I assign to my students. AI helps me prepare those tasks in much less time and with higher quality. [...] Better quality is the key for me” (Interview). These accounts indicate that teachers’ belief in the practical value of AI tools played a significant role in motivating them to integrate such technologies into their teaching practices.

Figure 3 further demonstrates the co-occurrence between perceived ease of use, willingness to be open, and self-disclosure, which led to the theme Enabling Open Passage Through Intuitive Technology. Teachers described how approachable and user-friendly AI tools lowered their barriers to engagement. One participant noted, “The technology was simple enough that [I] felt comfortable sharing [my] experiences with the supervisors of the institute and exploring its functions without fear because [I] could easily and

effectively work with it and discuss it with other colleagues to get familiar with its potential unknown features” (Interview). Another teacher explained that “When students ask [me] about the most effective AI tools, it is easier for [me] to share [my] suggestions when those tools are easy to use. [I] believe they are also easier for students to use, so [I] recommend them more often” (Narrative). Similarly, one participant stated that “[I] often shared [my] small successes and failures with AI tools with my colleagues, and those conversations helped [me] understand new ways to use them for teaching” (Interview).

The third theme, *Leaning Away: Emotional Distance and Perceived Limits in Technology Use*, emerged from the interplay of attitude toward using, defensive posture, perceived powerlessness, and protective withdrawal. This theme captures the emotional and cognitive boundaries that teachers experienced in the face of technological adoption. As one teacher reflected, “AI in education is creating a fast-paced industry, [I] am mostly overwhelmed and unsure, so [I] keep [my] distance and hesitate to fully commit to the AI tools” (Narrative). Another participant similarly shared that “Technology is getting fast-paced. It is difficult for a teacher with many responsibilities to catch up with all these innovations” (Narrative). A different teacher also explained that “On the one hand, [I] need to use AI tools in my teaching to integrate creativity; on the other hand, [I] do not have enough time, so [I] have reduced [my] use of them” (Interview).

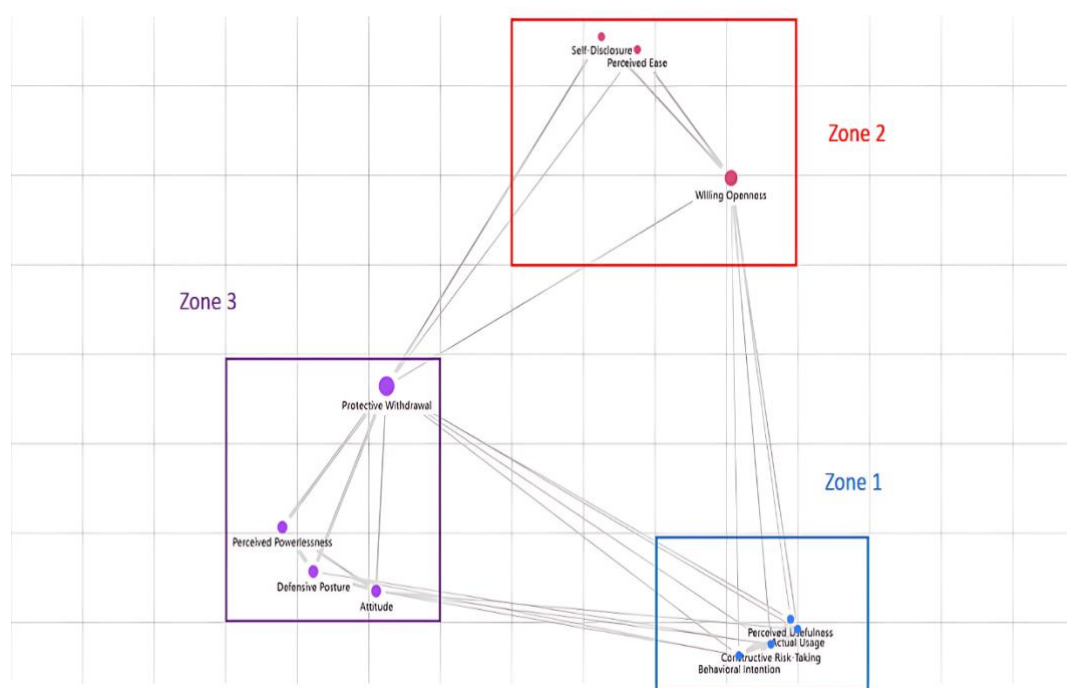


Fig. 3. Code map illustrating the relationships among codes, informing the development of themes

5. Discussion

5.1. Perceived value as a motivator for AI integration

EFL teachers' perceived usefulness of AI adoption is central to their behavioral intentions and actual usage (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Studies show that as long as teachers can observe the positive impact of technological tools on the productivity of their teaching, students' outcomes, and the feedback received from administrators and parents, they are more likely to formulate conscious plans to adopt such tools. Subsequently, as behavioral intention encourages risk-taking, teachers become more willing to engage proactively and authentically use technological tools (Teo, 2011; Liaw & Huang, 2013). The link between behavioral intentions and actual system use is also reflected in self-regulated learning, where the forethought phase, reinforced by behavioral intentions, is followed by actual system use (Zimmerman, 2000). Both processes are rooted in teachers' perceived usefulness of AI. Thus, the convergence of perceived usefulness, risk-taking, behavioral intention, and system use forms a cognitive-affective-behavioral cycle that leads to heightened innovation and proactive technological engagement in teaching.

Similarly, EFL teachers in this study described their deliberate engagement with AI tools is strongly related to their belief in the tools' instructional value. Teachers described that observing the effectiveness of AI in reducing workload, improving learning experiences, increasing learner engagement with AI-powered materials, and meeting institutional expectations motivated them to accept and experiment with these technologies. This pattern is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which identifies perceived usefulness as a central factor influencing users' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward technology adoption. In AI-assisted educational contexts, teachers' recognition of practical pedagogical benefits has been shown to play a crucial role in shaping their willingness to integrate digital tools into classroom practice (Viberg et al., 2023). Moreover, previous research indicates that positive experiences with educational technologies can strengthen teachers' acceptance and engagement while supporting their professional confidence and adaptability (Shen et al., 2025). In this study, teachers' perceived value of AI similarly translated into intentional planning and hands-on integration within their teaching routines. Such practices suggest that perceived usefulness not only influences cognitive evaluations of technology but also encourages experimentation and risk-taking, allowing teachers to align their instructional decisions with both pedagogical needs and their emotional readiness when incorporating AI into classroom practices.

5.2. Perceived ease of use and openness in AI adoption

Teachers' willingness to disclose and share their AI integration challenges with learners, peers, and administrators can also streamline the process of teaching in AI-assisted contexts (Oh & Ahn, 2024). Accepting and willingly disclosing both positive and negative emotions allow peers to respond, exchange ideas, and offer solutions. Studies show that in friendly and safe environments, where teachers experience positive vulnerability, they are more likely to voice concerns about difficulties in implementing AI, which in turn fosters their perceived ease of use and future openness to new tools (Peng et al., 2023). Workplaces are therefore no longer considered intimidating but rather as supportive systems that can be approached with confidence and less hesitation.

In line with previous research, the findings of this study reveal a reciprocal relationship between teachers' emotional disclosure and their perceived ease of using AI tools. When teachers openly shared their challenges and uncertainties in AI-assisted teaching environments, colleagues and administrators were able to offer feedback, suggestions, and practical support that facilitated smoother implementation. This interaction reflects the notion of positive emotional vulnerability described by Lasky (2005) and Kelchtermans (2005), where openness to sharing concerns and experiences can promote professional growth and collaborative problem-solving. Such supportive exchanges also appear to reinforce teachers' perceptions of technological accessibility. Consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model, perceived ease of use can strengthen teachers' willingness to adopt digital tools and integrate them into instructional practices (Davis, 1989; Viberg et al., 2023). Moreover, prior studies suggest that positive emotional experiences in technology-enhanced teaching contexts can encourage teachers to engage more confidently with new tools and innovations (Lin et al., 2024; Wan Ching & Jamaludin, 2025). In the present study, the accessibility of AI tools similarly encouraged teachers to discuss their experiences openly, which in turn fostered collaborative learning and greater readiness to experiment with AI in their classrooms. Together, these findings suggest that supportive professional environments and user-friendly technologies can work synergistically to reduce emotional barriers and promote sustained engagement with AI-assisted teaching practices.

5.3. Emotional barriers and perceived limitations in AI adoption

The emergence of this theme reflects well-established findings in the literature regarding emotional and cognitive barriers to technology adoption. Research shows that teachers' negative attitudes and protective postures toward reforms can lead to hesitation, resistance to adopting new technologies, and even threats to innovative teaching (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Howard et al., 2021; Tondeur et al., 2017). Feelings of powerlessness in the face of rapid AI advancements may result from lack of experience, insufficient training, inadequate support from administrators, or even pressure from learners who are younger and more adaptable to technology (Al-Awidi & Aldhafeeri, 2017; Kopcha, 2012). These affective

and cognitive responses, triggered by negative emotional vulnerability, can lead to behavioral withdrawal and even burnout (Liu et al., 2022).

The findings of this study further support existing literature indicating that emotional and cognitive barriers can significantly influence teachers' technology adoption behaviors. Participants reported that feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability, and defensive reactions toward AI integration sometimes discouraged them from experimenting with new tools. Such responses align with previous research suggesting that teachers' negative attitudes and protective postures toward educational reforms may lead to hesitation and resistance when adopting new technologies (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Howard et al., 2021; Tondeur et al., 2017). These reactions can also be understood through the lens of emotional vulnerability, where perceived risks and insecurities within changing professional environments may cause teachers to distance themselves from innovation (Kelchtermans, 2005). In addition, earlier studies show that limited experience with emerging technologies, insufficient institutional support, and pressure to keep pace with digitally proficient learners can intensify teachers' feelings of powerlessness in technologically evolving classrooms (Al-Awidi & Aldhafeeri, 2017; Kopcha, 2012). Consistent with these perspectives, the teachers in this study associated concerns about technological competence, student expectations, and instructional effectiveness with greater hesitation toward AI integration. Such patterns suggest that negative emotional vulnerability may contribute to avoidance behaviors, reinforcing a cycle in which teachers' distance from AI tools further limits their opportunities to develop confidence and competence in their use. These findings therefore highlight the importance of supportive environments and professional development opportunities that can help teachers navigate emotional challenges and build resilience when adapting to AI-driven educational change.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated the role of EFL teachers' technology acceptance in their emotional vulnerability in AI-assisted teaching environments. The findings showed that perceived usefulness of AI tools encouraged teachers to take risks and authentically integrate them into teaching. Moreover, safe working environments that foster interaction enabled teachers to disclose emotions and concerns about AI-assisted teaching and receive constructive feedback from colleagues, thereby enhancing their perceived ease of use and willingness to embrace new AI tools. Conversely, feelings of powerlessness in the face of innovative tools increased defensive postures and negative attitudes, leading to protective withdrawal and lack of enthusiasm for AI integration. The study's insights bear important implications for both teachers and teacher educators. EFL teachers should overcome their uncertainty and experiment with diverse AI tools, resisting negative attitudes and defensive postures in order to gradually build confidence and better appreciate the usefulness of AI in teaching. Teacher educators, in turn, should provide professional learning opportunities that allow teachers to observe the effectiveness of AI tools, share experiences with peers, and engage in meaningful activities that support smoother integration processes.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. Conducted within a specific national and cultural context, its findings may not generalize to other settings where attitudes toward technology and AI integration differ. Moreover, the study captures only a snapshot in time, rather than the evolving long-term impacts of AI integration on teaching practices and professional identity. Future research should expand the investigation to more diverse populations, incorporate mixed and longitudinal methods, and explore how shifts in policy, infrastructure, and teacher preparation contribute to the dynamic process of technology adoption and sustained innovation in EFL education. Moreover, future research could empirically test emotional vulnerability as an antecedent influencing perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use within TAM-based or extended technology acceptance models, such as TAM2, TAM3, or integrated acceptance frameworks, such as UTAUT. Examining emotional vulnerability within these models may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how affective experiences interact with cognitive evaluations in teachers' engagement with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Acknowledgments

The author sincerely acknowledges the EFL teachers who took the time to participate in this study.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The author used ChatGPT to refine the language in this manuscript. Afterwards, the content was thoroughly reviewed and revised.

References

- Al-Awidi, H. M., & Aldhafeeri, F. M. (2017). Teachers' readiness to implement digital curriculum in Kuwaiti schools. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, 16(1), 105–126. <https://doi.org/10.28945/3685>
- Acquah, B. Y. S., Arthur, F., Salifu, I., Quayson, E., & Nortey, S. A. (2024). Preservice teachers' behavioural intention to use artificial intelligence in lesson planning: A dual-staged PLS-SEM-ANN approach. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, 7, Article 100307.
- Barkhuizen, G. (2011). Narrative knowledging in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 391–414. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.261888>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chapelle, C. A. (2001). *Computer applications in second language acquisition: Foundations for teaching, testing, and research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, J., & Tsai, C. C. (2021). Teachers' coping strategies and emotional well-being in digital learning environments. *Computers & Education*, 165, 104149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.104149>
- Chiu, T. K. F., Lim, C. P., & Wang, Q. (2023). Artificial intelligence in second language learning: A systematic review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 71(3), 1235–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-023-10154-2>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- Edmond, N., & Kennedy, J. (2017). *Integrated practice in education and social work: Interprofessional learning and practice development*. SAGE Publications.
- Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. T. (2010). Teacher technology change: How knowledge, confidence, beliefs, and culture intersect. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 42(3), 255–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2010.10782551>
- Hermans, R., Tondeur, J., van Braak, J., & Valcke, M. (2008). The impact of primary school teachers' educational beliefs on classroom use of computers. *Computers & Education*, 51(4), 1499–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2008.02.001>
- Holmes, W., Bialik, M., & Fadel, C. (2019). *Artificial intelligence in education: Promises and implications for teaching and learning*. Center for Curriculum Redesign.
- Howard, S. K., Tondeur, J., Ma, J., & Yang, J. (2021). What to teach? Strategies for developing digital competency in preservice teacher training. *Computers & Education*, 165, 104149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104149>
- Hsu, L. (2016). The acceptance of technology among EFL teachers: Exploring anxiety, workload, and job satisfaction. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 25(4), 653–662. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-016-0288-2>

- Jang, J. (2024). Exploring emotional vulnerability and sense of agency in the digital realm: A three-year case study of an EFL teacher in South Korea. *Education Sciences*, 14(9), 950. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090950>
- Joshi, S., Pandey, K., & Maheta, D. (2025). The role of perceived trust and technology anxiety in intention to use technology tools in HEI: Applying the modified UTAUT from user behavior context. *Cogent Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2597051>
- Kasneci, E., Sessler, K., Küchemann, S., Bannert, M., Dementieva, D., Fischer, F., et al. (2023). ChatGPT for good? On opportunities and challenges of large language models for education. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 103, 102274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102274>
- Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerability, and reflection. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 995–1006. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.009>
- Khoo, W. C., & Jamaludin, K. (2025). Understanding school teachers' acceptance of AI in education: Insights from the technology acceptance model (TAM). *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 14 (3). <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i3/25196>
- Klykken, A. (2021). Implementing continuous consent in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 22(5), 795–810. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211014366>
- Kohnke, L., Moorhouse, B. L., & Zou, D. (2023). ChatGPT for language teaching and learning. *RELC Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882231162868>
- Kopcha, T. J. (2012). Teachers' perceptions of the barriers to technology integration and practices with technology under situated professional development. *Computers & Education*, 59(4), 1109–1121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.05.014>
- Kuran, K., Aktas, F., & Dolker, M. (2020). Ethical issues in qualitative research: A case study on semi-structured interviews. *International Journal of Social Research*, 13(2), 45–58.
- Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency, and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 899–916. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003>
- Liaw, S. S., & Huang, H. M. (2013). Perceived satisfaction, perceived usefulness and interactive learning environments as predictors to self-regulation in e-learning environments. *Computers & Education*, 60(1), 14–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.07.015>
- Lin, X., Wang, Y., & Xing, W. (2024). The mediating role of technology acceptance and moderating role of emotion regulation in faculty's online professional development. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 40(2), 106–120. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.906>
- Liu, Y., Gong, S., Zhang, H., Yu, Q., & Zhou, Z. (2022). Teachers' occupational stress and burnout in the digital age: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 866859. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.866859>
- Mercader, C., & Gairín, J. (2020). University teachers' perception of barriers to the use of digital technologies: The importance of the academic discipline. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-0182-x>
- O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>

- Oh, S.-Y., & Ahn, Y. (2024). Exploring teachers' perception of artificial intelligence: The socio-emotional deficiency as opportunities and challenges in human-AI complementarity in K–12 education. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2405.13065>
- Papadakis, S., Striuk, A. M., Kravtsov, H. M., Shyshkina, M. P., Marienko, M. V., & Danylchuk, H. B. (2024). Embracing digital innovation and cloud technologies for transformative learning experiences. In *Proceedings of the 11th Workshop on Cloud Technologies in Education (CTE 2023). CEUR Workshop Proceedings*. <https://ceur-ws.org>
- Papadakis, S., Lytvynova, S. H., Ivanova, S. M., & Selyshcheva, I. A. (2024). Advancing lifelong learning with AI-enhanced ICT: A review of 3L-Person 2024. In *Proceedings of the 9th International Workshop on Professional Retraining and Life-Long Learning Using ICT: Person-Oriented Approach (3L-Person 2024). CEUR Workshop Proceedings*. <https://ceur-ws.org>
- Peng, H., Ma, S., & Spector, J. M. (2023). Understanding teacher acceptance of AI in education: A systematic review. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 54(4), 1022–1041. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13324>
- Rabionet, S. E. (2011). How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An ongoing and continuous journey. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2), 563–566. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2011.1070>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. SAGE Publications.
- Scherer, R., Siddiq, F., & Tondeur, J. (2019). The technology acceptance model (TAM): A meta-analytic structural equation modeling approach explaining teachers' adoption of digital technology in education. *Computers & Education*, 128, 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.09.009>
- Shen, L., Qiu, N., & Wang, Z. (2025). Psychological safety and trust as drivers of teachers' continued use of AI tools in classrooms. *Scientific Reports*, 15(1), 12345. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-13789-4>
- Teo, T. (2011). Factors influencing teachers' intention to use technology: Model development and test. *Computers & Education*, 57(4), 2432–2440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.06.008>
- Tondeur, J., van Braak, J., Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. (2017). Understanding the relationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and technology use in education: A systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 65(3), 555–575. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9481-2>
- Valiao, A. (2025). Technostress and its impact on the job performance of teachers. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0692>
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(3), 425–478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036540>
- Viberg, O., Cukurova, M., Feldman-Maggor, Y., Alexandron, G., Shirai, S., Tømte, C., Wasson, B., Spikol, D., Milrad, M., & Kizilcec, R. F. (2023). What explains teachers' trust of AI in education across six countries? *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2312.01627>
- Xu, L., Liu, X., & Xiao, Y. (2024). Language teachers' emotions in online classrooms: Relations among teachers' appraisals of classroom events, emotional responses, and instructional practices. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 9, 72. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00301-0>
- Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education – where are the educators? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 39.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0>

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012109890-2/50031-7>

Index 1. Narrative prompts

Recall and narrate a meaningful experience related to encountering or using AI tools in your professional life as an English language teacher. Describe how the experience began and how it unfolded.

Write about a moment when you perceived an AI tool as particularly helpful or beneficial for your teaching work. Describe the situation and how you felt during that experience.

Describe an experience in which using an AI tool felt easy, manageable, or intuitive for you. Reflect on how this experience influenced your feelings about using AI in your teaching.

Recall a situation in which learning or using an AI tool felt difficult or confusing. Describe what happened and how this experience affected your confidence or comfort as a teacher.

Write about a moment when using AI tools changed the way you thought about your teaching responsibilities or professional role.

Describe an experience in which AI tools influenced how effective you felt as a teacher.

Reflect on a situation where the use of AI tools created emotional tension, uncertainty, or vulnerability in your professional practice.

Recall a moment when you felt pressure, concern, or hesitation about relying on AI tools in your teaching work.

Write about an experience in which AI tools seemed to support your teaching in a meaningful way. Describe how this affected your attitude toward these technologies.

Describe a moment when the use of AI tools made you question their value or usefulness in your teaching practice.

Reflect on an experience in which the process of learning to use AI tools influenced your willingness to continue using them.

Write about a situation where using AI tools affected your sense of control, confidence, or professional identity as a teacher.

Describe a moment when AI tools appeared to make your work easier, but also created mixed feelings or concerns.

Reflect on an experience that illustrates how your perceptions of the usefulness or ease of using AI tools have changed over time.

Conclude your narrative by reflecting on how your experiences with AI tools have shaped both your perceptions of these technologies and your emotional experiences as an English language teacher.

Index 2. The interview questions

How do you currently use AI tools in your English language teaching practice?

What aspects of AI tools do you find most useful for your teaching and your students' learning?

What challenges or concerns have you experienced when integrating AI tools into your teaching?

How easy or difficult do you find it to learn and use AI tools for instructional purposes?

Can you describe any emotional reactions or feelings you have experienced when using AI tools in your teaching?

In what ways, if any, has using AI tools influenced your confidence or perceptions of your role as an EFL teacher?

In your narrative, you mentioned [specific experience]. Could you explain this situation in more detail?

What factors do you think contributed to how you felt in that situation?

How did you respond to that experience at the time?

Did that experience influence your willingness to continue using AI tools in your teaching? How?

Looking back, would you approach that situation differently now? Why or why not?

Is there anything else about this experience that you think is important for understanding your use of AI in teaching?