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More than a tool: A narrative inquiry into the professional identity shifts of experienced EFL teachers integrating generative AI ⊘

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of experienced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in interpreting their integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into their professional practices and to examine the implications of such experiences for professional identity and pedagogical beliefs. While previous studies in AI integration in education have focused largely on teachers' and students' outcomes, there is a lack of exploration of teachers' experiences in interpreting their integration of AI into their practices. This study employed a narrative inquiry approach to examine the experiences of five experienced EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates who integrated AI tools like ChatGPT into their EFL practices for a semester. The data collection methods employed in the study were semi-structured interview, stimulated recall interview using AI tools like ChatGPT to generate EFL teaching materials, and four weeks of reflective journals. The analysis of data revealed that generative AI acted not only as a tool for EFL teachers but also as a tool for teachers to negotiate their professional identities from knowledge transmitters to facilitators, curators, and guides in AI integration in EFL practices. The study revealed that EFL teachers experienced a change in their professional identities from knowledge transmitters to facilitators, curators, and guides in AI integration in EFL practices.

Introduction

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has challenged assumptions regarding expertise, authorship, and professional authority within the context of English language teaching. The tools of generative artificial intelligence are no longer peripheral or auxiliary to the work of English language teachers (Gutiérrez, 2023); rather, generative artificial intelligence is being inte- grated into various aspects of lesson planning, development of learning materials, provision of feedback, and assessment-related activities. The development of generative artificial intelligence has created a mix of positive and negative emotions among English language teachers, particularly those who are experienced and whose professional identity has been shaped through years of professional routine, professional knowledge, and human-centred professional interactions. Although much of the discussion regarding generative artificial intelligence has emphasised efficiency, innovation, or risk, it is undeniable that the implications of generative artificial intelligence extend beyond efficiency or effectiveness to the realm of professional identity or meaning-making.

Studies of educational innovation have consistently demonstrated that changes to pedagogy are not merely technical or instrumental; rather, teachers make meaning of such changes through their beliefs regarding what constitutes good teaching, their sense of professional ethics, and their feelings of professional self-worth. The implications of this are particularly pertinent to language teaching/learning contexts, as the work of Canagarajah (2011) on Global Englishes and language teacher identity has consistently demonstrated that changes to established norms within language teaching/learning contexts often result in identity tensions or conflicts rather than linear or smooth transitions to new approaches or practices. Thus, the development of generative artificial intelligence is not merely a new option or a new technology; rather, it is a disruption that challenges English language teachers to re-evaluate their professional identity or role.

In the face of a growing body of research on the role of artificial intelligence in education, the majority of the extant research has focused on the student, the technological affordances, and the policy. Relatively little research has focused on the teacher, particularly the teacher with many years of professional experience, and the way they narrate their experience with generative AI. Where the teacher's perspective has been considered, it has been largely as a factor of attitude rather than a complex, storied account of adaptation, resistance, and transformation. As a result, the current research provides a necessary exploration of the identity work that takes place within the early stages of the adoption of generative AI.

In response to this need, the current research takes a narrative inquiry perspective on generative AI integration that emphasises the role of teacher experience rather than models of adoption. As a result, this research focuses on the experiences of experienced EFL teachers who are actively integrating

generative AI into their practice and explores the interplay between AI adoption and teacher experience, emotions, and futures. It does not concern itself with the question of whether AI works from a technical standpoint but rather how AI is positioned by the teacher in relation to her/his sense of self-as-teacher: as a threat, a help, a friend, a hindrance, or an agent of transformation.

Generative AI is positioned here as "more than a tool," and this research positions AI integration as an identity-mediated process whereby values, ethics, and purpose are intertwined with decisions about teaching and learning. By placing teacher experiences within the broader literature on language teacher identity and teaching/learning processes, this research seeks to contribute to an understanding of how experienced EFL teachers navigate innovation within a period of technological progress that intersects with long-running debates on the human dimension of ELT.

Literature review

The increasing global spread of English as a lingua franca has led to an ongoing discussion regarding the need for a paradigm shift in ELT that moves beyond native speakerism and monolithic notions of English (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2007; Kecht, 2005; Medgyes, 2001; Simpson, 2007). In this new sociolinguistic reality, Global Englishes (GE) theory advocates for an approach to ELT that takes into account the diversity, variability, and contextual dependency of English use by speakers from around the world (Fang & Widodo, 2020a; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Global Englishes (GE) theory moves away from the traditional notion of English as a fixed code belonging exclusively to speakers from Inner Circle countries and focuses on the role of English as a resource for communication by speakers from all countries around the world (Fang & Widodo, 2020a; Jenkins, 2006; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2012). In order to translate these theoretical findings into practice, the Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT) framework has been put forward as a model for curriculum innovation, conceptualising ELT and its teaching along a continuum from traditionally informed ELT to globally informed ELT (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Rose & Galloway, 2019). However, despite the broad support for these theoretical findings, research has continued to show a disconnect between teachers' positive attitudes towards GE and their ability or willingness to enact it in practice (Canilao, 2020; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2017; Vettorel, 2016).

Recent research has sought to address the disconnect between theory and practice by focusing on the cognition of language teachers, including their beliefs, knowledge, values, and experiences (Borg, 2015). Research into EFL teachers' cognition has shown that, despite teachers' awareness and recognition of the diversity of English around the world, traditional and deeply held assumptions about native speakerism remain a powerful force in teachers' decision-making, particularly in terms of assessment and teaching materials (Eslami, Moody, & Pashmforoosh, 2019; Prabjandee, 2020; Selvi,

2017). These findings have served to further emphasise the need for research into teachers as agents and mediators of change, rather than merely agents and implementers of it (Dewey, 2012; Galloway & Numajiri, 2020). Language teacher identity has thus emerged as an important analytical construct within GE studies. Teachers are perceived as non-neutral actors who engage agency in the process of negotiating pedagogical change based on their professional pasts, self-conceptions, and future visions (Varghese et al., 2005; Hayes, 2017). The role of teacher identity is perceived as constantly evolving and being reconstructed based on experience, which involves continuous "identity work" as teachers cope with the tensions between established practice and developing demands for new forms of pedagogy (Clarke, 2008; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Fairley, 2020). The tensions that emerge from this interplay may not necessarily function as barriers to new forms of practice but might act as catalysts for teacher learning and transformation, particularly during periods of significant pedagogical upheaval (Rose et al., 2020).

Studies on ideal teacher selves reveal that teacher future-oriented identity goals are critical for influencing teacher decisions regarding pedagogy and openness to innovation (Kubanyiova, 2009, 2012, 2017). Teachers are prompted by the desire to bridge the gap between actual and ideal teacher identities, which might lead them to attempt new forms of practice that resonate with images of successful teaching (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2016; Hiver, 2013). From this perspective, an understanding of teacher ideal teacher selves provides an interesting window into teacher responses to GE. Notwithstanding the increasing interest in teacher attitudes towards GE, there remains a need for further research that focuses on teacher experiences during the pre-innovation and early adoption stages of GE within particular contexts (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2020; Prabjandee, 2020).

This emphasis on identity negotiation and pedagogical sense-making offers a promising avenue for constructing a conceptual link with the growing body of research on the emergence of new technological disruptions in the ELT context. In a similar fashion to the case with GE, the incorporation of Generative AI appears to represent a disruption in the established expertise, norms, and roles of the teaching profession, which, in turn, has encouraged discussions around authority, creativity, and the human side of teaching. By engaging with the theoretical perspectives and findings from the GE body of research, as well as the broader literature on language teacher identity, the present study aims to place the experiences with Generative AI within the broader tradition of exploring the ways in which educators negotiate the new, reauthor professional identity, and reimagine the purpose and role of pedagogy in the face of new global conditions.

Artificial Intelligence, Language Teacher Identity, and Pedagogical Change

Recent studies have pointed to the growing salience of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a factor that increasingly influences educational settings, with particular implications for the professional roles, responsibilities, and self-conceptions of the teaching profession (Chiu et al., 2022; Kamali et al., 2024). In particular, it has been suggested that, rather than merely serving as a technological resource for instruction, the incorporation of AI technologies has the effect of transforming the work lives of educators by facilitating greater access to resources, improving the efficiency of instruction, and promoting a shift from content delivery to facilitation, mentoring, and learning orchestration (Edwards & Cheok, 2018; Ji et al., 2023). In this fashion, the growing salience of AI appears to offer the potential for changes in Language Teacher Identity (LTI), particularly in settings that require educators to negotiate authority, expertise, and pedagogical purpose.

Language Teacher Identity has been a prominent construct in language teaching research in the last two decades, acknowledged as a significant component of language teaching development and practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Fairley, 2020; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024). LTI is viewed as a dynamic, socially constructed, and context-dependent process, influenced by teachers' personal experiences, beliefs, emotions, and knowledge in particular educational environments (Barkhuizen, 2017; Nguyen, 2019; Sang, 2020). Research has consistently revealed the significant impact of language teaching identity on teachers' perception of pedagogical innovation and their willingness to adjust their practice in response to change (Varghese et al., 2005).

Research on LTI has consistently focused on the complex and ecological nature of language teaching identity development. LTI development has been viewed as a socially constructed process, influenced by teachers' interactions in a variety of dimensions of the educational environment, including the broader educational institution, policy, technology, and practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; van Lier, 2004). Within this context, LTI development has been found to be influenced by a range of interrelated components, including emotion (Nazari et al., 2023), cognition (Yazan & Lindahl, 2023), personal practical knowledge (Kamali, 2024b), education and professional development (Fairley, 2020), and sociocultural conditions (Pennington & Richards, 2016). This view of LTI development is in line with other research on identity, which has consistently revealed identity to be a fluid, historically, and socially constructed concept, constantly negotiated in practice.

Parallel to the developments in the research area of Global Englishes, the research area of AI in language education has indicated the potential of technological innovation in subverting traditional teaching practices and teachers' professional identities. For instance, the application of AI has been

identified in the areas of personalised learning, intelligent tutoring, assessment, and feedback provision. The benefits of the application of AI in these areas have been identified as increased learner engagement, improved efficiency, and the potential for improved learning outcomes (Lin et al., 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2025). The application of conversational AI has also been identified as an enabler of teachers, providing them with the potential for the application of AI as a partner, a source of resources, feedback, and needs analysis (Ji, 2023). However, the application of AI has also been identified as having the potential for academic integrity issues, including the potential for cheating and plagiarism, particularly through the application of ChatGPT (Adeshola & Adepoju, 2023; Pavlik, 2023). Most importantly, the application of AI has also been identified as having the potential for the repositioning of the roles of teachers. The research area of AI in language education has indicated the potential of AI in repositioning the roles of teachers as designers, evaluators, and coordinators of learning, rather than the traditional roles of knowledge authorities. This is parallel to the repositioning of the roles of teachers identified in the research area of innovation-oriented language education (Holstein et al., 2019; Tondeur et al., 2020). However, the effective application of AI in the teaching-learning process has also been identified as having the potential for being guided by sound teaching practices, rather than the application of artificial intelligence (Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2020).

Research Questions:

Question1: How do experienced EFL teachers describe the challenges and opportunities of integrating Generative AI into their lesson planning and teaching practices?

Question 2: How do these teachers describe the potential of the application of Generative AI in repositioning their roles as teachers?

Methodology

The study used a narrative inquiry research design to explore the experiences of experienced English as a Foreign Language teachers using Generative AI. Narrative research, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), considers experience to be storied. It focuses on the relational, temporal, and situational aspects of human experience. It was considered an appropriate research paradigm for this study because of the research goals, which were to explore the subjective meanings, identity changes, and changes in teaching practices resulting from the experience of using a dynamic and changing technological phenomenon. It was considered appropriate because the study focused on the dynamic, relational, and ever-changing nature of professional identity. Generative AI was a disrupting factor

to the teachers' teaching practices, which makes narrative research a good fit to explore the teachers' experiences.

Research Participants

The study recruited five experienced English as a Foreign Language teachers. All the study participants were enrolled in the Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Teaching program at Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi Campus, United Arab Emirates. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. These criteria were as follows: (a) at least 10 years of full-time teaching experience in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (ranging from 11 to 18 years); (b) currently teaching or previously taught English as a Foreign Language at a school, institute, or adult education centre within the Abu Dhabi Emirate; (c) currently using Generative AI tools like ChatGPT for at least one full academic semester (Autumn 2024 or Spring 2025) while pursuing the Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Teaching at Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi Campus. Participants included three female and two male teachers of different cultural backgrounds, mirroring the multicultural nature of the teaching staff and diploma candidates in the UAE, particularly those teaching English as a Foreign Language. Pseudonyms (Lena Karim, Ahmed Al-Mansour, Priya Sharma, Carlos Rivera, and Fatima Hassan) were given to the participants. The sampling procedure was carried out by sending an invitation letter by the programme coordinator in the College of Education. The first five who volunteered and gave their consent were included.

Materials

Three data collection methods were developed to ensure rich, multilayered data. A semi-structured interview guide was designed with three sections. The first included participants' backgrounds and initial experiences with Generative AI. The second focused on participants' experiences with challenges, opportunities, and critical moments in the implementation process. The third part covered participants' experiences with the evolving nature of teaching roles and professional beliefs.

The second data collection method was the use of the stimulated recall approach. Participants were asked to present two or three tangible items (such as Generative AI-generated lesson plans, materials, and feedback samples). The third data collection method was the use of the structured reflective journal. Participants were given a shared Google document containing weekly journal prompts for four consecutive weeks. The prompts focused on the participants' experiences with Generative AI.

The semi-structured interview guide, the stimulated recall approach, and the structured reflective journal template were tested with an experienced EFL teacher who was not included in the sample. The data collection methods were tested for linguistic clarity and cultural appropriateness in the context of the UAE.

Procedure

Data collection took place between October 2025 and February 2026. Participants chose whether they wanted the data collection interview to take place in person in private meeting rooms at the Abu Dhabi campus of Al Ain University or via videoconferencing (Zoom). The process began with a 30-minute orientation meeting with the participants during the first week, wherein the researcher explained the purpose of the research, all processes, and obtained written informed consent, while also providing the template for the reflective journal and enabling the participants to select their own pseudonyms and preferred processes for data handling.

The participants then maintained a reflective journal for four consecutive weeks, wherein they responded weekly with one entry for each structured prompt. At the same time, each teacher participated in two or three semi-structured interviews, which lasted for 45-75 minutes, and were conducted at approximately three or four weekly intervals. The second and third interviews included a discussion with the teachers wherein they were asked to recall and discuss their decision-making processes, adaptations, and rationales through a process called stimulated recall, wherein they presented two or three concrete artefacts. All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the teachers. Individualised re-storied narrative drafts were then prepared for each participant, which included a chronological reconstruction of the participant's journey with regard to their professional identity, and were shared with the teachers in the thirteenth week for the purpose of member checking. The participants then gave feedback and suggested modifications for better representation. The total data corpus for each participant included 120-180 minutes of recorded interview data, four reflective journal entries, and two or three artefacts for the process of stimulated recall.

Data analysis

Analysis of the data was undertaken through a two-stage narrative analysis approach, inspired by Riessman (2008) and Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first stage, structural analysis was applied to each participant's data set, including transcripts, journals, and artefacts, to produce individualised re-storied accounts.

In the second stage, thematic analysis was applied to all data to identify recurring patterns, resulting in hierarchical themes, sub-themes, and illustrative codes. NVivo 14 software (NVivo, 2023) was employed to assist in data organisation, coding, and memo writing.
Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, thick description, researcher reflexive journaling, and the development of an audit trail.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher is an applied linguist and teacher educator with experience in EFL settings and a user of Generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, for academic and pedagogical purposes. The researcher's positionality, including experiences in EFL settings and a user of Generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, for academic and pedagogical purposes, influenced the analysis of participants' accounts of opportunity, tension, and identity negotiation. In keeping with narrative analysis, the researcher's subjectivity was acknowledged as a resource, and attempts were made to approach it reflexively.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi Campus (Approval No: REC-2025-078). It was obtained from the Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Teaching programme coordinator. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after being presented with an information sheet explaining the purpose, methods, risks, benefits, and rights of participants, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by the use of pseudonyms, generalisation of programme-specific details where appropriate, and the use of audio recordings and written transcripts stored on password-protected and encrypted drives accessible to the researcher. For potential emotional vulnerabilities associated with questions of professional identity, participants were reminded of their right to skip questions and offered debriefing and institutional counselling services. The researcher did not have supervisory or evaluative power over the participants, and no conflicts of interest were present. The data will be stored for five years after publication and destroyed in accordance with institutional policy.

Analysis and findings

This section reports the cross-narrative thematic analysis based on the participants' re-storied accounts, journals, interviews, and stimulated recall artefacts. The analysis process responded to the two research questions by investigating how the experienced EFL practitioners narrated the opportunities and challenges of integrating Generative AI and how these experiences related to changes in professional identity and beliefs. The analysis resulted in the construction of four interrelated themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences while maintaining individual variation and temporality. The qualitative data presented in Table 1 indicate the ways in which the themes interrelate with regard to opportunity, tension, and negotiation of identity rather than being mutually exclusive categories.

Table 1

Cross-narrative themes of experienced EFL teachers' engagement with Generative AI

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Representative Quote	Partici-pant(s)	Data Source
1. Opportu-nities of GenAI Inte-gration	Time reclamation & workload relief	Reclaimed eve-nings / planning time saved	"For the first time in years I fin-ished planning before 8 p.m. and could actually prepare the human part — the feedback, the stories, the humour."	Ahmed	Interview 2 + Journal wk 4
		More energy for relationships	"AI gave me quantity; the confer-ences gave me quality."	Fatima	Journal wk 3
	Enhanced person-alisation & differ-entiation	Instant differen-tiated versions	"I started asking it to brainstorm five differentiated versions for A2, B1, and B1+ … Suddenly I had time to actually sit with the struggling learners."	Lena	Stimulated recall + In-terview 3
	Creativity & idea generation spark	AI as brainstorm-ing partner	"Once I learned good prompting, it became an idea partner that ex-panded rather than replaced my imagination."	Priya & Ahmed	Interview 2
	Professional growth marker	Prompting & evaluation as new expertise	"Learning sophisticated prompting became a new marker of being a good teacher."	All five	Cross-nar-rative syn-thesis
2. Challenges of GenAI In-tegration	Need for constant critical verification	Cultural / con-textual inaccu-racy	"The output was generic American English — completely tone-deaf for our context."	Lena	Journal wk 1
		Factual & linguis-tic hallucinations	"Wrong collocation – fix", "Cultur-ally inappropriate example" (mar-gin notes)	Carlos	Stimulated recall
	Risk of inauthen-ticity & soulless output	"Soulless texts that teenagers immediately de-tect as fake"	"AI produces perfectly grammati-cal but soulless texts."	Priya	Interview 1 + Journal wk 3
	Emotional & iden-tity labour	Initial resistance / feeling of cheating	"I felt it was cheating — both for me and for the students."	Fatima	Interview 1

		Embarrassment when output is poor	"I felt embarrassed — like I had outsourced my creativity."	Priya	Journal wk 3
	Ethical & equity concerns	Fear of widening gaps / integrity issues	"The fear that AI might widen rather than close achievement gaps."	Fatima & Carlos	Interview 3
3. Identity & Role Shifts	From knowledge transmitter → facilitator / curator	No longer sole expert	"I used to be the one who knew all the answers. Now I'm the one who knows which answers to trust, adapt, or discard."	Lena	Final interview
		Architect of learning experience	"I'm the architect who designs the learning experience and lets AI handle the scaffolding."	Ahmed	Interview 3
		Creative director / co-creator	"The students now see me as the creative director, not the writer. That feels like a promotion."	Priya	Final interview
		Guardian of the human element	"AI can never replace the moment when a student's eyes light up because I remembered their mother was in hospital."	Fatima	Final interview
	New core responsibility: AI literacy mentor	Teaching students to be discerning consumers	"My job is to help students become discerning consumers and ethical producers of language in an AI-saturated world."	Carlos	Final interview
4. Pedagogical Belief Transformations	From content coverage → critical/ethical language users	Shift in purpose	"Teaching has become co-creation — with AI, with students, with culture."	Carlos	Interview 3
		Focus on higher-order skills	"My value now lies in the questions I ask, the adaptations I make, and the human moments I protect."	Fatima	Final interview
	Increased job satisfaction post-reframing	AI as junior colleague	"Once I reframed AI as a junior colleague rather than a threat or a crutch, everything changed."	All five (similar phrasing)	Final interviews

Opportunities of Generative AI integration as professional reconfiguration

The participants' accounts consistently represented Generative AI not merely as an instrument of productivity but as an agent of rethinking the distribution of professional time and energy. A prominent sub-theme of this theme was the notion of time reclamation and relief from workload. The participants' accounts of AI-assisted lesson planning enabled them to reallocate energy from preparation towards relational and pedagogical work. Ahmed's account of completing her planning earlier than usual and channelling her energy towards feedback, humour, and presence demonstrates the ways in which productivity was represented as an instrument of reclaiming professional value rather than diminishing it. Fatima's reflection that "AI gave me quantity; the conferences gave me quality" further illustrates the ways in which efficiency was recontextualised to prioritise humanistic teaching concerns. "Enhanced personalisation and differentiation" was the second opportunity that emerged. Teachers explained how the use of AI facilitated the quick production of differentiated work, which, in turn, enabled them to devote more time to supporting struggling students. In the case of the stimulated recall interview with Lena, the use of AI for differentiation can be seen as providing a background support that enabled the teacher to exercise professional judgment. "Creativity and idea generation" was the third sub-theme that emerged. Teachers commonly described the use of AI as a brainstorming tool that facilitated pedagogical creativity, especially when the teacher had the skills and expertise to prompt the AI and critically evaluate the output. Priya's account of the use of AI as an "idea partner" again illustrates the agency that the teacher had, as well as the idea that the outputs had to be curated, reworked, and localised.

Challenges and Emotional Labour in Early Adoption

In addition to the opportunities, the participants also identified the challenges that required constant emotional and cognitive work. The first challenge that emerged was the need for constant verification of the output generated by the AI tool. Teachers explained how the output sometimes included culturally inappropriate examples, the prevalence of Inner Circle norms, and linguistic inaccuracies, which again underscored the need for teacher mediation. Carlos' annotated artefacts, which included corrections such as "wrong collocation," "culturally inappropriate example," and "wrong word," again underscore the constant critical scrutiny that the participants had to employ.

The second challenge that the participants identified was the perceived inauthenticity of the output generated by the AI tool. Priya's account of the output as "perfectly grammatical but soulless" again illustrates the tension that the participants had between the output being technically accurate and emotionally authentic. Teachers explained how the students were quick to detect the inauthenticity of the output, which again underscored the need for teacher mediation. Emotional and identity-

related issues were prominent in initial adoption, and several participants reported experiencing resistance, guilt, or embarrassment, defining initial AI adoption as "cheating" or "outsourcing creativity." These were not presented as static issues, however, but as a transitional state, prompting self-reflection about their professional values. Ethical and equity issues complicated the adoption of AI, as participants worried about the potential for creating greater achievement gaps or compromising academic integrity. These issues reinforced the idea that there was a need for heightened ethical awareness, not simply a passion for technology.

Identity and role changes: From authority to orchestration

In all the narratives, there was a clear link between the integration of AI and changes in professional identity, in terms of a shift from being a sole knowledge transmitter to being a facilitator, a curator, or an architect of learning experiences. Lena's comment, "Now, I'm the one who knows what to trust, adapt, or discard," encapsulates this change from a master of content knowledge to a master of evaluation and interpretation. Several of the participants used design and leadership metaphors to describe changes in their professional identity, and Ahmed positioned himself as being an "architect," and Priya positioned herself as being a "creative director." These metaphors suggest a level of professional elevation, not reduction, in terms of being a sole knowledge transmitter. A further change in professional identity was the redefinition of the human aspect of care. In all the stories, the participants stressed the value of relational knowledge, empathy, and contextual memory as essential components of teaching. In the account of Fatima, the memory of the pupil's family background exemplified the development of emotional understanding as a core professional responsibility that was enhanced, rather than diminished, by the presence of AI. From the stories, a new professional responsibility emerged as literacy mentors with AI. The participants described how they helped pupils critically evaluate the output generated by the AI, think ethically, and exercise discernment as users of the new technology. Carlos' account of the role positions the teacher as a mediator between the technology and the pupils' agency, which re-establishes professional identity.

Transformations in pedagogical beliefs and new professional purpose

The participants' experiences with the incorporation of AI also led to changes in pedagogical beliefs. In the stories, the participants described how they had moved from a focus on content coverage towards a focus on the development of higher-order learning, critical engagement, and ethical usage of the new technology. Teaching had become a form of co-creative work with the teacher, pupils, AI, and cultural context. This change in pedagogical beliefs resonated with the participants' stories of new professional purpose. The reframing of the role of the teacher, the pupils, and the AI, with the

latter as a junior colleague, was a common turning point that emerged from the participants' stories. This change had the effect of reducing anxiety and increasing job satisfaction.

Discussion

This research sought to investigate the ways in which experienced EFL teachers make sense of the integration of Generative AI, and the ways in which this process is related to professional identity and pedagogical beliefs. The research results suggest that the process of integrating Generative AI is not so much about the technical process of change, but about the ways in which the process is mediated by the teachers' past experiences, ethical considerations, and future aspirations. The discussion is, in these ways, particularly relevant to the fields of Global Englishes, language teaching identity, and innovation as negotiated practice.

Generative AI as a catalyst for identity negotiation rather than technical change

As is the case with ELT pedagogical innovation research, the study's findings indicate that the teachers' reaction to Generative AI was mediated by their beliefs regarding effective teaching practices (Borg, 2015; Varghese et al., 2005). As was the case with the theory-practice gap in Global Englishes language teaching (GE LT), the teachers' appropriation of Generative AI was neither a straightforward acceptance nor rejection of the technology; rather, it was a negotiated appropriation of the technology based on their professional self-concept (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Prabjandee, 2020). This is reminiscent of GE LT research on how language teachers innovate through adaptation rather than revolution, particularly for those who are more experienced and whose professional identity is defined by their established practices. Most notably, the study reveals how the teachers were forced to negotiate their authority, creativity, and expertise as a result of their attempts to incorporate Generative AI into their practice. This is reminiscent of GE LT studies on how language teachers struggle to come to terms with their professional identity as a result of their attempts to negotiate their language ideology (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2017; Vettorel, 2016). As was the case with GE LT studies on language ideology, the teachers' attempts to incorporate Generative AI into their practice led to a crisis of professionalism.

Reframing expertise: From linguistic authority to pedagogical judgement

One of the greatest contributions of this study is that it reveals how language teachers reframed their expertise as a result of their attempts to incorporate Generative AI into their practice. Contrary to their initial fears of losing their professional legitimacy as a result of Generative AI, the teachers were able to reposition their expertise as a form of judgement. This is reminiscent of sociocultural and

ecological theories of language teacher identity as a relational construct that is responsive to contextual changes (Barkhuizen, 2017; Pennington & Richards, 2016).

The results also resonate with the emerging body of research on AI that suggests the technology is not replacing the teacher but rather redefining what it means to be professionally knowledgeable (Holstein et al., 2019; Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2020). The primacy given by the teachers to the need for verifying the output, adjusting the content, and ensuring the contextual relevance can be seen as reiterating the central position of the teacher. Thus, the use of AI can be seen as having amplified the significance of the teacher cognition, which is in line with the argument that innovation actually increases the need for pedagogical discernment.

Emotional labour, ethics, and the moral dimension of teaching

The emotional labour and the moral conundrum expressed by the participants through their experiences of guilt, embarrassment, and ethical concern underscore the emotional labour associated with the use of AI. The emotional labour is an important aspect of the research on the identity of the teacher (Nazari et al., 2023; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024). The emotional labour expressed by the participants is not minor and is instead closely associated with the moral issue of authenticity. The emotional labour associated with the use of AI is not different from the emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the GE research on the use of the English language. The emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the GE research is associated with the issue of authenticity in the use of the English language (Selvi, 2017). The emotional labour associated with the use of the English language is not different from the emotional labour expressed by the participants in the current research. The emotional labour expressed by the participants is associated with the issue of authenticity. The emotional labour associated with the use of the English language is not different from the emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the GE research. The emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the GE research is associated with the issue of authenticity. The emotional labour associated with the use of the English language is not different from the emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the GE research. The emotional labour expressed by the teachers in the Global Englishes research is closely connected to questions of authenticity.

The study also contributes to the research on ideal language teacher selves by demonstrating how the adoption of AI was given significance because of its alignment with the teachers' identity goals. The teachers welcomed the adoption of AI because it enabled them to project themselves as creative designers, moral guides, and social professionals rather than content providers. This study thus supports the argument by Kubanyiova (2009, 2012) that the adoption of innovation is more likely to be

sustained if the innovation resonates with the teachers' imagined self. Interestingly, the teachers experienced a sense of job satisfaction after the adoption of AI, which was incorporated into a narrative of professional purpose. This study supports the GE and AI research that demonstrated that innovation adoption takes hold when it is positioned as enhancing rather than diminishing the moral and social aspects of teaching (Rose et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2023).

Generative AI, Global Englishes, and Pedagogical Coherence

This study did not conceptualise the adoption of AI within the context of GE. However, the study's findings revealed conceptual similarities with the GE paradigm. For example, the teachers' insistence on contextual adaptation, cultural appropriateness, and the presence of multiple norms resonates with the GE paradigm, which challenges the standardised, decontextualised language models (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2012). In this study, the teachers functioned as mediators who resisted the default positions of the Inner Circle orientations of the AI-produced language. This, in turn, suggests that the integration of AI could potentially, though unintentionally, tap into GE-inclined pedagogical intuitions, especially for more experienced educators agreed to contextual differences. Yet, as with the case of GE, it is once again the agency of the teacher and not the technology per se that influences the alignment with the innovation, further supporting the claim that the outcome of innovations is, in fact, an issue of identity work and not technology by itself.

Implications for theory and practice

The present study contributes to the theory of language teacher identity by situating the use of Generative AI as an aspect of modern ELT pedagogy, parallel to the historical use of GE-informed pedagogy. The findings further suggest that, in order to avoid the same theory-practice dichotomies inherent in the use of earlier ELT innovations, professional development for language educators should include opportunities for exploring the ethical implications of innovation, as well as opportunities for sense-making and exploring one's identity. The present study thus illustrates that, far from being an alien force forced upon ELT pedagogy, the use of Generative AI is, in fact, more akin to a mirror that reflects, challenges, and reconstitutes the very identity of the language teaching professional. The use of AI, therefore, can be seen as an issue of identity work and not technology per se, thereby offering an additional conceptual link between technology innovation and traditional issues in ELT pedagogy.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the experience of AI integration was not just about technology but, rather, an identity-mediated experience that encouraged reflective thinking about expertise, ethics, and the

human purpose of teaching. For the teachers, generative AI became an experience that functioned as a catalyst for professional sense-making, as opposed to an instrumental tool. Although the teachers recognised the efficiency benefits of AI integration, these benefits were ultimately recognised as means to an end, which was to focus more on relational, ethical, and pedagogical work. The experience of AI integration did not diminish professional identities but, rather, encouraged shifts to new identities as curators, designers, and evaluators of learning. Guilt, discomfort, and uncertainty were integral to the experience of AI integration and functioned as sites of reflective thinking that helped the teachers make sense of professional boundaries and reassert human judgments.

The study has also revealed conceptual similarities to other language education innovations, particularly in the field of Global Englishes, as language teachers in the study resisted decontextualised norms and instead prioritised contextual sensitivity and critical mediation in their practice. The findings of the study indicate that the integration of AI in language teaching may not require significant technical skills, but rather a focus on supporting identity negotiation and ethical practices among language teachers. The study has emphasised the need to consider the role of generative AI in EFL teaching as a mirror for language teachers to reflect on their purpose and re-author their identity in a rapidly changing pedagogical landscape.

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