

Exploring Indonesian EFL Students' Experiences in Using AI During Teaching Practicum

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Abstract. This study explores the lived experiences of Indonesian prospective EFL teachers of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) during a one-month teaching practicum. This phenomenological study explores the experiences of four prospective EFL teachers, three female and one male student, aged 20–22, who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, then analyzed phenomenologically by identifying key statements, developing meanings, and synthesizing experiential themes. The findings reveal that the participants view AI as a pedagogical and psychological partner rather than a replacement for teachers. AI supports lesson planning, the provision of instructional materials, classroom activities, and assessment, while also boosting participants' confidence and readiness. These findings highlight the importance of using AI critically and responsibly in fostering the readiness and competence of prospective EFL teachers.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Prospective Teacher; EFL Teaching; Artificial Intelligence; Partner.

1. Introduction

Professional teachers cannot be separated from theoretical and practical educational experiences in the classroom. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who are doing teaching practicum in the schools are a crucial part in the education of prospective EFL teachers because it provides students with the opportunity to apply a pedagogical theory learned at university to real life classroom practice, training their pedagogical skills, becoming familiar with the school environment, and increasing their teaching experiences before actually entering the world of teaching after graduation. Through these experiences, EFL students learn to develop teaching competencies, manage classes, and adapt learning strategies to real schools in EFL contexts (Li et al., 2023). Other research also shows that prospective EFL teachers need to develop pedagogical technology competencies to be able to integrate AI-based tools effectively in language learning so that the students, as prospective EFL teachers, are better prepared to face the demands of digital learning in the present and future (Zulianti et al., 2025).

EFL teaching practice for students as prospective EFL teachers requires the use of various learning media to meet increasingly technology-driven demands and support the EFL learning process both before and during class activities (Arochman & Fortinasari, 2024). Integrating learning media is a crucial aspect of EFL student teaching practice because it can help prepare EFL lesson plans, organize materials before teaching, and deliver material in a more engaging, interactive, and easily understood manner for students in the EFL classroom (Sudirman et al., 2025). During teaching practicum programs, EFL student teachers typically use various learning media, such as PowerPoint

presentations, videos, digital platforms, and online learning applications, to support EFL learning in the classroom. Research shows that the use of AI technology and digital media in EFL teaching practicum can increase students' motivation to learn and help EFL student teachers develop creativity and AI- or Technology-Based pedagogical skills (Ridha & Fithriani, 2023).

The application of media-based AI is inseparable from the broader function of teaching practice programs. It is crucial to comprehend teaching practice as a more comprehensive professional training process for aspiring EFL instructors, in addition to the integration of instructional media and technology (Li et al., 2023). Several previous studies have examined the role of teaching practicum programs in preparing students as prospective EFL teachers. These programs are considered a crucial component of teacher education because they provide students with the opportunity to gain hands-on teaching experience in schools and connect the theory learned in college with EFL classroom practice. Research shows that teaching practice experiences help EFL student teachers understand the real-life learning contexts and adapt their EFL teaching strategies to students' needs (Lengeling & Schneider, 2023). Other studies have found that during practicum programs, various factors such as support from supervising teachers, peer support, and personal motivation can influence the involvement and learning experiences of prospective teacher students in teaching activities (Fan et al., 2024). Practicum experiences also play a role in shaping the professional identity of prospective EFL teachers, as students begin to face real challenges in the EFL teaching process and develop an understanding of their role as future educators (Ariza-Quiñones et al., 2021).

Previous studies focused on the application of theory learned on campus to direct EFL classroom practice, the influence of internal and external support during EFL teaching practice, and the practical experiences that can shape the identity of prospective EFL teachers. Few studies have described the subjective feelings, impressions, and experiences of prospective EFL teachers during classroom teaching practice, particularly regarding the use of AI or technology in learning. Unlike those studies, this study focuses comprehensively on EFL students' experiences during a one-month classroom teaching practicum. The study's methodological innovation is its use of phenomenology as the main research design, which enables a deeper investigation of the essence of EFL student instructors' lived experiences during the teaching practicum. This study focuses on how participants subjectively derive meaning from their emotional, pedagogical, and technical experiences with AI, in contrast to previous research that primarily relied on case studies or descriptive approaches. The purpose of this study is to determine how EFL teacher students interpret their experiences using phenomenological qualitative methods during the teaching practicum program in EFL classroom teaching practice.

The use of AI technology, such as digital presentations and videos, can also help students understand EFL material more easily and encourage active participation during classroom learning (Lestari & Asari, 2022). Another study reports that using AI digital media during EFL classroom teaching also increases students' confidence as prospective EFL teachers to apply AI technology in EFL learning, presentation, and future (Lu et al., 2025). Recently, technological developments, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), have also begun to influence the practical teaching experiences of EFL students, as various AI tools can help them design learning materials, create classroom activities, and assess students (Wulandari & Purnamaningwulan, 2024). This makes it easier for EFL students and prospective EFL teachers to practice their teaching skills in schools during the School Field Introduction Program.

However, despite the apparent ease, obstacles and difficulties still arise during the practical process. One of them is maintaining ethical standards in using AI, minimizing the consequences of

its use, such as dependency, and addressing the most frequent issues, such as unstable signals or networks or sudden power outages. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to be used as an EFL learning medium by prospective EFL student teachers during teaching practice in recent years (Aly et al., 2025). AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gamma AI, and other AI-based platforms are being utilized to assist prospective EFL teacher students in designing learning materials, creating classroom activities, and developing assessments tailored to student needs (Kussin et al., 2024). The research shows that the use of AI during teaching practice can help EFL students generate more creative learning ideas, speed up the material preparation process, and adapt learning content to students' ability levels (Wulandari & Purnamaningwulan, 2024).

Another study found that EFL student teachers frequently used ChatGPT to create learning content, develop teaching strategies, and design more effective assessments during teaching practice activities (Kusuma et al., 2024). The application of AI in EFL learning is also considered capable of improving the technological competence of prospective EFL teachers in EFL learning (Hastomo et al., 2024). The use of AI as a learning medium in teaching practice not only helps prospective teachers in preparing learning materials more efficiently, but also provides opportunities to create EFL learning that is more innovative and adaptive to developments in educational technology (Özkan & Erdemir, 2024). Therefore, EFL students' experiences with AI during teaching practice programs are an important aspect of research for understanding how AI supports the teaching and learning process while shaping the professional competencies of prospective EFL teachers.

2. Method

This study aims to investigate how EFL students understand the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the classroom throughout a teaching practicum program. Since the main goal of this study was to investigate students' actual experiences as aspiring EFL teachers using AI technology during their teaching practicum, this research design employed a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is generally defined as the study of phenomena, emphasizing the lived experiences of the people involved. The focus of this study is on individuals' perceptions and interpretations of events, as explained from the perspectives of those who encounter them. Not all qualitative data collection techniques are appropriate for phenomenology, even though it is regarded as a qualitative design (Rungwaraphong, 2021). This method was selected in order to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives, emotions, and experiences about the technological and pedagogical difficulties of incorporating AI into classroom English language learning activities (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

Through a phenomenological approach, we employed bracketing by consciously reflecting on initial assumptions about the use of AI in EFL learning (Cudjoe, 2023). Before and throughout the research process, we sought to set aside any preconceptions that AI would inevitably yield positive or negative experiences for prospective EFL teachers. Instead, participants shared their experiences openly, including the benefits, difficulties, concerns, and limitations they encountered while using AI. This process enabled the researchers to remain open to participants' perspectives, allowing research themes to emerge from participants' actual experiences rather than from the researchers' initial assumptions or expectations. Through this approach, we explored the experiences of prospective EFL teachers using AI for various tasks, such as lesson planning, developing teaching materials, conducting classroom activities, and managing assessments, as well as their professional competence during their teaching practicum.

The researchers selected participants using purposive sampling based on their alignment with the research goal. Sampling technique is the practice of selecting a sample from a population, either from a single person or a large group, for a specific research purpose (Makwana et al., 2023). This study included four Indonesian Islamic university students who completed an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practicum program and used artificial intelligence (AI) during their

practicum, and participated in this study. Students who had completed a teaching practicum, used AI in EFL teaching, and could provide a thorough explanation of their experiences were eligible.

We contacted potential participants via WhatsApp and private messages to explain the purpose of the study and ask if they were willing to participate. Participants were recruited voluntarily. The researchers gave each participant a convenient interview time after consent was obtained. To thoroughly examine participants' experiences with the application of AI in EFL teaching practicum, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to investigate participants' perspectives on the application of AI in EFL instruction (Handrayani et al., 2024). Four of the eight people who were supposed to take part in the study agreed to participate. Some could not fully use AI in their EFL teaching practice, while others lacked the necessary time. The four participants comprised one male and three female EFL students aged 20 to 22. They studied at an Islamic University. Two of them desired to work as EFL teachers, but the other two did not. Participants ensured that the information gathered would be used only for the study by providing their identities and agreeing to the confidentiality of the data.

Researchers collected data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants. Three strategies were employed to collect data through rich information on the participants' real experiences throughout the teaching practicum (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Initially, students' experiences with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in EFL teaching practice were thoroughly investigated through semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed individually for approximately 30 to 60 minutes via an online tool such as WhatsApp. Because the interview questions were flexible and open-ended, participants could openly discuss their experiences, including their opinions, difficulties, and the benefits of using AI in their teaching practice. To gather more detail, the researchers also used probing questions throughout the interviews.

Participants' reflective notes on WhatsApp after the interview call were also used in this study, for example, "I used ChatGPT to create questions, and I found it helpful, but I also worry about becoming too dependent." Brief descriptions of their experiences using AI in their EFL teaching practice were solicited from participants. Because the phenomenological approach relies on individual narratives, this data was used to enhance the interview results and offer a more intimate perspective on their experiences (Rungwaraphong, 2021). Supporting documentation was collected to strengthen the data's legitimacy further. This included transcripts of WhatsApp chats and Instagram voice notes. Researchers convert voice notes into readable text using correct punctuation and spelling. They must also decide whether to transcribe details such as pauses, mixed-up words, or sounds like "eee," or whether to use conjunctions. Furthermore, if there are different dialects or languages, researchers need to consider how to transcribe or translate them. The way researchers write and organize these transcripts will affect how the data is understood, so transcription is not a completely neutral process (Bailey, 2008).

The data analysis in this study used a phenomenological method, which is modified by Ünsal-Görkemoglu and Solhi (2023) analytical technique. The first step was to transcribe each interview and collect complete reflection notes from the participants.

The researchers continued the *epoché* process during analysis by consciously reflecting on and setting aside initial assumptions about the use of AI in EFL learning. The researchers did not assume from the outset that AI was inherently beneficial, problematic, or always suitable for learning. Instead, we focused on the diverse experiences participants shared, including positive experiences, difficulties, concerns, and unexpected situations. Thus, we grounded the data interpretation in participants' experiences rather than preconceived conclusions. The researchers then identified significant statements and units of meaning related to the participants' experiences, perceptions, feelings, and interactions with AI during their teaching practice. They then grouped interrelated meanings into experiential themes. The researchers constructed a textual description to depict what

participants experienced, followed by a structural description to explain how those experiences unfolded within the context of teaching practice. Then the researchers compared the emerging themes with the interview data and original reflective notes to ensure that the interpretations remain consistent with participants' shared experiences. In the final stage, the researchers synthesized participants' individual experiences into a comprehensive overview of the essence of their experiences with AI during the EFL teaching practicum.

Data triangulation is used in phenomenological research to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Triangulation is performed by comparing multiple data sources, such as interviews, documents, or reflections, to determine whether the information is consistent.

Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from in-depth interviews and student reflection notes during the practicum. Using this method, researchers determined whether the information shared during the interviews was consistent with participants' opinions expressed in their reflections. This process also helped researchers understand students' experiences more fully, from what they said to what they directly understood when using AI in learning activities. The application of bracketing also supports the credibility of phenomenological interpretations. By consciously reflecting on and setting aside initial assumptions about AI, researchers strive to depict participants' experiences as closely as possible to how participants themselves recount and make sense of them.

3. Result

AI as a Pedagogical Partner in EFL Teaching Preparation

Pedagogical experience is essential before entering the field of education as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher (Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Aspiring EFL teachers must be skilled in delivering lessons using various digital media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to foster pedagogical innovation and ensure optimal lesson preparation. Interview findings indicate that participants view AI as a pedagogical partner that assists them in preparing EFL lessons. AI is not seen as a replacement for the teacher's role but rather as an assistant that facilitates various aspects of lesson planning, such as drafting lesson plans, sourcing references, creating teaching materials, developing exercises, and designing learning activities tailored to students' characteristics (Ünsal-Görkemoglu & Solhi, 2023).

The ability of AI to provide detailed and easily understandable explanations enables participants to gain a more comprehensive overview of the learning topics. This demonstrates that AI serves not merely as a source of information but also as a support in building the pedagogical readiness of prospective teachers, for instance, in creating lesson plans. Zivanya and Selena described this experience as follows.

"I generally categorize my use of AI into three areas. For instance, before teaching, I often use ChatGPT to look for examples or create lesson plans for the day's material."
(Zivanya)

"I use the first AI to draft lesson plans, such as engaging activities or effective learning strategies for a specific topic." (Selena)

The experiences of Zivanya and Selena show that AI serves as a pedagogical partner during the initial stages of lesson planning. For both participants, AI not only assists in generating sample lesson plans but also offers alternative teaching strategies and activities tailored to specific learning objectives and the nature of the material being taught. The use of AI makes the lesson-planning process more systematic and efficient, as participants do not need to start from scratch; they can use AI-generated suggestions as a foundation and modify them to suit their classes' specific needs.

Beyond assisting with the creation of lesson plans and instructional strategies, AI also helps source relevant academic references to support the learning process. It can locate theories, expert opinions, and scholarly sources that align with the material to be taught. In this way, AI strengthens the theoretical foundation while improving the quality of the instructional content delivered to students. Zivanya and Kevin shared the insight based on their experiences.

"In my experience, using AI to support EFL learning in the class does not apply across the board to every topic or every lesson for the students I teach.

Instead, I focus its use on tasks such as finding expert quotes, exploring concepts in depth, or helping students draw conclusions and map out the material covered that day." (Kevin)

"In my opinion, using AI today is incredibly helpful; for instance, I usually use a tool like Perplexity to look up references." (Zivanya)

Zivanya and Kevin's findings indicate that AI improves efficiency during lesson preparation. AI not only helps participants save time in developing teaching materials but also expands access to diverse learning resources that support the quality of the EFL teaching process. By using AI, participants can prepare lesson plans more systematically and draw on a wider range of information.

Regarding other aspects of lesson preparation, participants also utilized AI to tailor learning materials to students' characteristics and proficiency levels. During their teaching practice, participants realized that each class had distinct learning needs, necessitating adjustments to materials and activities to improve effectiveness. In this context, AI helped them generate a variety of exercises, activities, and instructional recommendations suited to the students' ages, English proficiency levels, and individual characteristics. This experience demonstrates that AI supports aspiring EFL teachers in implementing more adaptive, student-centered instruction.

"AI can generate different versions of exercises for students with varying ability levels. For instance, practice questions can be tailored so they are not too difficult or too easy for the student. We can make those adjustments." (Zivanya)

"For ChatGPT, I first locate the file containing the material I plan to teach. Then, I upload it to ChatGPT and ask for recommendations, such as the appropriate age group based on the child's English proficiency level, as well as activities that are both fun and effective for the material. For instance, if the student is a second grader....." (Selena)

Zivanya and Selena demonstrate that AI helps prospective EFL teachers tailor learning materials to meet students' diverse needs. Zivanya used AI to create exercises of varying difficulty, allowing instruction to be tailored to each student's abilities. Meanwhile, Selena used AI to analyze the materials to be taught and to obtain recommendations regarding appropriate age groups, English proficiency levels, and learning activities. The experiences of both participants indicate that AI assisted them in making more informed pedagogical decisions when determining teaching strategies and activities. Thus, AI is viewed as a pedagogical partner that supports the implementation of more adaptive, contextual, and responsive instruction to students' learning needs during teaching practice.

AI also supports participants in developing engaging and interactive learning materials. Various AI platforms generate visual aids that boost student engagement during the learning process, such as Gemini for creating flashcards and Canva AI for designing comprehensive PowerPoint presentations. The use of AI in creating these materials demonstrates that technology not only assists with planning but also facilitates a more creative and effective presentation of content. Selena and Zivanya described this experience.

"I usually use Gemini to create learning aids like flashcards." (Selena)

"... Canva AI is typically used to create more comprehensive PowerPoint presentations." (Zivanya)

The experiences of Selena and Zivanya demonstrate that AI is utilized not only to assist in preparing learning materials but also to enhance the quality of EFL teaching strategies in the classroom. Selena uses Gemini to create flashcards that help students grasp English vocabulary or concepts more clearly and engagingly. At the same time, Zivanya uses Canva AI to create well-organized PowerPoint presentations that support understanding of English vocabulary and concepts. Both participants' experiences show that AI helps prospective teachers become more creative in developing interactive learning materials.

Apart from creating educational resources and media, AI also assists participants in designing learning assessments. Participants utilize AI to generate practice questions aligned with the material taught, thereby enabling a more efficient assessment process. With the help of AI, teachers gain inspiration to create a variety of exercises to assess students' understanding. Aleya shared this experience.

"I source practice questions from textbooks, the internet, and AI. Usually, I ask the AI to generate the questions, and then I adapt them." (Aleya)

Aleya's experience demonstrates that AI serves as a source of inspiration when designing EFL learning assessment instruments. Although AI is used to generate various practice-question alternatives, Aleya does not adopt the output wholesale; instead, she combines questions sourced from textbooks, the internet, and AI, and subsequently adjusts them to align with learning objectives, the nature of the material, and student proficiency levels. This experience indicates that AI does not replace a prospective teacher's professional judgment in assessment design; rather, it serves as a pedagogical partner that accelerates the development of evaluation instruments and expands the variety of practice exercises available for classroom use. Thus, AI supports the design of assessments that are more efficient, relevant, and aligned with learning needs.

Overall, these findings indicate that AI serves as a comprehensive support tool during the lesson preparation phase of teaching practice. Participants' experiences show that AI is used to deepen understanding of learning concepts, draft lesson plans, locate academic references, tailor materials to students' abilities, develop instructional media, and design assessments. This diverse range of applications shows that AI helps prospective EFL teachers improve efficiency while fostering the creation of more systematic, creative lesson plans aligned with student needs.

AI Enhances Teaching Confidence and Professional Readiness

Every aspiring EFL teacher has undoubtedly experienced fear when teaching in the classroom. This AI tool serves not only as a pedagogical partner in instruction but also as a psychological one. Recent findings indicate that the use of AI has an impact that extends beyond merely assisting with EFL teaching tasks; participants felt that AI helped boost their confidence and readiness as aspiring EFL teachers during their teaching practice.

One of the most notable experiences participants shared was how AI boosted their confidence and professional readiness during their EFL teaching practicum. For most participants, the practicum demanded not only pedagogical skills but also emotional resilience, including nervousness, fear of making mistakes, anxiety about being unable to answer students' questions, and worry that the lesson might become monotonous. In this context, AI served not merely as a tool for developing instructional materials but also as a space for reflection and a companion that helped them mentally prepare before entering the classroom (Zhu et al., 2025). Kevin and Aleya explicitly described the positive impact AI had on their confidence as aspiring EFL teachers.

"Using AI has significantly boosted my confidence as a teacher. It makes it easier for me to reflect and gather feedback, whether when creating lesson plans or during the actual delivery of a lesson." (Kevin)

"As a prospective EFL teacher, AI has been instrumental in boosting my self-confidence. I often feel nervous and worry about teaching in a monotonous way. I frequently share these concerns with AI and ask for advice on building confidence, overcoming nervousness, and managing the classroom effectively. AI suggests various teaching strategies, which I then practice at home. After receiving this input, I feel calmer, better prepared, and more confident when teaching." (Aleya)

Kevin's experience demonstrates that AI serves as a tool for professional reflection, enabling him to evaluate the quality of his lesson plans and the actual delivery of EFL instruction in the classroom. Through the AI's feedback, Kevin gained confidence that his planned EFL teaching strategies were more focused and well-structured before implementation. Meanwhile, Aleya's experience highlights a different dimension; AI provided a safe space for her to express the anxiety, nervousness, and lack of self-confidence she felt before teaching EFL. After sharing these concerns, she received suggestions from the AI regarding alternative teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and ways to alleviate nervousness. This process left Aleya feeling both calmer emotionally and better prepared pedagogically.

The findings indicate that AI not only supports the technical preparation for EFL instruction but also provides psychological support, helping participants manage pre-teaching anxiety. In other words, AI serves as both a pedagogical partner and a source of psychological support, assisting prospective teachers in building confidence through reflection, simulation, and by providing solutions to the challenges they face.

Participants' self-confidence does not emerge instantly; rather, it is built through thorough preparation. AI can enhance participant readiness by facilitating the development of more systematic learning materials. Zivanya explains that AI assists her in planning materials and making the EFL teaching process feel more focused and structured.

"I use the cloud to plan my future lessons. With AI, I make the material more structured and reduce the fear of running out of ideas." (Zivanya)

These findings indicate that AI serves as a partner for brainstorming EFL teaching ideas and preparing more polished materials prior to entering the classroom. When participants systematically design EFL materials, activities, media, and lesson flows with AI assistance, they feel more confident and secure in front of the class. Thus, AI helps reduce the uncertainty that often causes anxiety among prospective teachers.

The importance of lesson preparation as a foundation for self-confidence resulted in similar experiences among the participants. AI helped them in systematically structure learning activities, instructional media, and assessments, fostering a greater sense of control over the teaching process. This thorough preparation reduced confusion during instruction and boosted confidence that the lesson would proceed as planned. Selena's statement highlights the strong link between the quality of lesson preparation and the level of self-confidence among prospective teachers.

"In my opinion, AI boosts my confidence as a prospective teacher because it helps me prepare for lessons more thoroughly. AI assists in planning learning activities, instructional media, and quizzes, making me feel better prepared, less confused while teaching, and more confident when facing the class." (Selena)

Selena's experience shows that greater self-confidence develops through a more comprehensive preparation process, aided by artificial intelligence, rather than appearing overnight.

AI facilitates Selena's more systematic arrangement of the lesson's components, thereby promoting a better understanding of the teaching process. This systematic planning reduces the uncertainty that often causes anxiety by building confidence that the class will proceed as planned. The experience shows that AI increases self-confidence by improving pedagogical preparedness, not just motivation.

One form of anxiety frequently experienced by prospective EFL teachers is the worry that students might ask difficult questions or raise topics outside the prepared lesson material. In such instances, AI helps teachers anticipate potential student questions before the lesson begins. Participants also feel better prepared to handle various unexpected situations during the teaching process. As Zivanya noted, AI also provides emotional support when teachers are confronted with student questions or unforeseen circumstances in the classroom while teaching EFL.

"... If students suddenly bring up off-topic matters or ask questions I do not yet have the answer to, I can rely on AI. Furthermore, AI tools like ChatGPT help me prepare for potential difficult questions from students, so I do not feel nervous when answering them." (Zivanya)

Zivanya's experience shows that AI builds instructional preparedness, specifically readiness to handle contingencies that arise during EFL instruction. By practicing answering a range of questions using AI, participants feel better prepared for spontaneous interactions with students, thereby reducing their nervousness.

Using AI as a psychological partner provides space for personal reflection, helping participants manage emotional stress before teaching EFL in the classroom. Although AI does not replace interactions with supervisors or peers, participants felt that it offered rapid, non-judgmental responses and was always available when input was needed. These characteristics led participants to view AI as a learning companion that enhances mental readiness and boosts self-confidence. Aleya described her relationship with AI as extending beyond the academic process to encompass emotional aspects, helping participants manage nervousness and improve their mental preparedness before teaching.

"Sometimes, it actually feels more comfortable asking an AI. Using AI is also incredibly helpful for explaining concepts I did not quite grasp during my teaching practice. After pouring my heart out to the AI, I feel more prepared to teach." (Aleya)

Aleya's experience shows that Artificial Intelligence can serve as a space for reflection, enabling her to articulate the concerns and challenges she encountered during her teaching practicum. Beyond helping Aleya clarify concepts that she did not yet fully grasp, AI provided a safe environment for Aleya to process her emotions without fear of judgment from others. The AI's rapid and constant availability helped her feel more composed when facing various challenges prior to starting a class. This experience illustrates that AI can assist participants in self-reflection by providing emotional support that fosters mental readiness for teaching. However, AI cannot replace the professional support provided by academic supervisors, mentors, teachers, or peers.

Overall, participants view AI as a professional companion that assists them in preparing both pedagogically and emotionally. AI is perceived as a professional partner that supports pedagogical development and helps manage emotional aspects during the teaching practicum. Through processes such as reflection, feedback, teaching simulations, anticipating student questions, and support in structuring lessons more systematically, AI helps prospective teachers build greater self-confidence and professional readiness. These findings indicate that the use of AI during the teaching practicum contributes not only to enhanced pedagogical competence but also to shaping the

professional identities of prospective EFL teachers, fostering educators who are more confident, reflective, and adaptive in navigating classroom dynamics.

4. Discussion

AI as a Pedagogical Partner in EFL Teaching Preparation

The study's findings indicate that prospective EFL teachers view AI as a pedagogical partner rather than a replacement, particularly during lesson preparation. They use AI to create lesson plans, find references, develop EFL materials, tailor exercises to students' needs, create engaging instructional media, and design assessments, making the preparation process more efficient, systematic, adaptive, and creative. These findings also show that participants do not accept AI output as raw; instead, they modify, select, and adapt it to align with learning objectives, student characteristics, and the classroom context, ensuring that pedagogical decisions remain with the teacher. These findings align with previous studies showing that AI supports EFL teachers in preparing materials, designing tasks, and facilitating the differentiation of EFL learning materials according to students' abilities (Zhou, 2025). Other studies also confirm that AI supports differentiated instruction, creative lesson design, media development, content personalization, and lesson plan creation, while strengthening a more student-centered learning environment (Laoha et al., 2025). AI-based pedagogy is significantly associated with improved EFL learning outcomes, although the effect is highly dependent on context and implementation design (Ekizer, 2025).

Many previous studies emphasize the benefits of AI, teacher readiness, or the need for AI training in general (Chan & Tang, 2025; Harakchiyska, 2025; Metwally & Bin-Hady, 2025). However, it has not yet been shown in detail how prospective EFL teachers use AI as a partner in the micro-tasks of daily lesson preparation, ranging from seeking references and adapting materials to selecting age- and proficiency-appropriate activities and designing practice and assessment instruments. Furthermore, this study confirms that the effectiveness of AI is not primarily in the sophistication of the digital tools themselves, but rather in the teacher's ability to prepare EFL lessons, conduct critical evaluations, adapt pedagogically, and ensure the contextual relevance of AI outputs to EFL learning materials (Karaduman, 2025; Laoha et al., 2025). Thus, the novelty of this research lies in affirming AI as a practical and adaptive pedagogical partner during the lesson preparation phase for prospective EFL teachers, not simply as an object of digital literacy or technological innovation.

This study demonstrates that the relationship between teachers and AI in EFL lesson preparation is best understood as a humanistic collaboration. While AI helps accelerate task completion, broadens perspectives through diverse references, and offers alternative strategies, pedagogical sensitivity, ethical considerations, student monitoring, and an understanding of student needs remain central of the teacher's role. Therefore, AI in EFL lesson preparation should be positioned as a partner that enhances prospective EFL teachers' readiness to teach, while affirming that the human touch remains the primary determinant of instructional quality.

AI Enhances Teaching Confidence and Professional Readiness

The findings of this study indicate that AI serves not only as a pedagogical partner but also as a psychological partner for prospective EFL teachers during the EFL teaching practicum. AI helps structure lesson plans, create space for reflection, provide rapid feedback, and assist in anticipating student questions, thereby reducing nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and worry about running out of ideas. The self-confidence that emerges does not appear to be instantaneous; it is built through more systematic preparation, stronger control over the learning process, and better mental readiness before entering the classroom.

These findings align with previous studies indicating that AI can enhance the capabilities, professional readiness, and identity formation of prospective EFL teachers when utilized for reflection, EFL lesson design, and EFL teaching simulations. Recent research on prospective EFL teachers demonstrates that AI serves as both a reflective partner and a tool that supports teaching readiness in real-world learning environments (Zhu et al., 2025). Other studies have also found that the use of AI in lesson preparation aids in brainstorming, improves time efficiency, and facilitates the development of materials better suited to students' needs (Karina & Kastuhandani, 2024). At the same time, structured AI training tends to reduce anxiety regarding technology and strengthen teachers' sense of competence and professional purpose (Griebiea, 2026; Huynh et al., 2025).

This research makes a significant contribution to previous studies. Several earlier studies have emphasized AI in terms of efficiency, technological literacy, or adoption readiness (Harakchiyska, 2025; Xiao, 2025) while emotional support before EFL teaching remains rarely discussed in depth. However, other evidence indicates that concerns invariably accompany the relationship between EFL teachers and AI. There are benefits in terms of competence and a sense of preparedness, but also anxieties about control, ethics, validity, and EFL teachers' professional standing. (Barjesteh et al., 2026; Isma & Ibrahim, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). This study extends the existing literature by demonstrating that AI not only helps prospective EFL teachers become "ready to teach" but also fosters readiness through a safe space for reflection, nonjudgmental responses, and mental preparation to navigate various classroom situations. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in positioning AI as a psycho-pedagogical companion in EFL teaching practicums, not merely a tool for lesson planning. Overall, this discussion confirms that AI can support the confidence and professional readiness of prospective EFL teachers when used in a reflective, purposeful, and human-centered teaching. AI is most beneficial not when it replaces teachers, but when it strengthens their pedagogical preparation, emotional stability, and the process of shaping their professional identity.

This study involved four prospective EFL teachers aged 20–22 from an Islamic university. Given the limited number of participants and the relatively homogeneous context, the findings are specific to that setting. They may not apply to prospective EFL teachers with different backgrounds or environments. Nevertheless, the study offers in-depth insights into the participants' experiences using AI during their teaching practicum and can serve as a foundation for future research encompassing more diverse contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) during teaching practicums provides meaningful experiences for prospective EFL teachers in Indonesia. AI is used not only as a tool to assist with technical tasks, such as preparing lesson plans, developing materials, designing assessments, and sourcing references, but also as a psychological partner that supports reflection, pedagogical decision-making, and mental readiness before teaching. Through these experiences, participants feel more confident, better prepared to handle classroom dynamics, and more capable of tailoring EFL teaching to students' needs. Nevertheless, the participants realize that AI cannot replace the teacher's role. Pedagogical decisions, student interaction, empathy, and the ability to build meaningful relationships in EFL learning fall to the EFL teacher, the central figure in the process. Prospective EFL teachers are expected to use AI responsibly, viewing with as a professional partner that supports the development of EFL teaching competence without reducing the teacher's role and identity as an EFL teacher.

The findings largely reflect participants' self-reported experiences. Consequently, these findings may not fully reflect the experiences of other EFL teachers or different teaching contexts. Future research could involve a larger number of participants from various institutions and examine AI usage over a longer period. Researchers could also combine interviews and reflective journals with classroom observations or instructional artifacts to gain a deeper understanding of how AI is utilized in actual EFL teaching practice.

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