



TEACHERS' READINESS TO INTEGRATE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *The rapid spread of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT has created new professional demands for university English language teachers. This article examines teacher readiness for integrating AI into English language teaching (ELT) in higher education by synthesising models of technology acceptance and teacher knowledge with recent empirical research. It argues that readiness is a multidimensional state that combines AI-related knowledge, positive yet critical attitudes, ethical awareness and supportive institutional conditions. The analysis identifies persistent external and internal barriers, including insufficient training, concerns about academic integrity and uncertainty about pedagogical value, and outlines strategies for professional development and institutional policy. The article concludes that readiness must be cultivated deliberately through sustained, discipline-specific training rather than assumed to follow from access to technology.*

Keywords: *artificial intelligence; generative AI; teacher readiness; English language teaching; TPACK; AI literacy; higher education*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has been present in educational research for several decades, yet its practical influence on everyday university teaching remained limited until recently. A widely cited systematic review of 146 studies on AI applications in higher education found that most of the research had been produced by authors from computer science and STEM fields, that critical reflection on pedagogical and ethical issues was rare, and that the voice of educators was largely missing from the field (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019:21). This finding is particularly important for language education, because the value of any technology depends on how teachers interpret it and embed it in meaningful learning tasks.



The public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 changed the situation dramatically. Large language models can now generate texts, explain grammar, simulate conversation partners, adapt reading materials and comment on student writing within seconds. Kasneci and colleagues note that such models offer considerable opportunities for personalised learning, but they also stress that teachers and learners need new competencies and a clear understanding of the limitations of these systems in order to use them responsibly (Kasneci et al., 2023:6). In the specific field of language teaching, Kohnke, Moorhouse and Zou show that ChatGPT can support learners through dialogue practice, vocabulary explanation and feedback, while simultaneously raising questions about accuracy, cultural bias and academic honesty (Kohnke, Moorhouse & Zou, 2023:540–544). Hockly similarly describes the current moment in ELT as a mixture of genuine pedagogical promise and serious risks that require professional judgement (Hockly, 2023:447).

International organisations have responded by calling for systematic capacity building. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI in education recommends a human-centred approach in which institutions validate tools, protect data and prepare teachers to use AI critically (UNESCO, 2023:18). The subsequent AI competency framework for teachers goes further by defining the knowledge, skills and values that teachers are expected to develop (UNESCO, 2024:20). Such documents make clear that the decisive factor is not the availability of AI tools but the readiness of teachers to integrate them in pedagogically sound and ethical ways.

Empirical evidence, however, suggests that this readiness cannot be taken for granted. In a qualitative study of English language teacher educators from Hong Kong universities, participants expected generative AI to transform curriculum, instruction and assessment, yet most admitted that they lacked the confidence and competence to respond to these changes effectively (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024:7). The aim of this article, therefore, is to conceptualise teacher readiness for AI integration in higher education ELT, to identify the main factors that shape it, and to propose strategies for its development. The study is based on an integrative review of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals and international policy documents.

MAIN PART

The notion of readiness has its roots in research on technology adoption. Parasuraman defined technology readiness as people's propensity to embrace and use new technologies



for accomplishing goals and described it as a combination of enabling beliefs, such as optimism and innovativeness, and inhibiting beliefs, such as discomfort and insecurity (Parasuraman, 2000:307–308). This definition is useful because it shows that readiness is not simply a matter of skill; it also includes the emotional and attitudinal stance a person takes towards innovation.

Technology acceptance models provide a second layer of explanation. According to the Technology Acceptance Model, the intention to use a system depends largely on perceived usefulness, understood as the belief that the system will improve one's job performance, and perceived ease of use, understood as the belief that using it will be free of effort (Davis, 1989:320). The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology later integrated eight earlier models and identified performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions as the key determinants of technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2003:447). For teachers specifically, a meta-analytic structural equation modelling study confirmed that the Technology Acceptance Model explains a substantial share of variance in teachers' intentions to use digital technology, with perceived usefulness playing a central role (Scherer, Siddiq & Tondeur, 2019:27). Applied to AI, this means that university English teachers are likely to adopt AI tools only if they see a clear benefit for their students' language learning and do not find the tools burdensome.

Acceptance, however, does not guarantee effective use. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework argues that good teaching with technology requires an integrated understanding of content, pedagogy and technology, and that this knowledge emerges from their interaction rather than from each domain separately (Mishra & Koehler, 2006:1028–1029). Mishra, Warr and Islam revisited the framework in the context of generative AI and argued that these tools share features of earlier digital technologies, being protean, opaque and unstable, but are also qualitatively new because they are generative and social (Mishra, Warr & Islam, 2023:237–240). They therefore call for a broader understanding of contextual knowledge that includes the social and ethical consequences of AI. Celik reached a similar conclusion in proposing the Intelligent-TPACK framework, which adds an ethical dimension to teachers' professional knowledge for AI-based tools (Celik, 2023:2).

A further component is AI literacy. Long and Magerko define it as a set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate



and collaborate effectively with AI, and use AI as a tool (Long & Magerko, 2020:2). Ng and colleagues conceptualise AI literacy through four aspects: knowing and understanding AI, using and applying AI, evaluating and creating AI, and addressing AI ethics (Ng et al., 2021:4). For an English teacher, AI literacy includes the ability to write effective prompts, to recognise fabricated or inaccurate output, to evaluate the linguistic quality of generated texts, and to explain to students when AI use supports learning and when it replaces it.

Drawing on these perspectives, teacher readiness for AI integration in ELT can be defined as a multidimensional state comprising four interrelated dimensions: a cognitive dimension (TPACK and AI literacy), an affective dimension (perceived usefulness, ease of use, self-efficacy and low anxiety), an ethical dimension (awareness of integrity, privacy and bias issues) and a contextual dimension (institutional policies, training and infrastructure). Figure 1 summarises this conceptual model.

The research literature points to several groups of factors that influence whether university language teachers are ready to use AI. The first group concerns knowledge and experience. A review of 138 publications on AI in higher education found that the field has expanded rapidly and that language learning is one of the most frequently studied domains, with AI used mainly for assessment, prediction, assistance, intelligent tutoring and management of student learning (Crompton & Burke, 2023:1–2). Nevertheless, familiarity with these uses among practising teachers remains uneven. Moorhouse and Kohnke report that even experienced language teacher educators felt unprepared to guide pre-service teachers in the use of generative AI (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024:8).

The second group concerns beliefs. Ertmer distinguished between first-order barriers, which are external to the teacher (lack of access, time, training and support), and second-order barriers, which are internal and rooted in beliefs about teaching and established classroom practices (Ertmer, 1999:48–50). She argued that second-order barriers are more difficult to overcome because they require changes in teachers' professional identity. A systematic review of qualitative evidence later demonstrated that the relationship between pedagogical beliefs and technology use is bidirectional: beliefs influence how technology is used, but successful experiences with technology can also reshape beliefs (Tondeur et al., 2017:569). In the case of AI, teachers who view language learning as a process of personal effort and struggle may perceive AI as a threat to authentic learning, whereas teachers with a more constructivist orientation may see it as a resource for scaffolding.



The third group concerns ethical and assessment-related concerns. Cotton, Cotton and Shipway argue that ChatGPT poses a direct challenge to academic integrity because it can produce plausible essays that are difficult to detect, and they recommend redesigning assessment towards tasks that require process documentation, personal reflection and oral explanation (Cotton, Cotton & Shipway, 2024:232–234). Holmes and colleagues point out that the ethics of AI in education extends beyond cheating to include questions of data ownership, algorithmic bias, transparency and the changing role of the teacher (Holmes et al., 2022:505–506). When institutions do not provide clear guidance, individual teachers are left to resolve these dilemmas alone, which increases anxiety and discourages experimentation.

Finally, contextual factors play a decisive role. The facilitating conditions construct in UTAUT emphasises that even highly motivated users need organisational and technical infrastructure to support their use of a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003:453). In higher education this includes access to reliable tools, institutional licences, protected time for course redesign and incentives for innovation. The relationship between barriers and the measures that can address them is shown in Figure 2.

Several frameworks now offer structured pathways for professional growth. The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) describes 22 competences organised in six areas and proposes a six-level progression model from Newcomer to Pioneer (Redecker, 2017:16, 28–29). Although it was developed before the emergence of generative AI, its progression logic remains useful for planning AI-related training. The UNESCO AI competency framework for teachers is more specific: it identifies five dimensions, namely a human-centred mindset, ethics of AI, AI foundations and applications, AI pedagogy, and AI for professional development, each developed through three progression levels described as Acquire, Deepen and Create (UNESCO, 2024:20–22). Together, these frameworks suggest that readiness should be developed gradually, moving from basic understanding to confident and creative pedagogical use.

Empirical evidence confirms that targeted training can make a difference. In an intervention study conducted within an initial language teacher education programme in Hong Kong, 54 master's students completed an 11-week course designed around a professional generative AI competence framework, and the results indicated growth in their ability to use generative AI tools critically and effectively for language teaching (Moorhouse et al., 2024:1). The key feature of this intervention was that training



was discipline-specific: participants did not merely learn how AI works, but practised designing language learning materials and tasks with it.

For university ELT departments, this suggests a practical training agenda. Teachers should first develop hands-on experience with prompting, for example by generating reading texts adapted to a particular proficiency level, creating vocabulary exercises or producing model answers for writing tasks. They should then learn to evaluate AI output critically, checking factual accuracy, linguistic appropriateness and cultural bias, since large language models can produce confident but incorrect statements (Kasneci et al., 2023:5). At a more advanced stage, teachers can design tasks in which students use AI as a conversation partner or feedback provider while reflecting on the quality of that support (Kohnke, Moorhouse & Zou, 2023:545). Throughout this process, the human teacher remains essential. As Luckin and colleagues argue, the most promising role for AI in education is to augment teachers' capacities rather than to replace them (Luckin et al., 2016:35). Institutional support must accompany individual training. Universities should adopt transparent policies that specify acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI in coursework, provide validated tools that respect data protection, and create communities of practice in which teachers share tested activities and reflect on their experience (UNESCO, 2023:24–26). Assessment policies deserve particular attention: shifting towards process-oriented writing portfolios, in-class tasks and oral defence of written work can reduce integrity concerns and, at the same time, encourage more authentic language use (Cotton, Cotton & Shipway, 2024:234). Such changes address both first-order and second-order barriers, because clear rules reduce uncertainty while positive classroom experiences gradually reshape teachers' beliefs (Tondeur et al., 2017:570).

It is also important to recognise that readiness is dynamic. Because AI tools evolve rapidly, a teacher who is ready today may feel outdated within a year. Mishra, Warr and Islam note that the instability of generative AI requires continuous learning and experimentation rather than one-off training (Mishra, Warr & Islam, 2023:245). Consequently, readiness should be understood as a cycle in which teaching practice with AI feeds back into reflection and further professional growth, as indicated by the feedback loop in Figure 1.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this article shows that teachers' readiness to integrate artificial intelligence into English language teaching in higher education is a complex,



multidimensional construct. It combines cognitive elements such as TPACK and AI literacy, affective elements such as perceived usefulness and self-efficacy, ethical awareness regarding integrity, privacy and bias, and contextual conditions created by institutions. Classical models of technology acceptance and teacher knowledge remain relevant, but they must be extended to account for the generative, social and unstable nature of contemporary AI.

The review also demonstrates that access to AI tools does not automatically lead to meaningful pedagogical integration. Many university teachers, including teacher educators, report insufficient confidence and competence, and their concerns about academic integrity and the authenticity of learning are legitimate. These external and internal barriers can be addressed most effectively through sustained, ELT-specific professional development, clear institutional policies, redesigned assessment practices and collaborative communities of practice.

Three recommendations follow for higher education institutions. First, AI competence should be embedded in both pre-service and in-service teacher education using established frameworks such as the UNESCO AI competency framework for teachers. Second, training should be practical and discipline-specific, focusing on the design of language learning tasks and the critical evaluation of AI output. Third, institutions should provide ethical guidelines and assessment models that allow teachers to experiment with AI without compromising academic standards. Future research should measure readiness empirically across different national contexts, including Central Asian universities, and examine longitudinally how training influences both teachers' practices and students' language learning outcomes.

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