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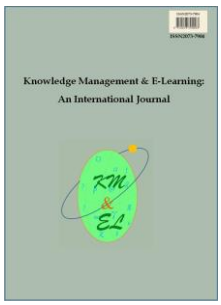

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Embracing generative artificial intelligence: The perspectives of English instructors in Thai higher education institutions

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Abstract: This study explored the perspectives of English instructors from Thai higher education institutions, with a focus on teachers' familiarity with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and its potential impact on teachers' professional roles and responsibilities. The results suggested that GenAI tools may allow English instructors to transition from traditional teachers to facilitators by using the tools to assist with both routine writing tasks and high-level academic work. Meanwhile, it was found that instructors worried about possible over-reliance on GenAI. The participants emphasised that human instructors were still needed, although their roles needed to evolve. Significant gaps were identified in the competencies related to professional development, curriculum design, teacher training programmes, ethics, and responsibility. The findings may support the professional growth of current and future English instructors and facilitate the incorporation of GenAI in teaching practice. The findings also underscore the necessity of comprehensive GenAI training for pre-service teachers, the development of robust guidelines to navigate ethical challenges, and the examination of the impact of GenAI tools on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Generative artificial intelligence; ChatGPT; Thailand; Teachers; English language teaching

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1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT-4 are transforming language teaching and learning (Godwin-Jones, 2023; Lodge et al., 2023; Morandini et al., 2023). They can generate human-like content, including audio, code, images, texts, simulations and videos, by leveraging deep-learning models (Taecharungroj, 2023). In the United States, these tools are being integrated into curricula to support personalised learning and provide students with instantaneous feedback (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023). European institutions, meanwhile, are leveraging GenAI to translate and facilitate cross-cultural communication, enhancing the internationalisation of their campuses (European Commission, 2022). Despite these advances, the application and effects of GenAI in language teaching vary significantly, with some institutions pioneering its adoption and others being more tentative. Some have recognised its potential to streamline workflows (Weng & Chiu, 2023), enhance grading, feedback and data analysis (Chiu et al., 2023; European Commission, 2022) and promote student motivation (Chen et al., 2020). More sceptical critiques have dismissed the work of GenAI as '*superficial and dubious*' (Chomsky et al., 2023). Despite this divided response, the roles of GenAI continue to evolve rapidly.

Incorporating GenAI into teaching practices effectively demands a deep understanding of its capabilities, limitations and optimal instructional uses (Kasneci et al., 2023). However, many language instructors lack the technical and pedagogical skills necessary to harness technology (Kohnke et al., 2023a; Seo et al., 2021). Accordingly, they need to develop AI-specific digital competencies and reconsider their pedagogical approaches to utilise GenAI successfully.

There has been little research on the use of GenAI at Thai universities. This qualitative study aims to address that gap by exploring the perceptions and readiness of English instructors in Thai higher education institutions to apply GenAI in language teaching. Our goals are to understand how they expect GenAI to affect their roles and identify the technical and pedagogical skills they consider necessary for using it in the classroom. The following research questions guide the study:

RQ1: How familiar are English instructors in Thai higher education institutions with GenAI tools and how are they currently using these tools?

RQ2: How do English instructors in Thai higher education institutions perceive the impact of GenAI on their professional roles and duties?

2. Literature review

2.1. The prevalence of GenAI in language education

GenAI, which can be defined as 'algorithms (such as ChatGPT) that can be used to create new content, including audio, code, images, text, simulations, and videos' (McKinsey & Company, 2023), has become increasingly prevalent in language education in recent years (du Boulay, 2022; Godwin-Jones, 2022). Researchers, policymakers and practitioners (e.g. Williamson et al., 2020) have begun to develop AI-driven learning tools such as intelligent tutoring and recommendation systems (Kohnke, 2023a, 2023b). These tools can be broadly split into two groups based on their primary users (Baker & Smith, 2019).

First, learner-facing AI tools are used predominantly by students to acquire skills and knowledge. They include machine translation tools (e.g. Google Translate), AI writing assistants (e.g. Grammarly, Quillbot; Goodwin-Jones, 2022), automatic speech recognition tools (e.g. ELSE) for pronunciation practice (Annamalai, 2023) and conversational chatbots (e.g. Cleverbot; Huang et al., 2022).

Conversely, teacher-facing systems supplement pedagogical methods and reduce educators' workload. They include automated writing evaluation tools (e.g. Pigai) that provide feedback, scores and suggestions on student writing (Dai et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2022). Other tools diagnose students' strengths, weaknesses and knowledge gaps (Liu et al., 2017) or identify those at risk of failure (Luckin et al., 2022). For instance, personalised adaptive learning platforms can enhance students' language proficiency by helping them become aware of weaknesses in their writing (Kohnke et al., 2022; Kohnke et al., 2023c).

One notable development in this area is the introduction of ChatGPT, a Natural Language Processing (NLP) model that uses the Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT) algorithm to create text and engage in human-like conversation. It has been trained on a massive corpus of data, encompassing articles, websites, books and written dialogue, which enables it to respond to users' prompts (Kohnke et al., 2023b). This model, introduced in November 2022, represents a significant advancement in GenAI with applications for language instruction

2.2. The emergence of ChatGPT in language education

Emerging research underscores the innovative potential of ChatGPT to generate academic material and promote students' proficiency in their target language. Other GenAI tools, such as personalised support systems and learning analytics platforms, also have considerable pedagogical potential. Studies have shown that they enhance teacher efficacy (Healy & Blade, 2020), promote student self-regulation (Seo et al., 2021) and facilitate meaningful communication and interaction (Torda, 2020). For example, a study conducted by Pérez-Núñez (2023) found that ChatGPT successfully composed a detailed course outline upon receiving a course title and corresponding background information. This piece comprised a variety of study modules and integrative learning assignments in which students would be asked to summarise key ideas, identify supporting evidence and infer the meanings of unfamiliar words or phrases, as well as practise other skills.

In a separate study conducted by Gayed et al. (2022), GenAI tools based on the GPT language model were implemented in English classes in Japan and positively impacted students' ability to express themselves verbally. Chan and Hu's (2023) study in

Hong Kong showed that students view GenAI favourably, as it can provide customised learning support and help them with writing, brainstorming, research and analysis. These findings suggest that ChatGPT can be valuable for educators, as it may streamline their workload and cater to their students' individual needs. Moreover, it could benefit instructors who lack resources or expertise by helping them develop and personalise practical tasks.

Despite its potential, there is still scant research on the pedagogical applications of GenAI in higher education (Leiker et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Further research is urgently needed to explore the specific pedagogical strategies teachers should employ to integrate GenAI into teaching and learning processes effectively.

2.3. Potential drawbacks of GenAI and barriers to adoption

There are some negative aspects of ChatGPT: it has been trained on outdated data sets, is not transparent about its sources and produces generic, repetitive texts (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Additionally, because it lacks true reasoning abilities, ChatGPT can only generate responses by engaging in statistical matching (e.g. synthesising a new dataset from two existing ones) without considering meaning or context (Hong, 2023). Educators and students have concerns about ChatGPT, especially regarding academic integrity (Shoufan, 2023). This demonstrates the need to carefully consider how to integrate it into language instruction appropriately.

There are also barriers to the adoption of GenAI, including instructors' apprehension. Some teachers fear that technology will replace them instead of complementing their skills (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022). This anxiety will likely be exacerbated as AI takes on more instructional roles. Additional barriers include insufficient infrastructure, funding constraints and limited training on meaningful integration (Sharma et al., 2022). These barriers must be addressed before instructors can take full advantage of the benefits of GenAI.

2.4. Training teachers to leverage GenAI meaningfully

Teachers must develop the digital competencies required to implement AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, in pedagogically sound ways (e.g. developing writing prompts to incorporate into activities; Hrastinski et al., 2019). Comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) that focuses on GenAI tools explicitly can help educators build these competencies by engaging in hands-on practice, learning about context-specific applications and speaking with instructional mentors (Kohnke et al., 2023a). These CPD opportunities should also foster positive attitudes about the potential of AI to complement teachers' skills by automating routine administrative tasks and providing personalised instructional support (Qian et al., 2021). For example, GenAI can be programmed to track participation through NLP, accurately recording attendance in real time. AI-enhanced systems can also evaluate students' responses on multiple-choice tests instantly, providing immediate feedback and allowing teachers to focus on more complex evaluative tasks. Finally, scheduling software with GenAI capabilities can optimise timetable creation by considering numerous variables such as room availability, staff schedules and student preferences, streamlining a traditionally time-consuming activity. Proper training highlighting the collaborative capabilities of GenAI will make teachers more confident about pursuing an enhanced, blended teaching approach. Clear guidelines, policies and

adequate funding for the necessary resources and infrastructure will further facilitate the adoption process (Zhang & Aslan, 2021).

3. Context of the study

Despite concerted efforts to improve their English language proficiency, Thai students face significant challenges. This section outlines the current state of English proficiency and the prevalent teaching methodologies in Thailand.

3.1. Data sources

Thailand, a member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has taken significant steps to improve the English language proficiency of its students. Despite exposure to English starting in primary school, many Thai students struggle with oral and aural English skills (Bhattarachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023; Noom-ura, 2013; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). The country ranks 97th out of 111 in the latest English First (EF) English Proficiency Index (EPI) report (2022), trailing Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar and Cambodia. The common teaching methods, which emphasise grammar and are taught in Thai often leave them with little confidence and limited opportunities to practise communicative English skills (Noom-ura, 2013; Simpson, 2011). Additionally, the lack of proficient, credentialed English instructors is apparent. This makes them more likely to adopt a teaching style that emphasises passive learning (Dhanasobhon, 2007; Wiriyachitra, 2002).

3.2. Educational reforms and the emergence of AI in Thailand

In response to these challenges, Thailand's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation have initiated various programmes to modernise and strengthen their respective educational frameworks (Rukspollmuang & Fry, 2022). For example, they have hired foreign English instructors and developed reinforcement training programmes for educators (Hickey, 2018). The Education Reform Project (1996–2007) mandated higher education institutions to coordinate training programmes and required teachers to participate in seminars and workshops every two years (Wiriyachitra, 2002).

In addition, the rise of GenAI in the Thai educational sector (Aung et al., 2022) presents new opportunities to enhance language instruction. Integrating GenAI into the classroom could provide administrative support for teachers, allowing them to focus on creating engaging language learning experiences and facilitating authentic relationships with their students.

4. Methods

This study employed an exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) research design (Hunter et al., 2019) to examine English teachers' perceptions of and readiness to use GenAI tools in language teaching in Thai higher education institutions. EDQ designs facilitate the study of uncharted phenomena by enhancing the understanding of relevant individuals, the nature of their involvement and the spatial context in which events unfold (Hunter et al., 2019).

The present study aimed to gain insights into how the use of GenAI tools is affecting the professional responsibilities of Thai English teachers.

4.1. Participants

This study explored the experiences and insights of 20 English teachers (11 male and nine female) currently employed at Thai universities. We used purposive sampling to identify a diverse sample of participants in terms of gender, teaching experience and educational qualifications, which added depth and breadth to the collected data. This choice reflected our belief that, in light of the study's objectives, individuals with specific characteristics offered unique perspectives that necessitated their inclusion in the sample (Campbell et al., 2020).

Thus, teachers who had used GenAI tools in the last three years, had been teaching English in Thailand for at least a year and were willing to participate in the study were considered. The participants had between five and 25 years of teaching experience; they had PhDs (5), MS/MAs (11) or BS/BAs (4). Ethical approval was provided by the university. All of the participants were informed of the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time before signing consent forms. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning participants codes (e.g. T1, T2, T3). Table 1 provides a detailed profile of the participants.

Table 1
Profiles of the participants

#	Gender	Age	Education	Teaching experience (Years)	Interview format
T1	Male	40	MA	10	Verbal
T2	Female	38	BA	6	Verbal
T3	Male	36	MA	8	Verbal
T4	Male	34	MA	9	Verbal
T5	Female	39	MA	13	Verbal
T6	Male	37	PhD	15	Written
T7	Male	53	PhD	25	Written
T8	Male	30	BA	5	Written
T9	Female	32	BA	5	Written
T10	Male	46	MA	10	Written
T11	Male	52	PhD	20	Written
T12	Female	40	MA	12	Written
T13	Female	36	MA	8	Written
T14	Male	37	MA	9	Written
T15	Female	42	PhD	15	Written
T16	Female	35	MA	6	Written
T17	Male	54	PhD	25	Written
T18	Female	32	MA	6	Written
T19	Female	39	MA	12	Written
T20	Male	31	BA	5	Written

4.2. Data collection

Various data collection methods were used to capture a full picture of the phenomenon. Teachers were invited to participate in the study by following a link to a Google Forms survey, which was shared in a Facebook group for members of the language teachers' association in Thailand for 20 days. Prospective participants were asked to leave their contact details and background information (i.e., age, degree, years of teaching experience, teaching location, teaching institution). Subsequently, 20 eligible participants were selected for verbal or written interviews. Five participants chose the verbal interview, which allowed for a deep exploration of their experiences and allowed them to clarify their responses. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted an average of 45 minutes. Fifteen participants opted to complete the written interview form. This offered flexibility and convenience, increasing the response rate and overall volume of data.

The interview guide was purposefully designed to focus on GenAI technologies, especially ChatGPT, and their current and future influence on language education and teacher training (see Appendix 1). It included seven main questions, addressing the two RQs. The questions delved into the participants' familiarity with GenAI, its uses and its influence on their responsibilities. To improve credibility and dependability, as well as troubleshoot the interview platform, the questions were expert-piloted by three experienced teacher educators (Malmquist et al., 2019).

4.3. Data analysis

The findings from the verbal and written interviews were subject to thorough thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. First, coding was completed manually and independently. Throughout the process, the two researchers communicated closely to check understanding, ask for clarification, discuss differences in interpretation and reach a consensus (Cohen et al., 2011). We familiarised ourselves with the data by transcribing the verbal interviews, and then reading the transcripts and written responses repeatedly. The participants received a copy of their transcripts for a member check.

Second, we followed a systematic approach to individually mark interesting features of the dataset, generating initial codes and sharing them via Google Docs. Third, we collated the codes into themes and gathered all of the data related to each theme. Fourth, we compared the themes and selected excerpts and generated a thematic map. Fifth, we refined the themes by generating clear definitions and names. Sixth, we wrote up the findings and wrote the analysis narrative and data excerpts together. This approach allowed us to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data, thereby developing a rich, detailed and complex account. We also provided each participant with a copy of the themes and representative quotes for a second member check (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). No participants requested additions or offered further suggestions.

5. Findings

We have analysed the findings in terms of the four main themes that emerged (see Table 2). Each theme addresses both RQ1 and RQ2.

Table 2
Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Familiarity with and use of GenAI tools	• Potential impact on ELT practices • Implications for assessment and feedback
Theme 2: Perceived impact on initial teacher education	• Opportunities and benefits • Anticipated challenges and threats • Essential skills for teachers
Theme 3: Changing roles of teachers	• Continued relevance of teachers • Evolution into facilitators
Theme 4: Implications for ELT	• Potential impact on ELT practices • Implications for assessment and feedback

5.1. Theme 1: Familiarity with and use of GenAI tools

5.1.1. Awareness and familiarity

Our analysis revealed that participants had varying degrees of awareness, familiarity and proficiency with GenAI tools, specifically ChatGPT. They had been introduced to these tools over the previous few months through either formal channels (e.g. '*a university forum*'; T4) or informal networks (e.g. '*a colleague*'; T1). This finding highlights the recent emergence of ChatGPT in the Thai higher education context.

Despite the participants' increasing awareness, their proficiency levels varied considerably. While some teachers possessed substantial knowledge about ChatGPT and other AI tools (e.g. Grammarly and Quillbot), T9 and T10 admitted to having only a basic level of familiarity. T9 stated, '*I know how to use it [ChatGPT], but I'm not an expert.*' T10 echoed this sentiment, noting that she had only tried the tool once.

This disparity suggests that there are still gaps in expertise and usage even though AI tools are being adopted in higher education more frequently. This highlights the necessity for ongoing discourse, training and support within professional communities to accelerate the adoption of GenAI, bridge proficiency divides and ensure that its benefits are fully realised in higher education and other sectors.

5.1.2. Use in work and research

We also identified how participants have begun to incorporate GenAI tools such as ChatGPT into their professional routines. For example, T1 started using ChatGPT for non-teaching tasks immediately due to its perceived utility:

> *"Since it was introduced to me, I have used it every day. I'm using it mostly in my writing research. It helps me paraphrase sentences, cut some words and clarify my sentences." [T1]*

Other participants echoed the notion that ChatGPT can help with research. For instance, T15 has employed it to '*help edit my manuscript and summarise articles for research projects*', while T16 finds it helpful '*for translation, finding citations and*

improving writing'. T5 has gone even further, leveraging the tool to '*generate ideas for my MA thesis*', highlighting its potential to assist with higher-level academic work.

Several participants have also utilised GenAI to plan their courses and lessons. For example, T3 has used it for '*developing the course content… asking for sample activities that we can use or revised or improved versions of the materials.*'

However, not all participants have fully integrated AI into their practices to date. One reason is that they do not need it to generate materials. As T4 explained, '*All of our lesson plans and activities are already prepared by our course coordinators, and we need to use them.*' This suggests that one barrier to the wholesale adoption of AI tools is a mandated curriculum.

Overall, there are many ways to employ GenAI in professional academic contexts. Its diverse applications highlight its flexibility and signal its potential for future implementation.

5.2. Theme 2: Perceived impact on initial teacher education

5.2.1. Opportunities and benefits

The participants generally expressed optimism about the potential of GenAI technologies to transform initial teacher education. T1 anticipated that AI will impact these programmes substantially, particularly those for English instructors, as it can help them with crucial aspects of the profession, such as '*developing fun, engaging and interesting learning materials, giving students individualised feedback and promoting language practice.*'

> *"AI can also assist in making administrative work easier, especially writing reports or research." [T1]*

Similarly, T2 affirmed that ChatGPT can function as a supportive tool by '*freeing up time for novice teachers to concentrate on essential aspects of their training and making their initial teaching experiences easier*'. T3 echoed this sentiment, envisioning that GenAI will help by '*allowing new teachers to focus more on developing innovative teaching strategies and engaging with students.*' Furthermore, T9 predicted that integrating AI will 'empower teachers to improve their instruction' when they enter the profession.

Therefore, the perceived benefits of AI-integrated materials included a reduced workload for teachers and improved instruction. However, the participants also stressed that AI tools must be incorporated thoughtfully to maximise these opportunities and avoid the challenges discussed in the following section.

5.2.2. Anticipated challenges and threats

While the participants expressed optimism about AI, they also acknowledged its potential downsides and the barriers to overcome. The primary concern raised by many participants, including T2 and T3, was the possibility that teachers become overly dependent on AI; this could result in less personal contact between teachers and students and less individualised content. Their caution underscores the importance of ensuring that AI tools are integrated into the classroom responsibly and with a sense of balance.

Several participants highlighted that the challenges lie more in the application of AI tools than in the technology itself. T4 advised users to '*focus on how to use AI effectively… learn how to write proper prompts… and double-check everything*', emphasising the need for proficiency and care. Similarly, T7 raised concerns about the reliability of AI-generated information that '*the knowledge must be accurate, but how do we know it is?*' This suggests the importance of scrutinising and verifying content generated by AI tools, especially in educational settings.

Additionally, issues with academic integrity emerged as a significant concern. The ease with which students can generate essays and reports using GenAI tools threatens to undermine the development of critical thinking and writing skills. Participants such as T5 expressed worries about the potential increase in plagiarism and the difficulty of differentiating AI-created work from students' original efforts. This necessitates the development of robust protocols and tools that can detect AI-generated content and uphold standards of academic honesty.

T6 presented a balanced perspective, asserting that AI is a powerful tool that can help learners acquire and use language but can '*hamper creativity and originality when overused*'. The risk of students relying on AI to the point of impairing their intellectual growth was echoed by T8, who stressed that educational institutions need to address such challenges head-on. These participants' nuanced understanding again highlights the importance of making informed and responsible decisions by weighing AI's benefits and possible downsides, including its impact on academic integrity.

5.2.3. Essential skills for teachers

Integrating AI necessitates re-evaluating the skills, knowledge and training teachers need to succeed. The participants identified many key competencies, including technological literacy, evaluation skills and pedagogical adaptability, that teachers will need in the future. According to T1, it is necessary to consider '*the skills and knowledge needed to integrate these tools successfully*'. Building on this, T2 stressed that teachers should have a deep understanding of emerging technologies, becoming '*thoroughly knowledgeable about their capabilities and their moral implications and pedagogical implications*.'

T3 and T5 noted that it will be necessary to adjust teacher training programmes to ensure that teachers can utilise and evaluate AI tools. As T3 explained, '*Teacher educators should make adjustments to their teaching practices to include these tools in a way that improves student learning and engagement.*' To complement this, T5 advised showing teachers '*how to detect whether AI did student work*'. Moreover, T11 commented that '*teachers will need regular training as AI technology rapidly evolves*'. This highlights that teachers need continuous professional development to hone and upgrade their skills. T12 also emphasised that '*an openness to re-thinking teaching approaches*' will be vital in leveraging the potential of AI.

The participants clarified that teachers would need to become better at using technology and more adaptable in terms of their approaches to harness the promise of AI. The provision of ongoing training can further both of these goals. If teachers and administrators make a concerted effort to develop these skills, AI can become a valuable asset rather than a replacement for English teachers.

5.3. Theme 3: Changing roles of teachers

5.3.1. Continued relevance of teachers

Participants emphasised that teachers would continue to be relevant in the age of AI. According to T2, AI will not threaten teachers' jobs because it '*is only a technology*'. Supporting this sentiment, T6 stated that '*students need the human touch, understanding, and guidance that only a human teacher can provide*'. T3 similarly noted that '*students still need teachers… real human beings*'. This implies that human interaction is an essential aspect of education that cannot be fully replicated by AI tools. T9 added, '*AI can supplement learning, but it can't replace a teacher's ability to inspire.*' These quotes collectively show that teachers remain indispensable in the era of AI-enhanced education.

5.3.2. Evolution into the facilitator

While the participants acknowledged that teachers are irreplaceable, they also envisioned that they would shift from traditional instructors to facilitators. T5 suggested that teachers can guide students to use AI ethically and effectively. This was echoed by T11, who stated '*I think I need to be smarter than AI. Students no longer want to learn from me but can learn from AI. Instead of teaching, I will become a facilitator.*'

The participants anticipated that teachers will no longer be the primary source of information in the classroom but guides who help students analyse and utilise the abundant resources available to them, including those provided by AI. As T14 explained, '*Instead of being the gatekeepers of information, we're becoming navigators who help students find and use the information that AI can provide.*' T12 stated '*Our roles are shifting from lecturers to coaches… the ones who can guide students in using AI intelligently and responsibly.*' In general, the participants felt that this change will not diminish the importance of teachers; it will only redefine their roles in the educational landscape.

5.4. Theme 4: Implications for ELT

5.4.1. Potential impact on practices

The participants expressed varying perspectives on the potential impact of AI on ELT. Some viewed it as part of an inevitable, beneficial shift in the educational landscape. T1 noted that the field is '*slowly adopting AI tools*', while T2 stated that AI can '*make teaching easier*'. However, others had concerns: for instance, T6 worried that over-reliance on AI could hinder language learning, that '*it is going to make teaching more difficult because AI could lead to the lack of essential skills needed to learn a language.*' T8 emphasised that the outcomes will depend on how AI is implemented, as it could either '*empower or replace teachers*'. This duality underscores the need to train and support educators to maximise the benefits of AI and avoid its pitfalls.

Participants also discussed the need for equitable access to AI tools, noting the existence of a '*digital divide*' in Thailand. T4 insisted that '*all students should have equal access to these tools regardless of their socio-economic status*'. T15 added '*It's not just about access, but also about providing training and support to all students to use AI.*' The participants noted that it cannot be assumed that all teachers will know how to use AI-

based learning tools intuitively. They must develop digital literacy competencies to implement these tools in the English classroom effectively.

5.4.2. Implications for assessment and feedback

The participants also discussed how AI could transform the assessment and feedback process in ELT to make it more efficient, personalised and multifaceted. T12 remarked, '*AI tools can provide instant feedback, and we have very large classes in Thailand, so individual feedback is difficult for me to give.*' T10 added, '*AI can provide personalised and precise feedback, and I believe this will change the way to assess students.*' In addition, T13 mentioned that '*AI speech-recognition tools can be used to practice pronunciation*', while T5 noted, '*AI can help us identify weak students more easily.*' However, T7 cautioned, '*While AI can provide feedback, it's incapable of the context-awareness that I can bring.*' These statements show that the participants see that AI has the potential to change the nature of assessment and feedback, but there is still an important role for human actors.

6. Discussions

Integrating GenAI tools, such as ChatGPT, into language teaching and learning represents a significant shift in the educational landscape that has implications for pedagogical practices, teachers' roles and student learning outcomes (Lodge et al., 2023). The present study expands on the existing body of knowledge by exploring how familiar English instructors in Thai higher education institutions are with these tools, how they use them and their perspectives on their potential impact on teachers' professional roles and responsibilities.

Our findings reveal that while instructors are increasingly aware of GenAI tools, there is considerable variation in their proficiency levels (RQ1). This corroborates the previous finding that teachers need technical and pedagogical skills to fully harness the potential of these technologies (Kohnke, 2023; Seo et al., 2021). Given the rapid advancement of AI technologies, educators need to partake in continuous professional development and training to bridge these proficiency gaps. This will help ensure that GenAI tools are integrated into higher education effectively.

Our findings also reveal that instructors have begun incorporating GenAI tools into their professional routines in ways that include assisting with daily writing tasks and generating ideas for high-level academic work. This is consistent with the existing literature on the diverse applications of GenAI tools in education (Godwin-Jones, 2023; Morandini et al., 2023). However, barriers to full integration (e.g. lack of familiarity, skill level) persist, highlighting the need for further exploration and additional support for educators. These barriers must be addressed before instructors can take full advantage of GenAI (Kohnke et al., 2023a; Sharma et al., 2022).

Regarding the potential impact of GenAI (RQ2), instructors generally expressed optimism about its transformative nature, consistent with Alphoso's (2023) positive views. However, they also acknowledged downsides, such as the risk of overdependence, echoing the more sceptical critiques (Chomsky et al., 2023). This shows the necessity of balanced, responsible implementation and clear guidelines to help educators navigate the inevitable ethical challenges presented by AI (Shoufan, 2023).

Our study also suggests that teachers may evolve from traditional instructors to facilitators, which will allow them to remain relevant in the age of AI (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022). This shift resonates with observations of the evolving educational landscape. Teachers will no longer see delivering content as their primary responsibility; instead, they will focus on helping students find and evaluate information from the resources at their disposal, including AI tools. Accordingly, they will need continuous professional development programmes tailored to their local contexts. Such programmes should equip instructors with the digital competencies, alternative pedagogical approaches and ethical understanding they need to leverage GenAI tools effectively. This aligns with the recommendations of Hrastinski et al. (2019) and Zhang and Aslan (2021) regarding professional development and training.

While this qualitative study provides valuable initial insights into the GenAI experiences of English instructors in Thai higher education institutions, certain limitations must be acknowledged. One such limitation is the limited sample size, which may impact the generalisability of the findings. Despite this, the selected sample size of 20 instructors is considered adequate for generating a '*new and richly textured understanding*' (Sandelowski, 1995) of the subject under investigation and serving as a foundation for future inquiry in this field.

Looking forward, researchers are encouraged to consider larger and more diverse samples in their studies. Expanding the population of teachers whose views are considered could offer a more comprehensive perspective on the integration of GenAI tools into English instruction. Moreover, employing varied research methodologies (e.g. quantitative approaches, mixed-method research, or observational studies) could further enrich the understanding of this phenomenon. Another avenue for future research could be a longitudinal exploration of the impact of GenAI on classroom instruction and curriculum design. Such an investigation would provide critical insights into the long-term effects of GenAI on education.

7. Conclusion and implications

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the integration of AI into language teaching by providing insights into how English instructors in Thai higher education institutions perceive and use GenAI tools in their professional contexts. The findings highlight the need for educators to receive ongoing training and support to harness the potential of AI tools, as well as the importance of balance and responsibility. The following four recommendations are proposed to help educators, policymakers, and stakeholders create learning environments that can be truly enhanced by AI:

- Curriculum design: GenAI tools should be integrated into English curricula to enhance students' communicative skills by shifting the mode of learning from a traditional, passive approach to one that is active and engaging.
- Continuous professional development: Instructors should attend programmes that are tailored to their local contexts and consider their specific needs and challenges.
- Teacher training programmes: Initial teacher education programmes should include training on GenAI tools and address the specific challenges they pose for instructors.

- Ethics and responsibility: Teachers and students should be taught about the ethical use of GenAI tools, with an emphasis on the importance of human interaction in language learning and the need for critical thinking and creativity.

Finally, while our study provides insight into the use of AI tools in Thai higher education, its findings should be interpreted with caution due to the rapidly evolving nature of this form of technology. Future research could explore this topic in greater depth – for example, by using larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs – to understand how these tools can be integrated into the classroom effectively. It could also further explore the challenges and opportunities provided by GenAI tools in Thailand and other contexts, providing valuable insight for educators, policymakers and curriculum designers.

Author Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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