AI-Enhanced Distance English Teaching: Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Attitudes and Experiences

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Abstract

This study explores pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attitude towards artificial intelligence (AI) in English language teaching, as well as their experience with AI-enhanced online teaching. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 22 master's students enrolled the Didactics of Distance English Teaching course at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia in 2024. As part of the course, all participants designed and delivered a micro-teaching activity, which provided a context for integrating AI tools. The survey addressed the following issues: previous training in AI-supported pedagogy, use of AI tools during micro-teaching, perceived effectiveness of such tools, concerns related to AI in education, and perceived balance between benefits and drawbacks of AI in distance English teaching. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions of AI in teacher education and aims to inform the design of training programs that prepare pre-service EFL teachers for effective AI integration into teaching English language.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Pre-service English as Foreign Language Teachers, Distance English Teaching, Artificial Intelligence, Attitudes, Experiences

1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly integral feature of educational practice, reshaping conventional classrooms and the landscape of distance and online learning. For pre-

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service teachers (PSTs) of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this shift is particularly salient, as distance teaching is gradually emerging as a permanent and legitimate component of language education curricula - a trend accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond crisis-driven adoption, AI technologies are now positioned as pedagogical partners that can alleviate teachers‘ workload while enhancing instructional quality. These systems support differentiated instruction through learner monitoring, automated yet personalised feedback, and self-paced learning opportunities that promote autonomy and engagement.

Recent international surveys further clarify how AI is already being used across EFL tasks and where gaps remain. A global mixed-method report with 1,348-teachers across 118 countries documents widespread classroom use of AI for language practice, and lesson support (Zhang & Li, 2024). Additional syntheses map perceived benefits and call for pedagogically aligned ethical integration (Holmes et al., 2022; Luckin et al., 2023). These findings place AI’s potential within real practices and emphasise the importance of meaningful use.

The potential of AI for pedagogical personalisation was demonstrated by Kerr and Kim (2025), who reported that PSTs frequently employed AI-generated materials that catered to learners‘ specific linguistic and cognitive needs. Their findings underscore the need to align technological innovation with sound pedagogical principles (Kerr & Kim, 2025). Yet, despite the potential, AI in education continues to be accompanied by public scepticism and conceptual ambiguity as evidenced in a large-scale study by Cave, Coughlan, and Dihal (2019). They found that most of the British public associated AI with dystopian imagery and existential threat. Similar findings were reported by Cukurova, Luckin, and Kent (2020), who also observed that AI was often perceived as less credible, less scientific, and less valuable than human-led approaches, domains central to the educational profession. Public discourses appear to influence the educational sphere, as PSTs frequently mirror these ambivalent perceptions and tend to act on a similar note. Analogous results were detected by Derinalp and Halife (2025), who found that although PSTs maintained generally positive attitudes toward the use of AI in EFL contexts, they expressed persistent concerns related to overreliance, reduced emotional interaction, and the ethical implications of AI-mediated pedagogy.

Parallel developments in distance education reveal a similar duality of promise and challenge. Distance learning is widely recognised for its accessibility, affordability and as Katane, Kristovska, and Katans (2015) highlighted, temporal flexibility noting that students often emphasised the opportunity to engage with coursework at any time of the day. Current EFL evidence also documents concrete properties of AI across the four skills in digital environment, such as speech recognition tools for pronunciation practice, grammar and usage checkers for writing feedback, chatbots for speaking and listening interaction, and adaptive platforms for personalisation (Wang & Mokhart, 2025; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). At the same time, recent findings in practice call for clear pedagogical models and attention to ethics and equity, reinforcing that AI should complement, not replace teacher-led instruction (Holmes et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023). More recent studies reaffirm these findings, identifying

distance education as a sustainable and cost-effective modality that supports diverse learner needs (Masalimova et al., 2022). Nevertheless, several enduring limitations persist, including the lack of direct interpersonal contact, insufficient support, and ongoing technical difficulties (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020).

When integrated, AI and distance education represent a pedagogical powerhouse with the potential to redefine English language teaching and teacher education. However, their combined implementation also amplifies already existing issues, particularly teacher preparedness and ethical concerns. This apprehensive attitude is seen in PSTs' tendency to utilise AI tools only episodically, suggesting limited conceptualisation of AI as a transformative instructional resource (Guan, Zhang, & Gu 2025). Collectively, these studies reveal a paradoxical trend, while PSTs exhibit openness to integrating AI, they do not perceive it as a central or enduring component of teaching practice which correlates directly with their preceding experiences.

Educators themselves report needing support to address generative AI's curricular and assessment implications. Interview and survey studies in teacher and education settings (Laupichler & Spannagel, 2024; Ng, 2021) describe disruption along uneven confidence and competence, arguing for explicit training and ethical frameworks in initial teacher education. This study justifies implementing AI-based competence development into the repertoire of already existing courses.

Given these complexities, further empirical research in PSTs' attitudes and lived experiences with AI in distance education is imperative. As future educators, PSTs 'beliefs and confidence in AI integration will shape how effectively these technologies are embedded into pedagogical practice. Addressing their misconceptions and training needs is therefore critical to the development of informed and technologically literate language teachers.

Empirical studies with pre-service teachers (PSTs) repeatedly highlight the risks of overreliance and integrity issues related to classroom AI use. Multi-country investigations (Holmes et al., 2022; Zhang & Li, 2024) report persistent concerns about plagiarism, as well as the growing need for critical AI literacy in teacher education. These insights directly inform the present study's focus on the balanced, supervised, and ethical integration of AI in distance EFL teaching. Specifically, the research aimed to explore how PSTs at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, respond to this agenda through their attitudes and lived experiences with AI during microteaching. To address this aim, the study was guided by the following research questions (RQ):

1. To what extent are pre-service EFL teachers prepared and trained to effectively integrate AI tools into distance English teaching?
2. How do pre-service teachers perceive the pedagogical value and effectiveness of AI tools in supporting language learning and teaching processes?

3. What concerns and ethical considerations do pre-service teachers associate with AI use in distance English teaching, and how do these influence their attitudes toward its adoption?
4. What recommendations do pre-service teachers propose for the balanced and ethical incorporation of AI in distance EFL teaching?

2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method design to explore pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes toward and experiences with AI in distance English teaching. The design enabled the triangulation of quantitative attitudinal data with qualitative reflections from microteaching observations and questionnaire responses.

Participants were 22 master's students (aged 22-24) enrolled in the *Didactics of Distance English Teaching* course at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, in 2024. A full cohort sampling approach was used, with voluntary participation by all students. Ethical approval was granted by the Department of English Language and Culture, and all participants provided written informed consent.

Each participant conducted a 15-minute microteaching session that integrated at least one AI tool (e.g., chatbot, grammar checker, adaptive platform), following instructor guidance. Sessions were recorded for observational analysis. A researcher-developed questionnaire was administered via Google Forms within 24 hours of teaching to minimize recall bias. The instrument included both open-ended and closed-ended items, using a five-point Likert scale for attitudinal measures.

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, whereas qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis. Findings from both strands were integrated through triangulation to enhance validity and interpretive depth.

3 PSTs Attitudes and Experiences with AI

The following section provides a detailed analysis of PSTs' responses to selected questions of the questionnaire.

3.1 Q1: Did you receive any training in how to effectively use AI tools in your teaching?

Two participants (9%) reported receiving training in the effective use of AI- tools for teaching, while remaining twenty (91%) had no such preparation. This indicates that most PSTs lacked structured guidance in AI integration and relied on informal, self-directed exploration.

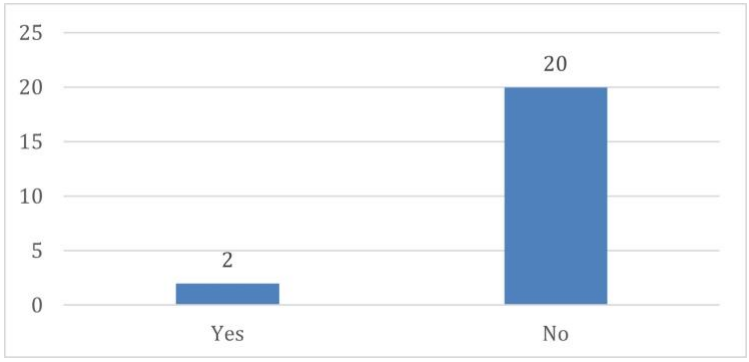

Figure 1: Prior training in effective AI use.

3.2 Q2: Did you incorporate any AI tools during your microteaching activity?

Fourteen participants (64%) reported incorporating AI-tools during their microteaching sessions, while eight participants (36%) did not.

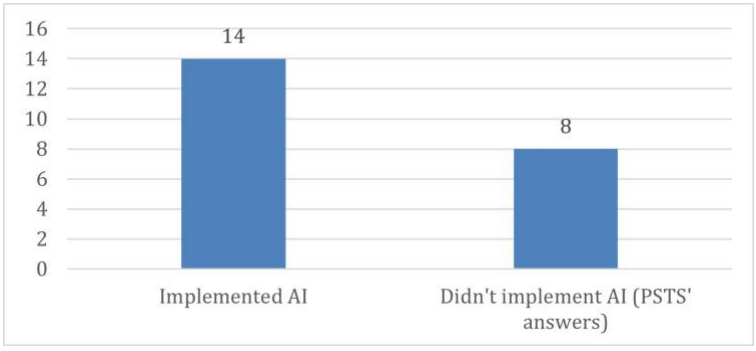

Figure 2: PSTs self-reported use of AI-tools during microteaching.

Although, observational data indicated that only six students (27%) refrained from using AI-tools, revealing a discrepancy between self-reported and observed use.

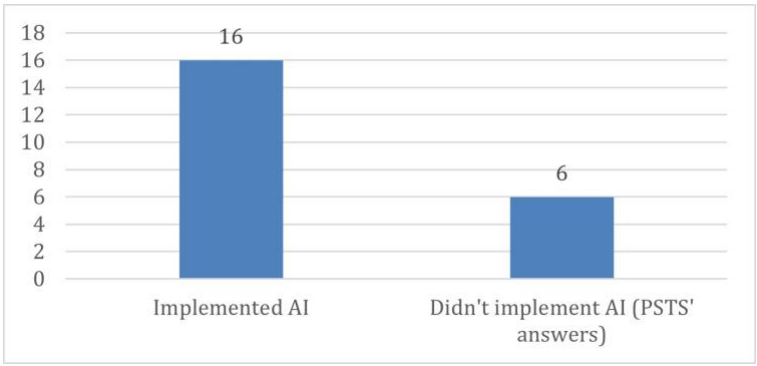

Figure 3: Observed AI-tool integration in microteaching.

This inconsistency may reflect divergent interpretations of what constitutes AI integration, revealing the need for clearer conceptual understanding among PSTs.
PSTs' most frequently mentioned tools included ChatGPT; AI-based image generators (e.g., *Pixlr, Microsoft AI Image Creator, Jweel*); AI-enhanced presentation platforms (e.g., *Canva, Prezi, Gamma AI*); and quiz or interactive applications with AI features. Several participants used AI for lesson planning, activity design, or creating visual teaching materials, as exemplified by responses such as *"I used AI (Gemini) to create an activity for my lesson"* and *"I let students to use AI to generate a picture of phrasal verbs."* Other PSTs utilised AI for presentation support or creative student engagement tasks.

The following table summarises types of tools used and provides examples along with the number who employed each. The total number of tools exceeds the number of participants (n=22) due several students integrating multiple AI application within their microteaching sessions.

Type of AI Tool	**Examples Mentioned by Participants**	**Number of Presenters (n)**
Text-generating tools	ChatGPT, Gemini	3
AI-based image generators	MagicStudio, Pixlr (AI version), Microsoft AI Image Creator, Jweel	8
AI-enhanced presentation tools	Canva (Magic Design), Prezi (AI layout), Gamma AI	5
AI quiz or gamification tools	Grammarly (AI edition)	1
AI-based writing assistants	Mentimeter, Padlet (AI image)	2
No AI tools used (observed)	-	6

Table 1: Types of AI-related and digital tools used in microteaching.

3.3 Q3: How effective did you find the AI-tools in enhancing teaching?

Participants rated the perceived effectiveness of AI-tools in enhancing teaching on a five-point Likert scale (1= not effective; 5= very effective). Two participants selected 1, none selected 2, five chose 3, six selected 4, and nine rated them as 5. The distribution indicates a tendency toward higher effectiveness ratings, with a mean score of 4.0, suggesting generally favourable evaluations of AI use in microteaching.

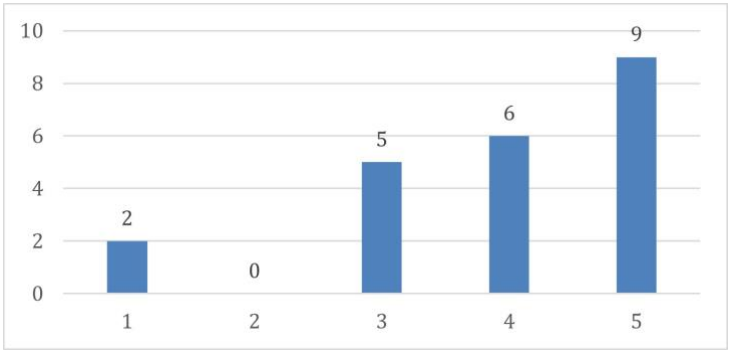

Figure 4: Perceived effectiveness of AI-tools during microteaching.

3.4 Q4: In your opinion, how does AI improve language skills?

PSTs articulated varied perspectives on how AI supports language skill development in EFL distance teaching. Most participants (17) expressed a positive view of AI's potential, frequently emphasising the value of personalised and adaptive learning opportunities it provides. Participant 2 stated that "*Learners can tailor the practice to themselves and their needs, which may be different from their peers,"* emphasising the flexibility attributed to AI. Likewise, P8 pointed to AI's versatility, explaining that "*Due to the versatility of AI tools, I think that they can certainly enhance writing skill of students who wish to learn how to write anything. The AI is there to assist, correct, and even improve their writing skills."*

In contrast, a smaller group of participants (5) expressed scepticism about AI's pedagogical contribution. P11 argued that "*No, it is not a practising tool. I think it saves a lot of time for students or teachers, but I cannot say it improves anything it just helps students who are lacking some abilities to catch up with better students,"* indicating doubts about AI's ability to foster genuine skill development. Similarly, P12 warned that "*It makes students lazier,"* reflecting concerns that excessive dependence on AI may encourage passivity rather than active learning. Considered as whole, these perspectives suggest that PSTs acknowledge AI's potential to enrich language-learning processes, particularly through personalisation, feedback, writing support. They also accentuate the enduring importance of authentic communication and teacher mediation in ensuring meaningful language development.

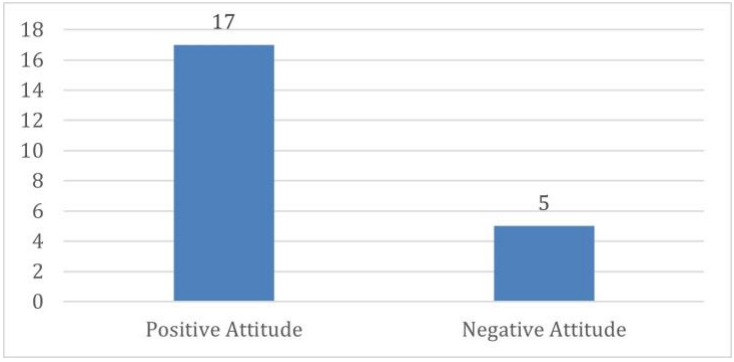

Figure 5: PSTs' views on AI and language-skill development.

3.5 Q5: Do you believe the benefits of using AI in Distance English Teaching outweigh the drawbacks?

Most PSTs expressed a generally positive outlook on AI in Distance English Teaching, while emphasising the need for modernisation alongside responsible use. Among the participants, 13 reported positive beliefs, 4 mixed views, and 5 expressed negative beliefs. The majority affirmed that benefits outweigh the drawbacks, citing AI's potential to enhance personalised learning, accessibility, efficiency, engagement, timesaving for teachers, and instant feedback for learners. For instance, P4 stated that "*Yes, the benefits of AI in distance English teaching outweigh the drawbacks, as it offers personalised learning, instant feedback, and accessibility, with manageable risks,"* while P21 similarly observed that "*I think yes, because teachers and students can seek help from AI. Then they wouldn't be so overloaded with the work, but it must be used as a supportive tool."*

However, several PSTs raised concerns regarding overreliance, reduced human interaction, and the risk of diminished creativity. Positive evaluations were tempered by opposing concerns. As P6 remarked, "*At this point, the drawbacks are enough of a reason to ban it in education outright. Until someone can properly check if the data accessible by AI is factually correct, I would not use it in my teaching at all."*

Overall, optimism was moderated by a balanced awareness of pedagogical and ethical considerations.

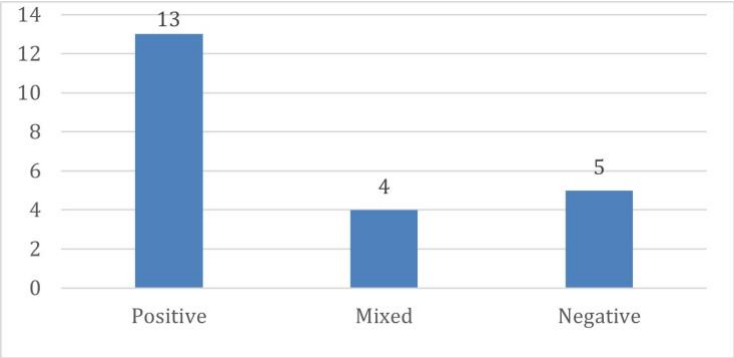

Figure 6: PSTs' belief in AI's benefits in Distance English Teaching.

3.6 Q6: Do you have any concerns about the use of AI in education?

Responses revealed a diversity of views. Six participants reported no concerns, describing AI as a "*useful*" or "*normative*" tool that can enhance teaching and learning processes. The remaining sixteen expressed varying degrees of apprehensive attitude, identifying several recurring themes.

The most prevalent concern related to student overreliance on AI. Many participants (P) indicated that learners might become "*lazy*" or overly dependent, using AI to complete assignments rather than engaging in independent thinking. This dependency was viewed as

detrimental to the development of creativity and critical thinking. As P10 explained: "*Yes, I do have concerns about the overuse of AI in education. While AI can be a valuable tool, excessive reliance on it can hinder students' critical thinking and creativity by providing them with instant answers and limiting their opportunities for independent exploration and problem-solving.*" A similar concern was articulated by P11, who argued that "*Yes, education overall is focused on results, rather than the passion to learn. Students are railroaded into precise answers, said no when they try to do something else, and any creativity is guided, mostly. And AI can serve you all the answers, conveniently in seconds, and sometimes the information is wrong, because some users have convinced it as a prank. AI is a tool, a hammer is a tool, if you use it wrong, you can end up harming yourself.*"

Several participants noted that overreliance could shift students' perception of AI from a supportive aid to a replacement for genuine cognitive effort. As P15 observed, "*AI is amazing, but there are two approaches - 1. ai is great tool, which can help me be more effective 2. ai is amazing tool which can do it instead of me there is nothing wrong with first approach, but the second approach is my concern as possible future teacher.*" Likewise, P17 expressed apprehension about academic integrity, stating, "*Yes - As I stated before, I fear that the use of AI could make students lazier, as it can write and complete assignments for them, and therefore it will be hard for teachers to evaluate them.*"
Collectively, these views suggest that while many PSTs see AI's usefulness, a substantial number remain concerned that excessive reliance on such tools may undermine students' autonomy, creativity, critical thinking, and engagement with the learning process.

The table provides a summary of concerns (themes coded inductively; multiple concerns possible; n = 22):

Theme of Concern	Number of Participants (n)
No concerns expressed	6
Overreliance and laziness	9
Academic integrity and authenticity	4
Reduced critical thinking and creativity	3
Ethical accuracy concerns	2
Data privacy	1
Societal dependence on AI	1

Table 2: Summary of concerns regarding AI in education

3.7 Q7: What overall recommendations would you make for incorporating AI into distance English teaching based on your experience?

Recommendations emphasised balanced, meaningful, ethical, and supervised integration of AI into distance English teaching. Most agreed that AI should serve as supportive pedagogical tool rather than a replacement for teachers, with primary aim to enhance rather than dominate the learning process. PSTs specified that AI is most effective when applied to specific, minor task such as lesson planning, brainstorming, generating feedback, or creating lesson materials, while human interaction and critical thinking remain central. This view was reflected in P6's observation that" *It's a good tool for brainstorming, getting an outline or start is one of the more difficult and sometimes frustrating things a teacher can face, so having something, that can throw out a bunch of ideas is good."*

Participants cautioned against excessive or unreflective use of AI. As P8 noted, "*Don't focus too much on AI. It can take the attention away from students as fast as it can make them fixate on it. Use it sparingly to make the lessons more interesting*." Similarly, P21 recommended targeted, purposeful integration, stating, "*Use it as a supportive tool, maybe use it for creating special programs or activities for students with special needs, and also for creating activities when you don't have any ideas."*

Several PSTs advocated for teacher training to ensure informed and responsible use of AI, including awareness of data privacy and accuracy. A gradual, reflective approach was recommended, focusing on student engagement and the continuous evaluation of AI's educational impact.

4 Discussion

The findings indicate that pre-service EFL teachers generally view AI as a useful addition to distance teaching, despite limited formal preparation. Only a small fraction reported prior training, yet most incorporated AI tools in the mandated microteaching activity and rated their effectiveness favourably (mean = 4.0). This pattern suggests pragmatic engagement driven by instructional requirements rather than autonomous competence development, directly addressing RQ1 on preparedness and training. The discrepancy between self-reported and observed use points to definitional ambiguity around "AI integration," indicating the need for clearer conceptual frameworks and guidance on what constitutes meaningful pedagogical application. Participants' tool choices gathered around text generation, image creation, and AI-enhanced presentation platforms, i.e., functions that primarily support planning, material development, and learner engagement. Consistent with this profile, recommendations favoured AI for bounded tasks and as a supportive aid rather than as a substitute for teacher-

led instruction, aligning with RQ2 and RQ4 on perceived pedagogical value and practical recommendations.

While most respondents judged the benefits to outweigh the drawbacks, concerns united around student overreliance, academic integrity, diminished creativity and critical thinking, and issues of accuracy and privacy. These reservations correspond with RQ3, highlighting persistent tensions between efficiency gains and the preservation of communicative competence, authenticity, and critical thinking, i.e., core aims in language education.

The implications of these results extended to the design of teacher-education curricula. Embedding structured AI-competence modules can transform the observed ad-hoc experimentation into deliberate instructional design (Kerr & Kim, 2025). Aligning such modules with existing competency frameworks (e.g., TPACK, DigCompEdu) would facilitate professional development and promote the transformation of AI-enhanced practices to authentic classroom settings (Wang & Mokhart, 2025). Moreover, policy makers should consider establishing institutional guidelines that describe ethical standards, data-privacy safeguards, and verification protocols; therefore, addressing the accuracy and privacy concerns voiced by participants (UNESCO, 2023).

Future research should examine longitudinal outcomes of AI-integrated teaching, assessing not only teacher perceptions but also learner achievement and communicative competence across instructional contexts. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration among AI developers, language educators, and curriculum designers could be essential in creating tools that support the human dimensions of language teaching.

5 Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The study was limited by its small sample size of 22 pre-service teachers, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire and 15-minute microteaching tasks involving AI integration, providing only a snapshot of participants' practices and perceptions and restricting insight into longer-term pedagogical impacts. Future research should therefore draw on larger and more diverse cohorts to strengthen the applicability of results across contexts. In addition, longitudinal or mixed-method designs, including extended teaching practice, classroom observations, and follow-up interviews, are recommended to more comprehensively examine how AI-integrated pedagogical practices develop over time and whether competencies demonstrated in microteaching translate into sustained and authentic classroom use.

6 Conclusion

This paper indicates that pre-service EFL teachers adopt AI-tools primarily as an engagement feature or supplement to distance English teaching. Ambiguities in meaningful AI integration

and concerns about ethical, accuracy, and privacy issues suggest the urgent need for structured competency courses and clear institutional guidelines. Policymakers and teacher-education programs should prioritise comprehensive AI literacy and ethical standards to ensure responsible and beneficial implementation in language instruction.

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