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Educators' Perceptions and Experiences of Using Artificial Intelligence in the English Language Classroom: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract
The incorporation of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning environments, especially in English as a Second Language instruction, is constantly evolving. This has led to studies focusing on students' perspectives, but there is a lack of research on educators' experiences with artificial intelligence in classrooms. The paper provides an overview of educators' perceptions and experiences with AI applications through a systematic review. This review synthesises 34 studies from 435 articles published between 2021 and 2024. The reviewed studies include countries from Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa and involve both pre-service and in-service educators across primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Based on the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology and the Substitution-Augmentation-Modification-Redefinition model, this review identifies themes across pedagogical benefits, ethical concerns and implementation challenges. The findings show that most studies focused on the technical aspects of artificial intelligence rather than educators' real experience applying it in classrooms. Hence, this paper recognises critical gaps, including the need for longitudinal studies on integration, frameworks for artificial intelligence-driven pedagogy, and professional development initiatives tailored to educators' diverse levels of competence. This provides valuable guidelines for policymakers, institutions, and future researchers for bridging the gap between artificial intelligence and pedagogy. This review highlights the importance of educator-focused research and the inclusive exploration of artificial intelligence's role in language instruction.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Artificial Intelligence in language learning, educator perceptions, English as a Second Language teaching

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence has transformed the teaching and learning landscape, especially in the context of ESL, in every aspect. AI-powered tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment platforms and Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications play a crucial role in creating teaching materials, supporting machine translation, guiding student practice and motivating class discussions (Zhou & Hou, 2025). AI tools significantly enhance educational outcomes and enable a more efficient and meaningful teaching and learning process (Owan et al., 2023). In higher education, the use of AI tools allows educators to create more supportive learning environments and enhance learning outcomes (Eager & Bunton, 2023).

The extensive application of AI in education, particularly in ESL contexts, represents not only a technological shift but a pedagogical revolution that requires educators to adopt new skills in AI-driven instruction, digital literacy, and instructional design (Tenberga & Daniela, 2024). The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) highlights that the successful adoption of AI in the classroom requires educators to develop coherent and balanced technological, pedagogical and content knowledge. The Substitution-Augmentation-Modification-Redefinition (SAMR) model by Puentedura (2020) similarly indicates that educators can utilise technology to go beyond mere substitution of traditional tools, thereby enhancing and transforming learning tasks in significant ways, leading to more engaging, personalised, and interactive learning experiences.

In addition to concerns about academic integrity and ethical issues, educators emphasise the risks of over-reliance on AI and the potential depersonalisation of teaching (Lin et al., 2022; Xing, 2021; Seo et al., 2021). These challenges shape educators' views on the integration of AI into language classrooms (Yu, 2022).

Existing studies have primarily examined students' perceptions and experiences, AI-driven assessment tools and technological affordances (McGrath et al., 2023). A clear understanding of educators' perceptions of effective AI implementation is vital, as their digital readiness, instructional beliefs, and constraints may influence the AI-driven classroom environment (Alshorman, 2024). Although AI can be applied across a wide range of academic domains, it is still in its infancy. It requires further research, particularly on educators' real perceptions and experiences when implementing AI in their classrooms.

This study bridges the gap between AI technology and pedagogical practice in the context of global digital transformation in education, contributing to the current debate on AI-driven ESL instruction. To address this gap, this review systematically reviews 34 studies published between 2020 and 2024 using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The data were sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC and other academic databases to ensure consistency and reliability. The review aims to:

1. Analyse educators' perceptions, attitudes and experiences towards AI adoption,
2. Identify dominant themes and trends in AI-related ESL teaching research, and
3. Identify the research gap and future research directions in AI-driven ESL classrooms.

Literature Review

Educators' Perceptions toward Pedagogical Opportunities of Artificial Intelligence

Educators perceive the integration of AI technology positively, given its ongoing evolution and effectiveness in ESL teaching and learning (Zulkarnain et al., 2023; Belda-Medina et al., 2022). Educators believe that AI tools can enhance teaching practices through adaptive platforms, intelligent tutoring systems and automated feedback mechanisms that encourage individualised and learner-centred instruction (Mahfouz & AbdelMohsen, 2025). They also point out that AI can help diversify instruction to accommodate students' varying proficiency levels and reduce administrative workload (Zakaria et al., 2025). Research indicates that AI has a positive impact on education by supporting students' development and offering tailored feedback, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development principle. These AI-driven tools help transform conventional teaching methods by introducing personalised and adaptive instruction. Another significant advantage of AI tools is autonomous learning, which encourages self-directed learning by giving students access to a variety of sources and immediate feedback (Lehfid et al., 2025). Apart from that, AI can assist in preparing lesson plans, generating materials, and providing information on lesson resources (Shoufan, 2023). Nonetheless, the acceptance of AI in the ESL classroom is influenced by concerns about contextual accuracy, reliability, and the possibility that AI could contribute to plagiarism or reduce human interaction (Avsheniuk et al., 2025).

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Even though AI integration can offer potential benefits for language learning, it also poses an array of pedagogical, technical, and ethical challenges (Kucuk, 2025). AI tools are proven to be a great assistant in the language classroom, including evaluating and grading the students by giving immediate feedback and offering interactive classroom activities but, the tools do not understand feelings and emotions like how educators do (Kucuk, 2025), Studies have shown that students were not exposed to the full benefits of the tools as they did not have full access, hence this limits the real purpose of the tools (Bouzar et al., 2024). Lehfid et al. (2025) note in their study that inexperienced students may generate and interpret outputs from AI tools without educators' guidance, which can affect the quality of the learning experience. Moreover, technical obstacles such as limited access to the latest AI technologies and a lack of training opportunities can hinder the success of AI implementation (Alotaibi et al., 2023).

This integration of AI must be aligned with clear guidelines on academic honesty and ethical responsibility to ensure its appropriate use in classrooms (Holmes et al., 2021). The concerns of over-reliance on AI and depersonalisation of teaching require clear institutional guidelines and adequate support mechanisms to ensure academic integrity (Moya & Eaton, 2023; Bajaj et al., 2023).

Methodology

A systematic review is a structured, thorough analysis of a topic, idea, or methodology, organising them and exploring measures to increase the rigour of research and education (Paul et al., 2020). The screening process involved one reviewer to ensure rigour and reduce selection bias. This study employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). PRISMA was adopted because it certifies that the reviews are inclusive, replicable, and of high quality (Rethlefsen et al., 2021; Brennan et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021).

Table 1. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria of this study*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study Context	Studies in ESL or EFL contexts involving AI use	Studies outside ESL/EFL or unrelated to AI
Participant Focus	Studies focus on educators' perceptions, views, beliefs, and experiences	Studies focus on learners/students or general technology
Technological Scope	Studies must cover the use of AI tools in ESL classrooms.	Studies that cover general technology and non-AI technology are excluded.
Language	English language publications	Non-English language publications
Publication Type	Empirical, peer-reviewed articles (2020-2024)	Theses, editorials, grey literature, pre-2020, or post-2024

The initial database yielded 435 articles. The articles underwent a manual screening process in Microsoft Excel, after removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts; 67 studies were reviewed at the full-text level. Thirty-four studies adhered to the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 1. The selection process is illustrated using a PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1).

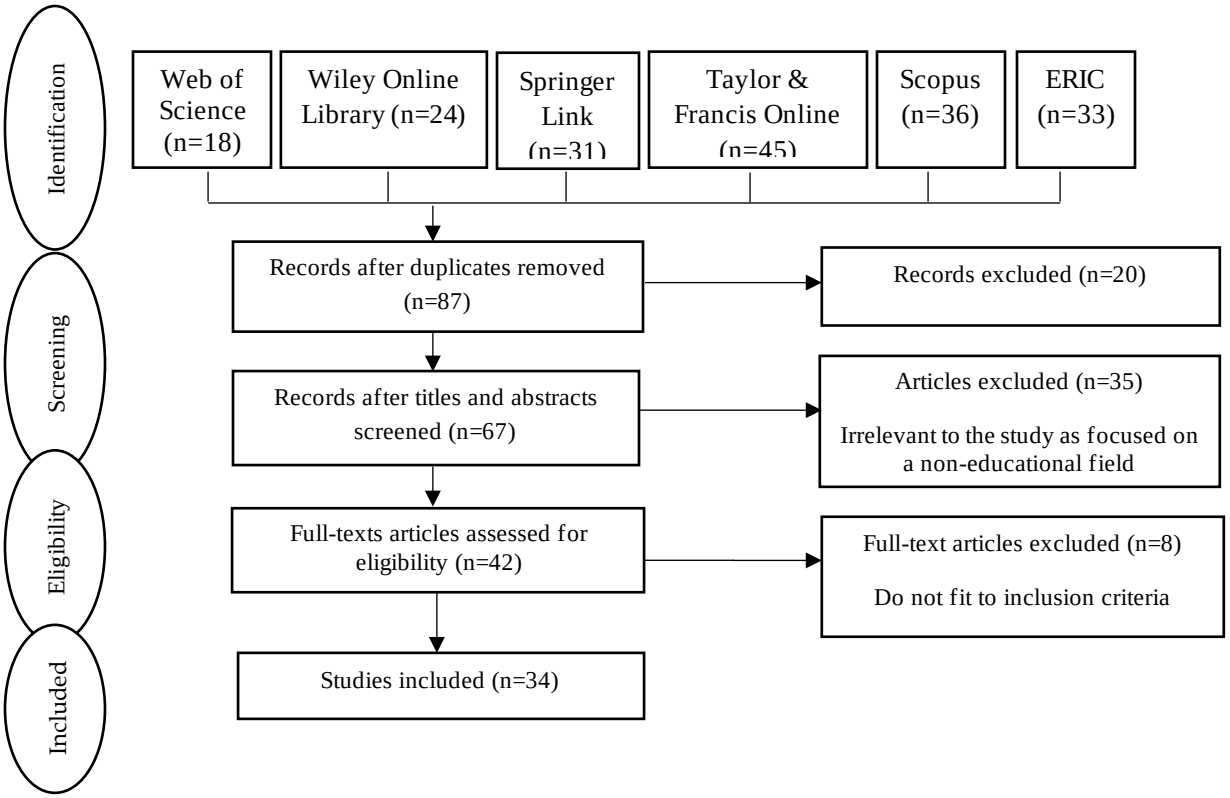


Figure 1. Flowchart of the screening and selection procedure (Moher et al., 2009, p. 3)

Literature Search Phase

The researcher conducted searches across academic databases focusing on artificial intelligence and academic contexts, including Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, Web of Science (WoS), Taylor & Francis Online, ERIC and Scopus. The search string utilised carefully selected keywords and Boolean operators (Gough et al., 2017) to yield sufficient search results on the subject matter.

Example for Scopus:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(("ESL" OR "EFL" OR "English language teaching" OR "English language learning")
AND ("educators" OR "teachers" OR "instructors" OR "lecturers")
AND ("perceptions" OR "views" OR "experiences")
AND ("artificial intelligence" OR "AI"))

Results

The process of writing an SLR requires meticulous data extraction to ensure the accuracy of the synthesis and analysis, which involves procedures such as the use of a standardised form and systematic sorting (Büchter et al., 2020; Schimdt et al., 2021). The researcher created a standardised form in Microsoft Excel to ensure consistency in data collection across the studies. This form captured the bibliographic details, the characteristics of the study, the methodology, and the findings. The extracted characteristics were mapped to each research objective to ensure consistency between the objectives and the results. This study employed inductive coding, in which codes were created directly from the extracted data and cross-checked to ensure coherence with the objectives. The primary objective of this review is to analyse educators' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding AI adoption. The second objective is to identify the dominant themes and trends in the AI-driven ESL context. Meanwhile, the third objective outlined pedagogical challenges, ethical considerations, and future research directions in AI-driven ESL classrooms. The research gap pinpointed the understudied and unexplored areas in the current literature.

Geographical distributions of authors

Table 2 shows the geographic distributions of the authors who have contributed to the selected research articles on ESL Educators' Perceptions and Experiences of Using AI in ESL classrooms published between December 2021 and October 2024. The table highlights the diversity of geographic locations, which proves that AI implementation in ESL classrooms is widespread across different continents. Two collaborative international studies (Novawan et al., 2024; Arefian et al., 2024) are included in this study.

Table 2. *Geographical distributions of authors*

Continent	Geographic Locations	Number of Studies
Asia	Indonesia*	6
	Saudi Arabia	4
	China	3
	Philippines	3
	Iran*	2
	Malaysia	2
	United Arab Emirates	2
	Vietnam	2

	Pakistan	1
	Thailand	1
	Japan*	1
	South Korea	1
Europe	Ukraine	2
	United Kingdom*	2
	Germany	1
	Norway*	1
North America	United States of America	1
Africa	Algeria	1
	Morocco	1
Trans continent Asia & Africa	Egypt	1
Asia & Europe	Turkey*	1

*Countries marked with * are included in the collaborative studies.*

Based on the table, 29 (71%) studies were authored by authors from Asian countries, making Asia the top continent in terms of studies. This indicates that Asian ESL educators have a significant interest in and contribution to AI integration, specifically in educators' perceptions and experiences in ESL classrooms. Seven (17%) studies by European academicians are the second-highest contributors to this field. Two studies (5%) in the African continent have the third-highest interest in investigating educators' viewpoints on AI integration into ESL classrooms.

Research Methodologies

In the exploration of educators' viewpoints on using AI in ESL classrooms, the researchers most commonly used a quantitative, survey-based methodology (40%), with the dominant instrument a questionnaire. Meanwhile, two quantitative studies employed cross-sectional studies. 28% of studies that used the qualitative method relied mainly on interviews and open-ended questionnaires, and only one study employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the in-depth experience of ESL educators utilising AI. The range of data collection techniques shown in Figure 2 indicates that the study area is receptive to investigating various lookouts and methodology options.

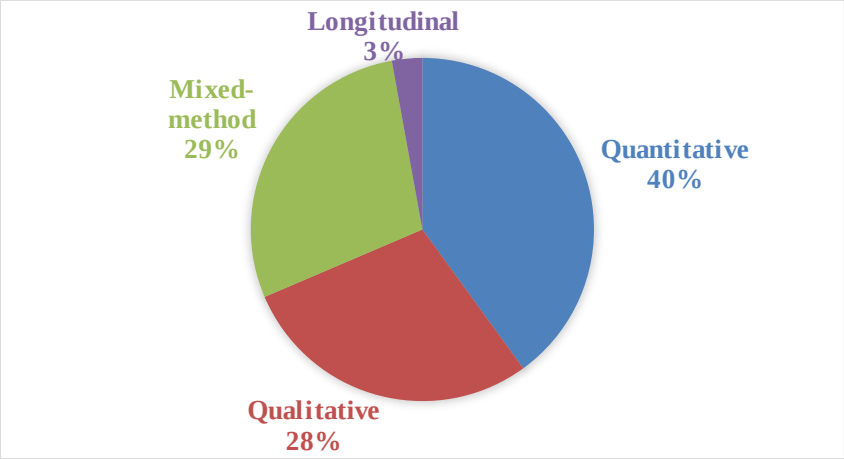


Figure 2. Research Methodologies

Data Analysis Methods

47% of the researchers used thematic analysis to explore the perspectives and experiences of ESL educators who incorporate AI in the classroom. The percentage is also contributed by the mixed-method studies, whereby the researchers used thematic analysis as the accompanying data analysis method. Those studies that used qualitative methodology applied complete thematic analysis.

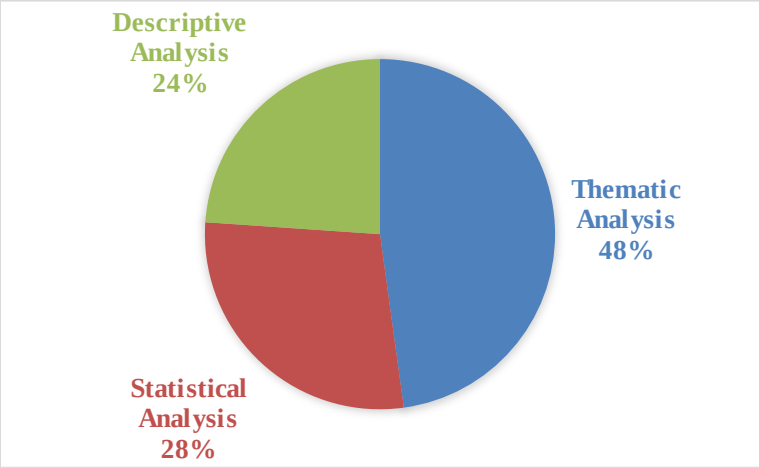


Figure 3. Data analysis methods

The choice between descriptive and statistical analysis depends on the nature of the research. In this study, 28% of the articles used statistical analysis to explore correlations and causal relationships between educators' viewpoints and experiences when AI is incorporated into the classroom. Another 24% opted for descriptive analysis, such as means and standard deviations, to describe educators' perceptions of AI incorporation, as it offers a general understanding of attitudes and perspectives. The studies that employed descriptive analysis were mostly mixed-methods, as they also utilised thematic analysis.

Dominant themes in AI-related ESL research

Table 3. *Research primary themes*

Themes	Subthemes	No. of Studies
Challenges and limitations of AI in English teaching and learning	Limited digital literacy, insufficient professional training, tool capabilities, technical difficulties, reliability and accuracy of information, and limitations of creative thinking	29
Impacts of AI on English teaching and learning	Personalised feedback and learning, autonomous learning, active engagement and motivation, efficiency and convenience of learning	20
Ethical concerns and considerations	Loss of human interaction, plagiarism issues, and over-reliance	13

The most significant focus area that emerged from the selected published research in this field is educators' perspectives on the implementation of AI in English teaching and learning. This aligns with the study's core subject matter: exploring educators' perceptions. All 34 selected

articles discuss educators' perceptions of using AI in English language learning and teaching. Examining teachers' perceptions of AI and ChatGPT, and instructors' perspectives on AI integration in English language education, focusing on efficiency, social and emotional development, engagement, feedback, critical thinking, and the role of teachers, contributes to a broader understanding of educators' perspectives.

Twenty-nine articles, the most, addressed the challenges and limitations of AI in English language instruction. Exploring EFL teachers' perceptions and responses to the integration of AI and academic integrity provides insights into their concerns about the integration of AI into their classrooms. 22 published articles conferred the recommendation for professional development in utilising AI in ESL classrooms. The studies emphasise the need for structured teacher training programs to enhance digital literacy and AI-specific competencies among educators and the need for curriculum adaptation that includes AI.

The impacts of AI in English teaching and learning are discussed in 20 articles. The impacts cover both the positive and negative impacts of AI integration in ESL classrooms. However, none of the published articles found the negative impacts of AI insertion in ESL classrooms. The area titled 'strategies for integrating AI in teaching and learning' is among the top five focus areas discussed in the 19 published articles. Examining the methods teachers employ to effectively integrate AI into their lesson plans and enhance the learning experience could ensure the success of English language learning and teaching with AI. Sixteen articles focused on the opportunities and benefits of using AI in ESL classrooms. Highlighting the advantages of AI tools in boosting students' performance and providing immediate feedback underscores the benefits of AI integration.

Finally, it has been acknowledged that there are ethical concerns and considerations surrounding AI incorporation in ESL teaching and learning. 13 articles mention the issue of ethics concerning AI in ESL classrooms. These studies address concerns over students' over-reliance on AI, the potential for academic dishonesty, the impact of ChatGPT on teachers' roles as total replacements, changes in teaching dynamics, and the impact on thinking and creativity. Numerous studies have examined AI integration from different perspectives, indicating a strong interest in its instructional implications.

Discussion

Perceptions and insights towards using AI in English teaching and learning

Educators have a favourable view of implementing AI in ESL classrooms, emphasising how technology can significantly enhance their teaching methods. The dominance of studies from Asia and the Middle East indicates that these regions are more actively exploring AI integration as they undergo digitalisation. The constant emphasis on digital readiness indicates that the educators' confidence plays a pivotal role in effective AI integration. This aligns with the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), which views AI as effectively helping balance technology integration with pedagogical and content knowledge.

Challenges and limitations of AI in English teaching and learning practices

The first dominant theme that emerges is the challenges and limitations of AI in English teaching and learning, highlighting the obstacles ESL educators face when integrating AI into their teaching practices. These challenges and limitations include practical, technological, and pedagogical dimensions that affect the implementation's effectiveness. Limited digital literacy is

one of the issues educators address, indicating that educators have diverse proficiency and familiarity with technology. 65% of the studies addressed educator professional development, revealing a significant gap in preparing educators for AI integration. The lack of AI integration techniques may limit critical thinking, creativity and originality in language learning. The UTAUT model can provide insights into these obstacles that will promote more successful AI incorporation in ESL settings.

Impacts of AI on English teaching and learning

One significant impact of incorporating AI into ESL settings is the ability to provide personalised feedback, thereby enabling customised learning experiences tailored to students' needs and capabilities. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) aligns with this situation, as AI-powered tools offer a tailored, flexible learning experience that enables students to learn at their own pace, since ZPD focuses on individualised scaffolding that links students' actual and potential development levels. Using AI-powered tools can reduce educators' workload by automating grading and providing immediate feedback, while students experience a meaningful learning process through active engagement. UTAUT has a close relationship with educators' perceptions of AI's positive impact on language learning because their willingness to adopt AI in the classroom is influenced by performance expectancy, which offers them measurable gains in effectiveness and positive outcomes.

Ethical concerns and considerations

Educators expressed ethical concerns about a possible decline in human interaction if AI tools are widely used. They fear that AI may compromise the relational and emotional aspects of teaching and learning, potentially replacing educators' roles in language learning. Plagiarism and integrity issues are other important ethical dilemmas. The educators fear that students may misuse AI tools to plagiarise, contributing to academic dishonesty. The ethical and methodological concerns require careful attention. Educators expressed concern about over-reliance on AI, which could potentially diminish students' creative skills. Even though AI-powered tools offer significant benefits for language instruction, a balanced integration is required to preserve human creativity and critical thinking. The development of rigorous ethical guidelines and policies can address these ethical concerns and promote responsible use of AI. UNESCO has produced the first global standard on AI ethics, the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), which provides a framework for the use of AI. The fundamental principle of this framework is the protection of human rights and dignity in the domain of AI.

The research gap and future research directions in AI-driven ESL classrooms

This review focuses on the need for additional research to understand the impact and implications of AI in educational contexts, identifying current research gaps and potential future research initiatives informed by educators' insights into AI applications in their classrooms.

Methodological Gaps

Lack of longitudinal studies

One clear research gap is the need for more longitudinal studies of educators' perspectives. Only one study conducted a longitudinal study to explore teachers' experiences with AI, and this approach captured the dynamic changes in those experiences, providing a comprehensive view of

teachers' adaptation to AI advances. This type of study can also support a deeper exploration of educators' perspectives by assessing the long-term effects of AI integration in ESL settings. The existing research focuses solely on current perceptions rather than on evolving viewpoints.

Lack of studies exploring the experiences of educators

Referring to the title of this review, which highlights educators' perceptions and experiences, 99% of the selected articles focus on educators' perceptions, while only one examines educators' experiences. Hence, there is an urgent need to conduct further studies on educators' lived experiences when implementing AI in ESL classrooms. The educators' perceptions and experiences will complement each other, providing insights into future planning for AI implementation in an ESL setting.

Contextual Gaps

Lack of diversity in terms of the educator population

There is a gap in comparing perceptions among pre-service, in-service, novice, and experienced educators. Pre-service educators who are still in training might have different views on AI adaptation in the classroom compared to in-service educators with real teaching experience. Experienced educators may perceive AI adoption in their classrooms as a challenge, as they have established teaching habits, whereas novice educators may view it as an opportunity. Thus, exploring this aspect may help identify strategies specific to various groups.

Limited focus on context-specific challenges

There is limited research on how cultural, institutional, and economic disparities, as well as regional factors, affect educators' perceptions of integrating AI into their classrooms. Although AI is frequently presented as universally applicable, cultural, institutional, and regional factors can significantly influence educators' perspectives on its use in classrooms. The impacts of these aspects on educators' and students' viewpoints are understudied. Comparative studies across cultural, institutional, economic, and regional contexts should be conducted to examine variations in perspectives on AI employment in ESL classrooms.

Pedagogical Gaps

Lack of focus on technical and pedagogical knowledge

Another substantial research gap that emerges is the lack of attention to how varying levels of digital literacy among educators will affect their perceptions of adopting AI in their classrooms. However, some articles urge the provision of professional training, and only a few probe into specific training tailored to educators' digital literacy levels. Hence, there is a need to explore which types of professional development and training should be conducted.

Comparison between students' perspectives and educators' views

There is little data connecting students' and educators' perspectives on the implementation of AI in classrooms. It is crucial to understand the perspectives on both sides to ensure that the adoption of AI in classrooms is meaningful and effective. The existing study focused on differences in students' and educators' views on ChatGPT; however, it still has limitations, such as a small sample, and the survey method may not yield comprehensive insights. More research is needed to compare students' and educators' perceptions.

Conclusions

This review provides stakeholders, educators, researchers, and policymakers with insights into the current state of AI integration in ESL classrooms. This review is an important platform for addressing current issues, seizing opportunities, and providing guidance on the future direction of research. It highlights research gaps and suggests future studies.

The findings review comprehensive perspectives on educators' perceptions of adapting AI into their ESL classrooms. By highlighting perceptions, it emphasises the importance of addressing worries and concerns, including the training required, ethical issues, and the impacts on their teaching strategies, thereby promoting the efficiency of AI incorporation. This study also provides educators' viewpoints on AI tools and policies aligned with actual classroom practice, which can increase the successful integration of AI in classrooms.

This study serves as a guide for the successful application of AI in ESL classrooms and academic contexts. By identifying gaps and offering practical insights, it helps shape the future, with AI serving as the driving force behind the evolution of language education. The 5-year time frame of the published articles being reviewed provides the latest and most robust views on the subject matter, as AI is rapidly evolving.

Generally, this review demonstrates how AI can completely reshape the field of language education through the eyes of stakeholders directly involved in the situation. This provides robust, firsthand insights into the needs and expectations of ESL educators for the future development and integration of AI in ESL learning. At the same time, this review reveals significant obstacles and hindrances, especially in the aspects of ethical dilemmas, accessibility issues, professional development and digital literacy.

Recommendations

A majority of educators perceive AI as a helpful tool that can enhance the conventional teaching strategies they use; however, inadequate training, technical constraints, insufficient digital literacy, and a lack of support across various aspects may affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching and learning process.

This study identifies significant research gaps, including the need for more qualitative and longitudinal studies and for research on educators' lived experiences. The complete integration of AI in ESL classrooms based on the synthesis of the educators' perceptions in existing research can be achieved if the following recommendations are taken into consideration:

Professional Development

Since this issue has been discussed in most studies, it is crucial to implement professional training or mentorship programmes to enhance educators' digital literacy and competence with AI. This will address concerns about limitations and challenges educators face in the current situation.

Critical AI Literacy

Educators and students need critical AI literacy, which includes the ability to access AI-generated outputs, identify limitations and biases, use the tool ethically, and avoid over-reliance that can affect creativity and critical thinking skills.

Ethical Guidelines

The authorities should develop and enforce the policies and guidelines to address ethical concerns to ensure the responsible use of AI in ESL classrooms. Clear policies and guidelines will help educators to have faith in AI integration.

Curriculum Adaptation

The institutions need to consider implementing an AI-assisted curriculum aligned with pedagogical goals to ensure optimal use of AI.

In conclusion, this review plays a significant role in guiding future research in the same area, guiding stakeholders in developing suitable policies and guidelines, and encouraging appropriate actions towards a more ethical and meaningful integration of AI in ESL classrooms. As the educational system continues its digital transformation, professional development, critical AI literacy, and ethical guidelines are vital to ensuring that AI enhances rather than replaces the fundamental goals of the language classroom.

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