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RETHINKING ENGLISH TEACHING IN THE AI ERA: ENGLISH EDUCATORS' AI LITERACY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

This study examines English educators' AI literacy and teaching practices in the AI era, focusing on how English teachers and English lecturers understand, use, and ethically manage AI in English language teaching. Adopting a qualitative case study design, the study involved questionnaire data from 27 English educators and semi-structured interviews with five participants from diverse educational contexts. The questionnaire explored educators' AI awareness, pedagogical use of AI, and ethical practices, while interviews provided in-depth insights into educators' experiences and professional decision-making. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively, and interview data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that English educators demonstrate moderate AI awareness and strong ethical sensitivity; however, their pedagogical use of AI remains cautious, selective, and largely teacher-mediated. AI tools were primarily used for instructional preparation and text-based language support, particularly in writing and reading. Student-facing AI use and assessment-related integration were limited due to concerns about academic integrity, overreliance, and learning quality. Despite high ethical awareness, many educators reported uncertainty in evaluating AI-assisted student work and establishing clear boundaries for acceptable AI use. The study concludes that English educators' AI literacy is pedagogical and contextual rather than primarily technical. Meaningful AI integration in ELT requires professional development and institutional support that prioritize pedagogical judgment and ethical guidance over technical training alone.

Keywords: artificial intelligence in ELT; AI literacy; English language teaching; English educators; teacher pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to reshape educational practices across disciplines, including English language teaching (ELT). AI-powered tools such as text-generation systems, speech recognition applications, automated feedback tools, and adaptive learning platforms are increasingly accessible and used by English educators to support instruction, assessment, and learning activities. In ELT contexts, these tools are commonly associated with writing support, pronunciation practice, assessment assistance, lesson planning, and materials development (Karki & Karki, 2025). As a result, English teachers and lecturers are increasingly required to engage with AI not only as a technological resource but as a component that may influence everyday teaching practices and professional decision-making.

Alongside these developments, the concept of AI literacy has gained prominence in educational research. AI literacy is generally understood as educators' ability to understand AI technologies, evaluate their outputs, and engage with them in informed and responsible ways (Ng et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024). In ELT, AI literacy is particularly important because AI tools can directly affect learners' language production, feedback processes, and assessment outcomes. Consequently, English educators are expected not only to use AI tools, but also to



understand their capabilities, limitations, and ethical implications within instructional contexts.

Within ELT research, recent studies have begun to explore AI literacy among teachers and pre-service teachers, revealing uneven levels of preparedness. For instance, Chenqi et al. (2023) and Ayuningtryas and Emaliana (2025) report that while teachers demonstrate awareness of ethical issues related to AI, they often lack confidence in pedagogical and assessment-oriented uses of AI. Similarly, Seunmin and Kim (2024) show that AI literacy is closely linked to teacher efficacy and professional identity, suggesting that AI competence extends beyond technical skills to encompass teachers' beliefs and pedagogical decision-making. Despite these insights, there remains a limited amount of empirical research that specifically examines English educators' AI literacy from a pedagogical perspective, particularly across different educational levels, such as school teachers and university lecturers.

Despite the growing presence of AI in ELT, existing studies suggest that English educators' preparedness to engage with AI varies considerably. Previous research has reported generally positive attitudes toward AI use in language teaching; however, many teachers express uncertainty regarding their AI-related knowledge, confidence, and ethical decision-making (Karaduman, 2025). Even among in-service educators, AI use is often shaped by informal experimentation rather than systematic understanding or institutional guidance.

Moreover, much of the existing literature conceptualizes AI-related teacher competence using broad or highly technical competency frameworks. While systematic reviews have identified extensive lists of AI-related competencies for EFL teachers—including AI-assisted lesson planning, automated assessment, data-driven instruction, and ethical AI use—such models may be difficult to operationalize in applied linguistics research and everyday ELT contexts (Case et al., 2025). There remains limited empirical attention to how English educators' AI awareness and understanding relate to their reported teaching practices and ethical considerations, particularly among in-service teachers and lecturers.

To address this gap, the present study examines English teachers' and English lecturers' AI literacy and AI-related teaching practices using a simplified and practice-oriented framework. In this study, AI literacy is conceptualized through three interrelated aspects: technical understanding, practical use, and ethical awareness. This conceptualization draws on existing discussions of AI literacy and responsible AI use in education (Ng et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024) and is informed by principles of reflective and responsible engagement with AI (Nol & Heng, 2025). By aligning this framework, the study seeks to capture how AI literacy is perceived and enacted by English educators in real teaching contexts, rather than proposing new pedagogical models or advanced technical competencies. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What levels of AI awareness and understanding do English teachers and English lecturers report in relation to English language teaching?
2. How do English teachers and English lecturers report the use of AI tools in their English teaching practices?
3. How do English teachers and English lecturers perceive and enact ethical, responsible, and critical use of AI in English language teaching?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design with supporting descriptive quantitative data to explore English educators' AI literacy and teaching practices in the AI era. A case study approach was chosen to provide a contextualized and in-depth understanding of how AI literacy is perceived and enacted by English teachers and English lecturers within a specific educational context. This design is particularly suitable for exploratory research on emerging phenomena, such as the integration of AI in English language teaching, where practices, beliefs, and institutional guidelines are still evolving (Case et al., 2025). Although questionnaire data were collected to provide an overview of trends, the primary focus of the study was interpretive, aiming to understand educators' experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes rather than to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships.

Participants

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants. The participants consisted of 27 English educators, including school teachers and university lecturers, with diverse teaching experiences, educational backgrounds, and teaching contexts. Most participants held a master's degree and had more than five years of teaching experience.

Table 1. Demographic of Participants

Variable	Category	n
Gender	Male	7
	Female	20
Age	25–34 years	6
	35–44 years	12
	45–54 years	6
	>55 years	3
Highest Education Level	Bachelor's degree (S1)	9
	Master's degree (S2)	15
	Doctoral degree (S3)	3
Professional Role	School teachers (SD/SMP/SMA)	14
	University lecturers	13
Teaching Context	Elementary & Junior High School	9
	Senior High School	3
	Higher Education	15
Years of Teaching Experience	5–10 years	12
	11–15 years	4
Variable	Category	n
	> 15 years	11

Data Collection

A questionnaire was used to obtain an overview of English educators' perceptions and self-reported practices related to AI literacy in English language teaching. The instrument was adapted and modified from existing AI literacy frameworks and scales, with a focus on pedagogical relevance rather than advanced technical knowledge (Lintner, 2024; Ng et al.,

2024). The questionnaire was conceptually informed by UNESCO's (2024) AI Competency Framework for Teachers, operationalized through ELT-relevant dimensions, and guided by discussions of AI literacy in language education (Nol & Heng, 2025).

In this study, AI literacy is understood as educators' basic awareness and informed use of artificial intelligence in English language teaching, drawing on existing discussions of AI literacy and responsible AI use in education (Ng et al., 2024; Nol & Heng, 2025; UNESCO, 2024). AI literacy is examined through three interconnected aspects: technical, practical, and ethical as shown in Figure 1.

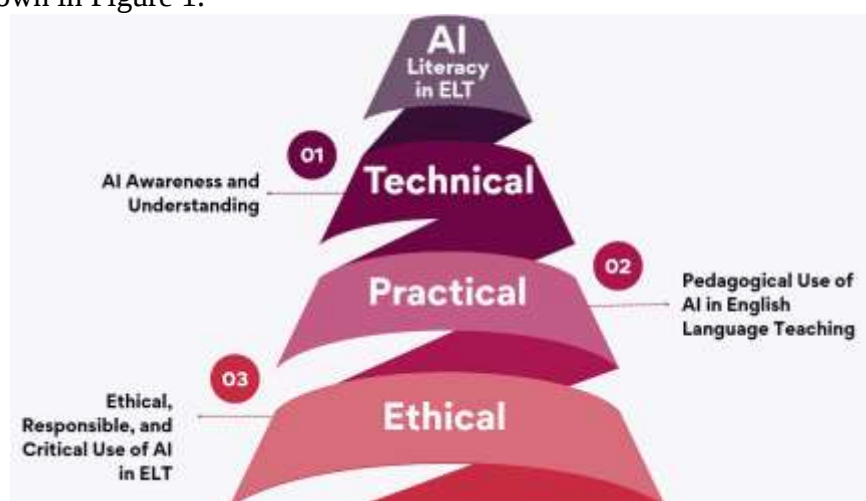


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Ng et al., 2024; Nol & Heng, 2025; UNESCO, 2024)

The technical aspect refers to educators' understanding of what constitutes AI in ELT, as well as their awareness of the capabilities and limitations of AI tools used for language-related tasks. The practical aspect focuses on how AI tools are applied in English teaching practices, including their use for instructional support, assessment, feedback, and lesson preparation. The ethical aspect concerns educators' awareness and enactment of responsible and critical AI use, encompassing issues such as academic integrity, data privacy, bias, and assessment-related considerations.

To reflect these dimensions, the questionnaire was structured into three corresponding sections. Section A examined participants' awareness and understanding of AI in the context of English language teaching. Section B focused on educators' pedagogical use of AI, including the types of tools used, the purposes for which they were employed, and the stages of the teaching–learning process in which AI was integrated. Section C addressed ethical, responsible, and critical practices related to AI use in ELT, such as evaluating AI-generated content, maintaining academic integrity, and ensuring responsible use of AI in assessment and feedback. Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to illustrate overall trends within the case, rather than to conduct inferential statistical analysis.

To deepen the understanding of questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five English educators, consisting of three school teachers and two university lecturers, volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews. These interview participants were selected to represent different levels of AI awareness and teaching experience, enabling deeper exploration of contrasting practices and perspectives. The purpose of participant selection was not to generalize findings to all English educators, but to

identify shared patterns, challenges, and practices within this particular case.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings are organized in accordance with the three research questions, which correspond to the technical, practical, and ethical aspects of AI literacy examined in this study.

AI Awareness and Understanding among English Educators

The questionnaire results indicate that English educators possess moderate foundational AI literacy, though levels of pedagogical confidence vary. In terms of conceptual understanding, most respondents reported at least basic familiarity with AI in English language teaching. Specifically, 73.7% of educators indicated some level of understanding of AI concepts, with 36.8% reporting a basic understanding and 36.8% reporting a clear or critical understanding of AI and its implications for ELT. However, 26.3% noted that their understanding remained limited, suggesting uneven depth of AI knowledge across participants. The result is shown in Figure 2.

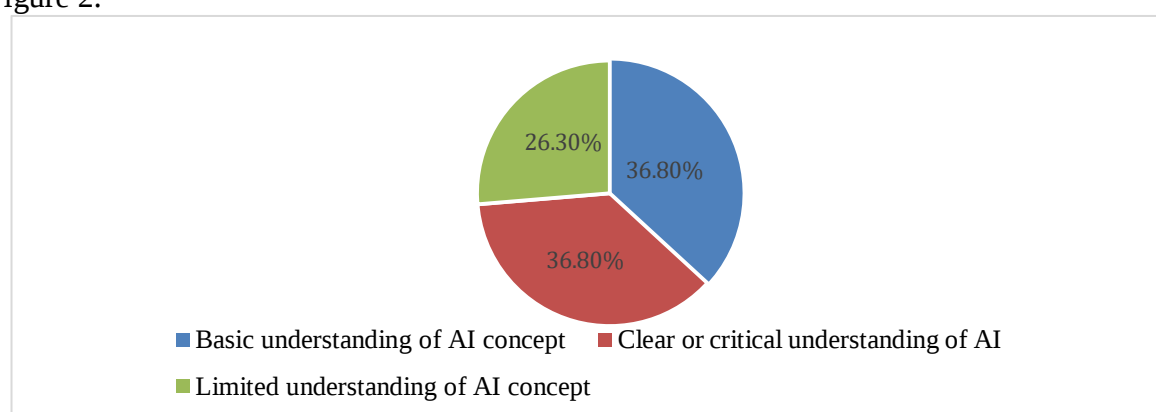


Figure 2. Conceptual Understanding of AI in English Language Teaching

Despite this general awareness, pedagogical AI literacy appeared less developed. While most respondents reported using AI for instructional preparation, such as lesson planning and material development, fewer expressed strong confidence in identifying pedagogically appropriate contexts for student-facing AI use. Responses to items on pedagogical decision-making showed that educators were more cautious about integrating AI directly into learning activities, reflecting uncertainty about how AI can support deeper learning rather than surface-level task completion.

Regarding instructional focus, AI was most used to support writing and reading-related activities, with respondents indicating that AI-assisted feedback, idea generation, and text adaptation were among the most frequent applications. In contrast, fewer educators reported using AI to support speaking and listening skills, suggesting that AI integration remains concentrated in text-based language domains. The ethical and evaluative dimensions of pedagogical AI literacy also revealed notable gaps. Although a large proportion of respondents indicated awareness of academic integrity and overreliance concerns, fewer felt confident in evaluating student work that may involve AI assistance, particularly in writing tasks. This aligns with the tendency to prioritize teacher-controlled use of AI and structured classroom activities, rather than independent student engagement.

Table 2. Frequency of AI Use

Frequency of AI Use	n	%
Never	1	3.7
Rarely	3	11.1
Sometimes	9	33.3
Often	12	44.4
Very often	2	7.4

As shown in Table 2, data on the frequency of AI use indicate that most English educators have begun to engage with AI tools in their teaching practice. Nearly half of the participants (44.4%) reported using AI often, while an additional 7.4% indicated very frequent use. A further 33.3% reported using AI sometimes, suggesting emerging but not yet fully routinised integration. In contrast, smaller proportions of educators reported rare use (11.1%) or no use (3.7%) of AI in their teaching. Overall, these findings suggest that AI use among English educators is becoming relatively common, although the intensity of use varies, reflecting differing levels of confidence, pedagogical readiness, and contextual support for AI integration in English language teaching. Overall, the data suggest that while English educators demonstrate functional and conceptual AI literacy, their pedagogical and evaluative AI literacy is still emerging. The findings highlight a need for targeted professional development and institutional guidance to support educators in moving beyond personal AI use toward confident, ethical, and pedagogically grounded integration of AI into English language teaching.

Pedagogical Use of AI in English Teaching

The findings indicate that English educators have begun to integrate AI into their pedagogical practices, though usage remains uneven and primarily teacher centered. Most respondents reported using AI to support lesson planning, material development, and task adaptation, with over 70% of educators indicating frequent or occasional use of AI for instructional preparation. This suggests that AI is largely perceived as a practical tool for enhancing teaching efficiency rather than transforming classroom interaction. AI-generated worksheets, reading texts, and writing prompts were among the most reported applications, particularly across elementary and junior high school contexts.

In terms of classroom implementation, fewer educators reported encouraging direct student interaction with AI tools. Approximately 40–50% of respondents indicated limited or cautious use of AI in student-facing activities, especially for productive skills such as writing and speaking. Educators expressed concerns that unrestricted AI use might reduce students' cognitive engagement or lead to overreliance on AI-generated language. As a result, AI-supported learning was often embedded within controlled tasks, such as guided brainstorming, vocabulary support, or model text analysis, rather than open-ended composition.

Skill-based analysis further shows that AI was most frequently used to support writing and reading instruction, with more than 60% of educators reporting its use for generating ideas, improving text organization, or simplifying reading materials. In contrast, AI use for speaking and listening activities remained relatively low, reported by fewer than 30% of



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participants, reflecting both technological limitations and pedagogical uncertainty. Overall, the data suggest that while educators recognize the pedagogical potential of AI, its classroom application remains cautious, scaffolded, and closely mediated by teachers to maintain learning quality and academic integrity

Ethical, Responsible, and Critical AI Practices in ELT

The survey results indicate a relatively high level of ethical awareness among English educators regarding the use of AI in teaching and learning. A substantial majority of respondents—approximately 70–80%—reported being concerned about issues related to academic integrity, particularly plagiarism and students’ overreliance on AI-generated content. These concerns were most strongly associated with writing tasks, where educators expressed difficulty in distinguishing between students’ original language production and AI-assisted output. This suggests that while AI is increasingly present in English classrooms, ethical considerations remain central to educators’ professional judgment.

Despite this awareness, the findings reveal uncertainty in translating ethical concerns into consistent pedagogical practice. Around 50–60% of educators indicated that they were unsure how to clearly explain acceptable versus unacceptable AI use to students. While many respondents acknowledged the importance of ethical AI use, fewer reported having explicit classroom guidelines or assessment criteria addressing AI-assisted work. This gap reflects a broader lack of institutional direction, leaving educators to rely on personal judgment rather than shared standards when managing ethical issues related to AI.

Professional concerns were also evident in educators’ perceptions of their evolving roles. Approximately 60% of participants expressed concern that unregulated AI use could undermine core language learning processes, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent writing skills. However, fewer than 25% agreed with the notion that AI would reduce the importance of English teachers. Instead, most educators emphasized that AI reinforces the need for teacher mediation, ethical guidance, and instructional scaffolding. Overall, the results suggest that English educators demonstrate strong ethical sensitivity toward AI use but require clearer institutional policies and professional support to confidently address ethical challenges in practice.

Insights from Interviews

The survey results reveal a high level of ethical awareness among English educators across educational levels, particularly concerning academic integrity and responsible AI use. Overall, more than 70% of respondents indicated concern about students’ potential overreliance on AI, especially in productive skills such as writing. These concerns were strongly reflected in interview responses from elementary and junior high school teachers, who emphasized students’ developmental readiness. An elementary school teacher explained,

“At this level, students may use AI without understanding the language, so I limit AI use and focus on guiding them step by step.”

Similarly, a junior high school teacher stated,

“My concern is that students will depend on AI answers instead of trying to think and write on their own.”

Ethical concerns became more complex at the secondary and higher education levels, where assessment and authorship were central issues. Approximately 68% of senior high

school teachers and lecturers reported difficulty in identifying AI-generated content in students' writing assignments. A senior high school teacher noted,

"It is increasingly difficult to differentiate between students' original work and AI-assisted writing, especially when the language quality suddenly improves."

An English lecturer echoed this concern, stating,

"AI challenges our traditional understanding of plagiarism and originality, which creates uncertainty in assessment practices."

These findings indicate that as students engage in more advanced academic tasks, ethical concerns shift from supervision to evaluation and academic integrity. The results also highlight educators' uncertainty in addressing these concerns pedagogically. Around 60% of respondents reported lacking clear institutional guidelines or assessment policies related to AI use. This lack of support was consistently mentioned across educational levels. A junior high school teacher remarked,

"There is no clear policy, so teachers decide individually how to handle AI."

Likewise, a lecturer commented,

"Without institutional direction, we rely on personal judgment rather than shared standards."

Overall, the findings suggest that while English educators are highly sensitive to ethical issues surrounding AI, they require clearer policies, professional development, and institutional support to confidently manage ethical challenges in English teaching.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that English educators' AI literacy is best understood as pedagogical and contextual rather than primarily technical. Although participants demonstrated moderate conceptual awareness of AI tools and strong ethical sensitivity, their classroom practices remained cautious, selective, and largely teacher-mediated. This suggests that AI literacy in ELT is shaped more by pedagogical judgment, professional responsibility, and contextual constraints than by technical proficiency alone. Such a finding supports Lintner's (2024) argument that AI literacy must be interpreted in domain-specific ways and adapted to professional contexts such as language teaching.

Educators' emphasis on ethical considerations over advanced technical knowledge reflects their prioritization of academic integrity, learning quality, and meaningful student engagement. Many participants deliberately limited student-facing AI use—particularly in productive skills such as writing—due to concerns about overreliance and reduced cognitive engagement. This pedagogical caution aligns with UNESCO's (2024) AI Competency Framework for Teachers, which positions ethical judgment, reflective decision-making, and learner-centered considerations as core competencies for educators working with AI.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous research showing that teachers often demonstrate stronger ethical awareness and conceptual understanding than confidence in pedagogical implementation of AI. Studies by Chenqi et al. (2023) and Seunmin and Kim (2024) similarly report that educators' AI literacy is closely linked to professional identity and concern over preserving pedagogical authority in AI-enhanced classrooms. In contrast to research focusing on pre-service teachers (Ayuningtryas & Emaliana, 2025; Karaduman, 2025), the present study shows that in-service English educators may possess practical familiarity with AI tools but still lack structured pedagogical frameworks for integrating AI into classroom interaction and assessment. This suggests that teaching experience alone does

not guarantee pedagogical confidence in AI use, particularly in the absence of institutional guidance.

A key issue emerging from the findings is the disconnect between ethical awareness and pedagogical certainty. While most educators expressed concern about plagiarism, authorship, and student overreliance on AI, fewer felt confident in evaluating AI-assisted student work or articulating clear boundaries for acceptable use. This was especially evident in the writing assessment. Interview data further revealed that ethical concerns varied across educational levels, ranging from developmental readiness and supervision at lower levels to authorship and assessment validity at higher levels. These challenges echo concerns raised by Case, Liu, and Mintz (2025), who argue that insufficient institutional readiness often leaves educators relying on personal judgment rather than shared pedagogical standards.

Despite these challenges, educators did not perceive AI as diminishing the role of English teachers. Instead, participants consistently emphasized the continued importance of teacher mediation, ethical guidance, and instructional scaffolding. This reinforces the view that AI does not replace teachers' professional roles but rather intensifies the need for pedagogical leadership and ethical oversight in AI-enhanced learning environments (Laoha et al., 2025).

Taken together, the findings highlight the need for professional development that prioritizes pedagogical and ethical AI literacy, rather than technical training alone. Consistent with Nol and Heng (2025), effective professional learning should support educators in designing AI-informed language tasks, evaluating AI-generated content, and guiding students toward responsible and critical AI use. Such an approach recognizes AI literacy as a reflective and developmental process shaped by educators' pedagogical values, teaching contexts, and professional identities.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study examined English educators' AI literacy and teaching practices in the AI era, focusing on technical understanding, pedagogical use, and ethical awareness. The findings indicate that English teachers and lecturers demonstrate moderate AI awareness, strong ethical sensitivity, and cautious, teacher-mediated use of AI in English language teaching. AI tools were primarily used to support instructional preparation and text-based language activities, while student-facing use—particularly in productive skills and assessment—remained limited due to concerns about academic integrity, overreliance, and learning quality. Overall, the findings suggest that English educators' AI literacy is pedagogical and contextual rather than primarily technical. Educators prioritized

ethical judgement, instructional responsibility, and student development over advanced technical expertise, reinforcing the view that meaningful AI integration in ELT depends on pedagogical decision-making rather than tool mastery alone. This highlights the need to conceptualize AI literacy in language education as a practice-oriented construct grounded in classroom realities and professional values.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample within a specific context, and the findings are based on self-reported data rather than direct classroom observation. As such, the results reflect educators' perceptions and reported practices rather than verified instructional behavior. Future research could address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples, employing longitudinal designs,



and incorporating observational or artefact-based data to capture how AI is enacted in classroom practice.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of professional development that emphasizes pedagogical and ethical AI literacy, supported by clear institutional guidelines and shared assessment practices. Rather than focusing solely on technical training, professional learning initiatives should support educators in designing AI-informed tasks, evaluating AI-assisted student work, and guiding learners toward responsible and critical AI use. Such an approach may better support English educators in navigating the opportunities and challenges of AI in language teaching.

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