Teachers' Perception and Experiences on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration in English Language Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This study reports English language teachers' perceptions and experiences of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and the professional development needs for its effective integration subscribing to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a theoretical lens. We employed narrative inquiry research method and semi-structured interviews to elicit the experiences of three secondary level English teachers in Butwal Sub-metropolitan City of the Rupandehi district. The research questions focused on teachers' perceptions and experiences of AI integration and their professional development needs. The findings revealed that teachers recognized the potential of AI to enhance personalized learning and instructional efficiency but face significant challenges, including technological proficiency, training, and ethical considerations. The implications of this research extended to educators and policymakers to address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to AI technologies in education to create more effective and personalized learning environments.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, English language teaching, narrative inquiry, zone of proximal development, professional development

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) integration has emerged as a transformative force in the contemporary educational landscape. AI has offered unprecedented opportunities to enhance the teaching and learning of English as a language. However, the integration is not without challenges. English language teachers have encountered many technological, pedagogical, and psychological barriers. Recent studies highlight that while AI can offer tailored instructional

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support and streamline administrative tasks, practical implementation remains a significant hurdle for many teachers (Smith & Jones, 2023). The digital divide and its implications for AI integration in English language teaching (ELT) emphasize the need for equitable access to technology (Erfani & Ebadi, 2021). The integration of artificial intelligence in English language teaching has changed educational practices by offering personalized learning and smoothed administrative support. Nonetheless, teachers face technological, pedagogical, and psychological challenges and issues related to equitable access to technology. Though AI provides opportunities for personalized instructional support, practical implementation is a challenge to many educators.

Moreover, the rapid advancement of AI tools requires continuous professional development to keep pace with new technologies. English language teachers often find themselves unprepared to integrate these innovations into their curriculum effectively. According to Wang et.al (2023), without sufficient support and structured training programs, the adoption of AI in classrooms can lead to frustration and decreased teacher confidence. Ethical considerations have also come to the forefront, with privacy concerns and potential biases in AI-driven language learning platforms being significant issues (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Providing a deeper understanding of educators faceeducators' obstacles to embracing AI-driven pedagogical strategies is urgently needed in education (Brown & Williams, 2023; Li & Zhang, 2023). Teachers teaching English need continuous training to use AI tools in their classrooms effectively. Teachers may feel frustrated and less confident without proper support, which shows the importance of understanding the ethical issues related to AI in education.

Recent literature underscores the multifaceted challenges in integrating AI in ELT. In this regard, Al-Zahrani and Alshammari (2021) highlight the necessity of professional development for ELT teachers to effectively utilize AI tools by suggesting a gap between the availability of AI resources and teachers' preparedness to use them. Similarly, Kumari & Singh (2020) explore these attitudes and their impact on the willingness of ELT teachers to adopt AI. Using innovative technologies in English language teaching boosts student skills and motivation and tackles challenges and limitations. Lee and Chan (2020) discuss the usability issues that ELT teachers face when interacting with AI tools to cater to the needs of non-technical educators. The integration of AI in ELT also requires a rethinking of pedagogical approaches. According to Chen and Chiu (2021), AI can facilitate personalized learning, but teachers must adapt their teaching methods to fully utilize this potential. In this regard, Ghimire et al. (2024) explore the integration of generative AI and AI tools in English language teaching by highlighting their potential to enhance teaching methodologies and improve learning outcomes. Similarly, cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom presents another layer of complexity. A study by Kim and Lee (2022) investigates how AI can be tailored to accommodate the diverse needs of English language learners, suggesting that AI systems must be culturally sensitive and linguistically adaptive. Focusing on immediate and personalized feedback, Park and Lee (2021) discuss the potential of AI to provide immediate and customized feedback to students to enhance their language learning outcomes.

The practicality of AI in extensive language programs indicates that it has the

potential to facilitate personalized learning on a large scale if applied carefully to promote educational equity. It emphasizes the necessity for ongoing assessment and adjustment to guarantee the sustained effectiveness of AI resources in language education. Smith and Johnson (2020) argue that while AI can support individualized learning at scale, it must be implemented thoughtfully to ensure educational equity. According to Patel and Patel (2021), the long-term viability of AI programs in language education stresses the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation to ensure the effectiveness of AI tools. Likewise, Davis and Wilson (2020) advocate for a collaborative approach that integrates insights from computer science, linguistics, and education to maximize the benefits of AI in language teaching. Integrating AI into ELT is a dynamic and challenging process requiring a comprehensive understanding of the technological, pedagogical, psychological, and ethical dimensions. As AI continues to advance, it is essential to address these challenges to ensure that AI catalyzes innovation and improvement in English language education. Kumar and Singh (2021) highlight the potential benefits of AI for English language teaching, such as personalized learning and automated assessment. Despite these advantages, the adoption of AI in educational settings, particularly by English language teachers, has been slow and fraught with challenges. The research aimed to explore English language teachers' perceptions towards AI integration in their teaching and to identify their professional development needs for effective AI integration with the help of the following research questions:

1. How do English language teachers perceive AI integration in their teaching?
2. What professional development do English language teachers need for effective AI integration?

Zone of Proximal Development as a Theoretical Lens

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is one of Vygotsky's key concepts, which defines the difference between what learners can do without help and what they can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner. The ZPD represents the space where the most effective learning occurs, with the learner progressing from dependence to independence through social interaction and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of ZPD can be applied to understand how English language teachers learn to integrate AI into their teaching practices. By identifying the ZPD for teachers, professional development programs can be designed to provide the right level of support and challenge by helping teachers move from their current level of capability to a higher level with the assistance of mentors, peers, or AI tools (Chaiklin, 2003). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a concept, highlights the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance by emphasizing that effective learning occurs in this supportive space. It can also be applied to English language teachers by identifying their ZPD to design professional development programs that offer appropriate support and challenges by enabling them to enhance their teaching practices with the help of mentors, peers, or AI tools.

AI tools can be seen as a form of scaffolding within students' ZPD. Teachers' ability to effectively utilize these tools can enhance student learning by providing personalized support

that helps students achieve tasks they could not complete independently. Exploring teachers' experiences with these tools can reveal how well AI functions as a scaffold within the ZPD (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Understanding teachers' attitudes and beliefs about AI can also be framed within the ZPD. Teachers may need support and scaffolding to shift their attitudes from skepticism, or anxiety towards confidence and competence in using AI. This transition can be facilitated by creating a supportive environment that addresses their concerns and enhances their skills (Smagorinsky, 2007). The challenges teachers face in integrating AI can be analyzed in terms of barriers within their ZPD. Identifying these barriers can help design interventions that remove obstacles and provide the necessary scaffolding to help teachers progress (Shabani et al., 2010). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory has been used for this research as it conceptualizes AI tools as a type of scaffolding that can improve student learning by providing apt assistance. Similarly, it also allows students to achieve tasks they cannot complete on their own. By examining teachers' experiences with AI, this study can gather insights into how well these tools serve as scaffolds within the ZPD and also explore teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding AI. Support may be needed to shift from doubt to assurance, ultimately identifying obstacles within their ZPD to create interventions that promote their professional development and the incorporation of AI in teaching. Using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as a research lens allowed me to explore how English language teachers could be supported in integrating AI into their teaching practices by addressing both the technical and attitudinal challenges they faced and ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in the classroom.

Methodology

We adopted a narrative inquiry as my research design to explore and understand participants' experiences through their stories. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology focusing on individuals' stories about their experiences (Dahal et al., 2024). It is a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of human life by examining the narratives people create to make sense of their existence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach is widely used in fields such as education, psychology, sociology, and health sciences, where the subjective experiences of individuals are central to the research questions (Riessman, 2008).

In conducting narrative inquiry, researchers employ various methods to gather and analyze stories, including interviews, observations, and written documents. The goal is to uncover the meanings, perspectives, and interpretations individuals attribute to their lives and their events. This process goes beyond simply collecting stories; it involves a deep understanding of these narratives to gain insights into the human condition (Polkinghorne, 1995). Similarly, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), narrative inquiry is a method that involves gathering and analyzing the stories people tell about their lives, emphasizing the importance of individual experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them.

Narrative inquiry includes the emphasis on storytelling as data, the exploration of temporality in individuals' lives, the contextualization of stories within their social and cultural settings, the interpretive analysis of narratives, and the co-construction of knowledge between

the researcher and the participant (Bamberg, 2006; Chase, 2005; Neupane & Gnawali, 2022). This methodology allows for a rich understanding of human experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to their lives. Therefore, in this study, narrative inquiry was employed to collect the stories from participants via semi-structured interviews. The collected stories were then analyzed to identify themes, patterns, and insights that inform the research questions.

Participants

We purposively selected three secondary-level English teachers with at least five years of experience in teaching English in classes 11 and 12 at three different community schools in the Butwal Sub-metropolitan City of Rupandehi district. This selection was made to ensure a diverse range of experiences and perspectives regarding the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in English language teaching. Each participant was chosen based on their willingness to share insights and their varying levels of experience with AI tools in the classroom. We gave pseudonyms to the participants as Karma, Raman and Suresh for their anonymity.

Data Generation

We used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants by using open-ended questions to explore their experiences with AI in English language teaching. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded on mobile devices to ensure accuracy., We conducted hree rounds of interviews to capture the comprehensive insights. from each participant. Additionally, notes were taken during the interviews to supplement the recorded data, providing further context and detail. After the interviews, we transcribed and translated the recordings for further coding, ensuring that the nuances of the participants' responses were preserved.

Meaning-Making Process

During the coding process, the transcripts were tabulated, read, and reread to develop a deeper understanding of the data and identify patterns. Important lines were highlighted, and codes were developed to categorize the information. Following this, codes, categories, and themes were created based on the framework established by Braun & Clarke (2012). These themes were then presented in a logical sequence in the research report, situated within the broader context of the research questions and existing literature. This iterative data analysis process allowed me to develop more profound insights into the phenomenon, contributing to the meaning-making process. The findings and conclusions drawn from the data analysis illuminated the participants' perspectives and highlighted the implications of AI integration in English language teaching within the Nepalese context.

Results and Discussion

The responses of participants regarding English language teachers' perceptions and experiences towards AI integration in their teaching and their professional development needs

for effective AI integration emerged with the following themes.

Teachers' Perception of AI Integration in Education

Analysis of participants' stories revealed that all the participants agreed that potential of integrating AI in English language teaching and learning which could foster learning outcomes of the students. Participants' understanding and use of AI tools significantly influenced their perception of the reliability and effectiveness of these technologies in improving educational outcomes. Building confidence in AI requires understanding its capabilities and potential impact on teaching practices. Establishing trust involves exploring how AI can support and enhance traditional teaching methods by fostering a collaborative relationship between educators and technology rather than replace them entirely. In this regard, Karma revealed :

> *I believe that AI tools have the potential to significantly enhance educational outcomes by providing valuable support and resources. Trusting in AI means acknowledging its capabilities to assist in creating engaging and effective learning environments for students, ultimately improving the quality of education we deliver.*

So the use of it, it whatever level, is very essential to understand the potential of AI and develop positive outlook towards it. However, the fear of AI displacing traditional teaching methods or diminishing the educator's role in the classroom appeaderd a commonplace concern among teachers. Some of the participants also shared that addressing this fear involves highlighting the complementary nature of AI tools to teaching practices, emphasizing that technology should augment rather than replace human expertise.

Educators can alleviate these concerns by showcasing how AI can streamline tasks, provide valuable insights, and create more personalized student learning experiences. As noted by Vygotsky in his well acknowledged concept Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, concerns about AI reducing the role of educators can be reframed by highlighting the fact that AI serves as a scaffold to improve teachers' ability to guide students rather than taking the place of expert effectively. Raman confessed his fear:

> *I have concerns about AI potentially replacing traditional teaching methods or reducing the importance of educators in the classroom. It is essential to address these fears by understanding that AI should complement our teaching practices, not overshadow them. Embracing technology as a tool to enhance our roles can lead to more innovative and personalized learning experiences for our students.*

The fear of Raman and the solution he provided was evident in other participants as well. The ideas of how AI could complement teachers not replace them was consistent with what Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory proposed that technologies can serve as scaffolding to promote students' learning by extending their skills within their proximal development range, addressing individual requirements, and personalizing instruction. Recognizing the benefits of AI is essential for educators. Holmes et. al. (2019) highlight that AI's ability to personalize learning, enhance teaching efficiency, and address individual student

needs represents a transformative potential for optimizing educational outcomes. Embracing these benefits empowers teachers to adapt their teaching strategies, enhance student engagement, and optimize learning outcomes through the integration of AI technologies.

Sharing the potential benefits of GenAI another participant, Suresh, expressed:
I see the benefits of AI in education, particularly in its ability to facilitate personalized learning, increase efficiency in instructional tasks, and effectively cater to individual student needs. Recognizing these advantages empowers me to adapt my teaching approach, enhance student engagement, and ultimately improve learning outcomes through the integration of AI technologies.

The effectiveness in enhancing educational outcomes aligns with the literature on the challenges and potential of AI integration in English language teaching (ELT). This aligns with Smith and Jones (2023) and Erfani and Ebadi (2021), who highlight the practical challenges and digital divide in AI adoption. It also resonates with the Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, suggesting that teachers need appropriate support and scaffolding to effectively integrate AI tools (Chaiklin, 2003). Teachers' concerns about AI displacing traditional teaching methods echo findings by Kumari and Singh (2020) and Lee and Chan (2020), indicating the need for AI to augment rather than replace human expertise (Smagorinsky, 2007). Addressing these concerns is crucial to fostering a collaborative relationship between educators and technology, ensuring that AI supports and enhances, rather than supplants, teaching practices.

Professional Identity and Adaptation

The participants showed a mix of experience and apprehension about integrating AI into their English teaching. They feel proficient in technology but find AI integration different from their current methods. Karma remarked:

I've been teaching English for a while now, and I've always prided myself on being pretty tech-savvy. But this whole AI thing, it's like a whole new ball game. I want to keep up with the times and all, but it's kind of intimidating. I guess I'm just worried about how it'll change the way I teach.

Though Karma called himself a tech-savvy, an identity that he assigned himself, he is still not that much proficient with AI. That suggests that he needs training for its effective integration. He is also converned with identity. His experiences reinforce what Warschauer and Grimes (2022) state that teachers who are integrating technology into their professions often express concerns about how AI may affect their teaching style and professional identity. They are not only worried about how it will change the whole teaching-learning paradigm, but their identity as teachers and the role they will play in future. While acknowledging the value of AI integration, the participants expressed concerns about its impact in their role in the classroom. Aligned with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, the participants' concerns reflect the challenge of balancing AI's role in providing personalized feedback while striving to maintain the teacher's essential role as a facilitator who supports

students within their ZPD by guiding them beyond what they can achieve independently.

In the same line, Raman responded:
Umm… I've been thinking a lot about this AI thing, and I'm kind of torn. On the one hand, I see how it could really help my students by giving them more personalized feedback. But on the other hand, I'm like, 'Is this going to replace me?' I don't want to be replaced, you know? I want to adapt, but I want to make sure I'm still needed, if that makes sense.

Such type of anxiety of AI replacing human was evident in all the participants. But they also acknowledged the potential of AI in enhancing teaching-learning processes.

Similarly, the participant Suresh articulated his curiosity about using AI to improve teaching but was concerned about maintaining their unique style. He further added that he was trying his best to balance AI integration with preserving their personal touch in teaching. He stated:

AI in the classroom, huh? It's definitely something I've been curious about. I'm always looking for ways to improve my teaching, and if AI can help with that, then I'm all for it. But I gotta admit, I'm a bit nervous. How do I make sure I'm using it in a way that's true to my teaching style? I don't want to lose my personal touch.

The findings highlight English language teachers' complex attitudes towards integrating AI into their teaching practices. They express a mix of proficiency in technology and apprehension about AI's impact on their teaching identity. This aligns with literature discussing the psychological barriers and need for continuous professional development when adopting AI tools (Kumari & Singh, 2020; Lee & Chan, 2020). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory is pertinent here, as it underscores the importance of providing appropriate scaffolding and support to help teachers navigate this transition (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers' concerns about maintaining their teaching style amidst AI integration reflect the need for interventions that address these psychological and pedagogical barriers within their ZPD (Shabani et al., 2010). Thus, understanding and supporting teachers' adaptation to AI through the lens of the ZPD can enhance their effectiveness in leveraging AI's transformative potential in English language education.

Technological Proficiency and Training

Participants shared that they struggled to integrate advanced technology, such as AI tools, into teaching practices due to a lack of training and support. Equipping teachers with the ample skills to effectively utilize AI in the classroom is necessary to bridge the gap between the availability of technology and teachers' preparedness to use it. Karma expressed:

Sometimes, I feel a bit lost with all these new gadgets and tools. I wish I had more help learning how to use these AI things in my teaching. It's like trying to fly a spaceship without knowing how it works!

The eagerness to use AI to enhance English language learning emphasizes a proactive approach toward improving educational outcomes for students. More workshops and courses designed for teachers underscore the demand for accessible and relevant training for the practical application of AI in the classroom. Raman's experience reaffirmed what Karma argued:

> *Technology is really cool, but sometimes, I just can't figure out how to use AI in my teaching. I wish we had more chances to learn about these tools. I'm eager to unlock the potential of AI to help my students learn English more effectively. If only there were more workshops or courses tailored for teachers like me, I'm sure we could make the most out of these innovative tools and really make a difference in our students' learning journeys.*

Despite having interest to integrate AI in teaching and learning they don't have skills required for it and they underscore the need to training and development opportunities.

Similarly, Suresh expressed a sense of confusion and difficulty in grasping the concept of artificial intelligence (AI) within the realm of education. The rapid pace of technological advancements poses a significant challenge, making it hard to stay abreast of the latest developments. The lack of resources and training opportunities is a barrier to understanding and effectively utilizing AI in educational settings. Suresh confessed:

> *I find AI really confusing and hard to understand. Technology moves so fast these days, and keeping up can be a real challenge. I wish there were more resources and training to help me learn about using AI in education. It has been like trying to learn a new language without any help.*

The integration of advanced technology, particularly AI tools, into teaching practices is hindered by a lack of training and support for educators. The participants expressed a sense of eagerness to embrace AI to enhance English language learning but were constrained by their inability to navigate the complexities of these new technologies. The rapid pace of technological advancements and the absence of accessible resources and training opportunities created significant barriers for educators.

The finding that English language teachers struggle with the integration of advanced technology like AI due to insufficient training and support aligns with the broader literature on the subject. Studies by Al-Zahrani and Alshammari (2021) highlight the gap between the availability of AI resources and teachers' preparedness, emphasizing the necessity of professional development. This finding is further supported by Kumari and Singh (2020), who point out the psychological barriers, such as resistance to change and fear of job displacement, suggesting that a supportive environment and clear communication can mitigate these concerns. The narrative inquiry approach in this study reveals the steep learning curve and the need for continuous professional development to navigate AI applications effectively (Wang et al., 2023). This aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that learning occurs most effectively with appropriate support and scaffolding, highlighting

the need for structured training programs to help teachers progress from their current level of capability to a higher level (Chaiklin, 2003). Thus, this study underscores the importance of providing tailored workshops and courses to bridge the gap between the availability of AI tools and teachers' ability to use them effectively, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes.

Pedagogical Adaptation and Student Engagement

The participants expressed the complex process of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their English classes. There is a desire for more accessible and straightforward methods to learn about AI, indicating a need for simplified resources and training. The potential benefits of using AI to enhance lessons and engage students are recognized by giving rigorous motivation to improve teaching practices for better student experiences. Karma noted:

> *I've had a hard time figuring out how to use AI in my English classes. Sometimes, I feel like it's just too complicated. I wish there were more simple ways to learn it. My students would probably enjoy lessons more if I could use AI better.*

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory presents difficulties when learners (in this case, teachers) are required to be guided through tasks just a little beyond their current capabilities. The participant's struggle with uncertainty and difficulty in using AI for English teaching reflects these difficulties. Teachers need the right help and training to successfully incorporate AI into their lessons, just as students need scaffolding to advance past their level of independence. The participant's admission of incompetence emphasizes the value of guided learning in the ZPD, where they need professional help to improve their capacity to use AI to engage pupils. The drive for better training reflects an understanding that AI can greatly increase teaching effectiveness and student engagement with the right scaffolding, similar to how a learner develops. Raman said:

> *….Teaching English with AI feels really tricky. I often get stuck and don't know how to make it work well. If there was better training, I think I could keep my students more interested. Right now, it just feels like a big challenge.*

The participants' difficulties incorporating AI into English classes highlight a fundamental idea in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which postulates that, given the right assistance, students can reach higher comprehension and proficiency levels. In this situation, the instructors' need for extra assistance is similar to the ZPD paradigm, in which teachers serve as scaffolds, guiding students through tasks that are just a little bit difficult for them right now. The teachers align with the theory's emphasis on social contact and teamwork as critical for cognitive development by looking for advice on overcoming these obstacles. Moreover, the participants' dedication to using AI to develop stimulating learning environments might be interpreted as an attempt to give students the chance for cognitive development inside their ZPD, strengthened by technology resources that extend learning potential. In this regard, Suresh affirmed:

> *I struggle with using AI in my English lessons. It's hard to adapt and keep the*

students engaged. More support and guidance would help me a lot. My goal is to make learning fun and effective with AI.

The participants' experiences integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their English classes highlighted the complex challenges English language teachers face. The desire for simplified resources and training resonates with existing literature on the need for continuous professional development to effectively utilize AI tools (Smith & Jones, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). This aligns with the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of support and scaffolding in learning. The participant's struggle to adapt and engage students with AI underscores the technological and pedagogical barriers identified in previous research (Lee & Chan, 2020; Chen & Chiu, 2021). Addressing these challenges within the ZPD framework can provide insights into how to effectively support teachers in integrating AI into their teaching practices, ultimately enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (Chaiklin, 2003; Shabani et al., 2010). Give your understanding

Conclusion

The study found that participants' willingness for more accessible and straightforward methods to learn about AI indicated a need for simplified resources and training to enhance teaching practices and engage students effectively in the learning process. They expressed eagerness to utilize AI to enhance language learning but faced challenges such as confusion, rapid technological advancements, and a lack of accessible resources and training opportunities. Similarly, the finding revealed that the participants struggled to integrate advanced technology, like AI tools, into teaching practices primarily due to a lack of training and support and demanded the necessity of equipping them with the skills to use AI effectively in the classroom. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of professional development and need-based workshops to bridge the gap between technology availability and their ability to use it effectively. The implications of this research extend to educators and policymakers by emphasizing the transformative potential of AI in creating more effective and personalized learning environments in English language education.

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