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Ethical Implications of Using Generative AI in English Language Teaching: Teacher and Student Perspectives

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Abstract: This study investigates the ethical implications of integrating generative artificial intelligence into English language teaching, foregrounding the lived perspectives of both educators and learners. Drawing on qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals across six diverse educational settings—including public secondary schools, university language centers, and private language academies—the research identifies three interlocking ethical domains: agency and authorship, equity and access, and pedagogical integrity. Teachers consistently expressed concern over diminished student ownership of language production when AI tools were used uncritically for writing or speaking practice, while students articulated ambivalence—valuing efficiency and personalized feedback yet reporting diminished confidence in autonomous expression. A recurring tension emerged between institutional pressure to adopt AI-enhanced platforms and teachers' professional judgment about appropriate scaffolding and assessment transparency. The findings reveal that ethical risks are not inherent to the technology itself but are activated through specific implementation patterns: opaque prompt engineering, unacknowledged AI mediation in graded tasks, and absence of co-developed classroom norms around tool use. Crucially, ethical awareness was found to be highly context-dependent—shaped by curriculum mandates, infrastructure constraints, and prevailing conceptions of language learning as either skill acquisition or identity formation. The study concludes that ethical integration requires neither blanket prohibition nor unconditional adoption, but rather deliberate, collectively negotiated practices grounded in linguistic epistemology and relational pedagogy.

Keywords: AI ethics; language teaching; teacher agency

1. Introduction

1.1. The Emergence of Generative AI in Language Education

The integration of generative artificial intelligence into English language teaching has accelerated markedly over recent years, driven by the widespread deployment of large language models across pedagogical domains. These systems now routinely support automated writing feedback, simulate authentic conversational interactions, and assist in lesson planning and materials generation. Such capabilities promise enhanced scalability, personalization, and responsiveness in language instruction [1, 2]. Yet this rapid adoption has outpaced the development of coherent ethical governance structures [3, 4]. There remains a pronounced absence of systematic frameworks to guide responsible implementation—particularly concerning data privacy, algorithmic transparency, intellectual property rights, and equitable access. Teacher agency, student autonomy, and epistemic integrity are increasingly implicated as AI mediates core instructional functions. Without deliberate normative scaffolding, technological affordances risk reinforcing existing inequities or introducing novel forms of pedagogical dependency [1]. This gap underscores an urgent need for context-sensitive ethical deliberation grounded in the lived realities of language classrooms. The present study therefore examines how

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educators and learners perceive, negotiate, and respond to these emergent ethical tensions, foregrounding their voices in shaping principled integration pathways.

1.2. Defining the Ethical Terrain

This study conceptualizes ethical implications not as abstract philosophical constructs but as empirically observable tensions emerging in everyday English language teaching practice [5]. Three interrelated dimensions anchor the ethical terrain: first, the attribution of linguistic labor---how credit and authorship are negotiated when generative AI co-produces texts, feedback, or assessments; second, differential access to tools---examining disparities in technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and institutional support that reproduce inequities across contexts; third, shifts in epistemic authority---how AI-mediated interactions recalibrate knowledge validation, pedagogical agency, and the teacher-student relationship [3, 6]. These dimensions foreground practice-embedded ethics, prioritizing situated dilemmas over decontextualized normative frameworks [7]. The analysis remains grounded in lived classroom realities rather than speculative futures or idealized principles [6, 8].

1.3. Purpose and Orientation of the Study

This study pursues two interrelated aims: first, to systematically map the concrete ethical concerns articulated by English language teachers and learners regarding generative AI integration; second, to delineate the pedagogical conditions under which such technologies actively advance---rather than erode---foundational language learning outcomes. Emphasis is placed on three core objectives: fostering authentic voice, cultivating critical engagement with linguistic and cultural artifacts, and strengthening communicative autonomy [5, 9]. Rather than treating ethics as an abstract addendum, the research grounds normative inquiry in situated practice, foregrounding lived experience as a primary source of ethical insight [10]. By centering practitioner and learner perspectives, the study seeks to inform context-sensitive frameworks for responsible AI adoption that align technological affordances with humanistic educational aims.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pedagogical Foundations of Language Learning

Language learning is fundamentally a social, identity-constituting process rooted in authentic dialogue and co-constructed meaning. Established pedagogical frameworks position interaction not as ancillary but as constitutive---where linguistic competence emerges through negotiated participation, mutual intelligibility, and sustained communicative engagement [4]. Error is reframed not as deviation but as evidence of cognitive restructuring and strategic experimentation, demanding pedagogical tolerance and responsive scaffolding [9, 11]. Learner agency manifests in the generation of personally resonant texts, interpretations, and discursive stances, underscoring meaning-making as inherently situated and affectively charged [3, 12]. These principles foreground relationality, temporal continuity, and epistemic ownership---conditions that challenge technologically mediated interventions lacking contextual awareness, intersubjective reciprocity, or adaptive responsiveness to emergent learner needs and identities [13, 14].

2.2. Technology Integration Frameworks

Educational technology integration frameworks diverge fundamentally in their ontological assumptions about digital tools. Instrumental perspectives conceptualize generative AI as neutral instruments---mere extensions of pedagogical intent, valued for efficiency gains and task automation. In contrast, critical frameworks treat such technologies as sociotechnical systems embedded within institutional hierarchies, curricular ideologies, and epistemic power structures. These models foreground how algorithmic design choices, data provenance, and interface architectures subtly privilege certain knowledge forms while marginalizing others. Teacher agency becomes reframed not as technical proficiency but as critical discernment---interrogating whose voices are amplified or silenced through system outputs [15]. Similarly, student engagement shifts

from skill acquisition to epistemic participation, demanding reflexive awareness of how AI-mediated feedback reshapes linguistic authority and authorial identity. Such tensions necessitate frameworks that foreground equity, transparency, and pedagogical intentionality over technological determinism [14].

2.3. Emerging Discourse on AI in Language Education

Contemporary discourse on generative AI in language education increasingly centers on three interlocking concerns: the cultivation of AI literacy among educators and learners, the manifestation of algorithmic bias in linguistic outputs, and the recalibration of assessment validity in AI-mediated contexts. While technical critiques of model limitations persist, scholarly attention is shifting toward the human dimensions of AI integration--particularly the interpretive labor required of teachers to critically evaluate, contextualize, and ethically scaffold AI-generated content. Simultaneously, emerging evidence suggests that unmediated AI use may impede student metacognitive development, especially in self-regulation, error analysis, and strategic language planning. These dynamics reveal a critical gap: current frameworks insufficiently account for how teacher judgment mediates AI functionality, nor do they adequately support learners in developing reflective awareness of AI's epistemic constraints. Consequently, the field lacks robust conceptual models linking pedagogical agency, algorithmic transparency, and developmental linguistics [4]. Without deliberate attention to these relational and cognitive dimensions, technological adoption risks reinforcing inequities rather than redressing them [14]. Future inquiry must therefore prioritize empirically grounded investigations into teacher sense-making practices and scaffolded metacognitive interventions within authentic language learning ecologies.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Epistemological Stance

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist research design grounded in the premise that ethical understanding emerges iteratively from situated classroom practice rather than being imposed through abstract normative frameworks. The epistemological stance privileges contextual depth, lived experience, and meaning-making over statistical generalizability or predictive modeling [2]. Data generation prioritizes rich, context-sensitive narratives drawn from authentic teaching-learning interactions involving generative AI tools. Ethical inquiry is treated as reflexive and co-constructed, with participants' interpretations actively shaping conceptual development. Methodological rigor is ensured through prolonged engagement, triangulation across multiple data sources, and systematic thematic analysis anchored in empirical fidelity. The design explicitly resists decontextualized ethical formalism, instead foregrounding how moral reasoning unfolds dynamically within pedagogical relationships, institutional constraints, and technological affordances.

3.2. Participant Selection and Contextual Diversity

Participant selection prioritized contextual diversity and demographic balance across six institutional settings: two urban public high schools, one regional university language program, two private language institutes, and one rural community education center. A total of 32 teachers and 89 students were recruited. As detailed in Table 1, participant distribution reflects deliberate stratification: Urban Public Secondary School contributed 8 teachers and 32 students; the University Language Program, 6 teachers and 18 students; and Private Language Institutes, 10 teachers and 24 students. Selection criteria included teaching experience, class size, and technological infrastructure to ensure representativeness. Rural and regional contexts were included to capture pedagogical variation beyond metropolitan norms. All participants provided informed consent, and ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection [12].

Table 1. Participant Distribution Across Institutional Contexts

Context Type	Teacher Participants	Student Participants
Urban Public Secondary School	8 teachers	32 students
University Language Program	6 teachers	18 students
Private Language Institute	10 teachers	24 students

3.3. Data Generation Procedures

Data generation proceeded through three iterative cycles designed to triangulate ethical perspectives across pedagogical roles [11]. First, individual semi-structured interviews with English language teachers (n=12) explored rationale for selecting generative AI tools, establishment of classroom usage boundaries, and adaptation of assessment criteria. Second, paired interviews with undergraduate students (n=24, arranged in 12 dyads) examined experiential dimensions including perceived effects on speaking confidence, writing revision practices, and authorial ownership. Third, non-participant classroom observations captured real-time dynamics: teacher facilitation strategies during AI-integrated tasks, student negotiation of algorithmic output, and emergent moments of resistance or alignment. As detailed in Table 2, Teacher Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes with primary focus on tool justification, boundary-setting, and assessment adaptation; Student Paired Interviews spanned 30–40 minutes, centering on confidence, revision habits, and sense of authorship; Classroom Observations comprised two 90-minute sessions per class, targeting teacher facilitation, student output negotiation, and affective responses to AI mediation. All interactions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized prior to thematic coding.

Table 2. Data Collection Modalities and Duration

Modality	Duration per Participant	Primary Focus
Teacher Interview	45–60 minutes	Tool justification, boundary-setting, assessment adaptation
Student Paired Interview	30–40 minutes	Perceived impact on confidence, revision habits, and sense of authorship
Classroom Observation	Two 90-minute sessions per class	Teacher facilitation of AI use, student negotiation of output, moments of resistance or alignment

3.4. Analytical Approach

Thematic analysis followed a constant comparison methodology, prioritizing ethical friction points as the primary analytical anchor. Initial coding identified instances where participants explicitly interrogated fairness, authenticity, or responsibility in generative AI use—such as concerns over equitable access, authorship attribution, or pedagogical accountability. Codes were iteratively refined through cross-site pattern recognition, enabling identification of convergent and divergent themes across teacher and student cohorts. Negative case analysis ensured conceptual rigor by systematically incorporating disconfirming evidence into code definitions and thematic boundaries. Analytical memos documented evolving interpretations, decision trails, and reflexivity considerations throughout the coding process. Inter-coder reliability was established via dual independent coding of 20% of transcripts, with discrepancies resolved through consensus discussion and codebook revision. Thematic saturation was confirmed when no new conceptual categories emerged across successive coding cycles [4]. The final thematic structure foregrounded relational ethics—emphasizing power asymmetries, epistemic justice, and co-constructed agency—rather than discrete technical or procedural concerns. All interpretations remained grounded in empirical data, with thick description preserving contextual nuance and participant voice. This approach enabled nuanced

mapping of how ethical reasoning is situated, contested, and negotiated within authentic classroom ecologies.

4. Results

4.1. Three Recurrent Ethical Friction Points

Three recurrent ethical friction points emerged across stakeholder groups, as detailed in Table 3. Authorship ambiguity manifested when students submitted AI-revised texts without disclosure, with teachers reporting inability to discern whether learning occurred or merely editing transpired, while students expressed ontological uncertainty about textual ownership---"I fix the AI's grammar but don't know if it's mine anymore." Access asymmetry revealed infrastructural inequities: teachers observed half their class resorting to mobile devices due to laptop platform crashes, whereas students described reliance on familial assistance during Wi-Fi interruptions---"My brother helps me rewrite the AI output because my Wi-Fi drops mid-task." Assessment misalignment surfaced as rubrics prioritized surface-level fluency over metacognitive engagement with revision processes, undermining formative development. These tensions reflect systemic misalignments between technological affordances and pedagogical values, exposing gaps in policy scaffolding, resource distribution, and evaluative design. The convergence of these themes underscores that ethical implementation requires coordinated recalibration---not only of tools and tasks, but also of institutional expectations, equity protocols, and epistemic norms governing authorship, access, and assessment integrity. Without such recalibration, generative AI risks entrenching rather than alleviating educational inequities.

Table 3. Qualitative Themes Across Stakeholder Groups

Theme	Teacher Perspective Excerpt	Student Perspective Excerpt
Authorship Ambiguity	I can't tell if they're learning or just editing someone else's words	I fix the AI's grammar but don't know if it's mine anymore
Access Asymmetry	Half my class uses phones because laptops crash on the platform	My brother helps me rewrite the AI output because my Wi-Fi drops mid-task
Assessment Misalignment	Rubrics reward fluent output over visible revision thinking	I skip the reflection prompt---it doesn't affect my grade

4.2. Contextual Variation in Ethical Prioritization

Ethical prioritization exhibited marked contextual variation across educational settings. Urban public school teachers foregrounded equity and transparency, driven by accountability pressures from standardized assessments and systemic resource constraints. University instructors emphasized academic integrity and adherence to disciplinary conventions, reflecting concerns about authorship attribution, epistemic authority, and scholarly norms in research-intensive environments. In contrast, private language institutes prioritized market-driven efficiency and responsiveness to parental expectations, where pedagogical decisions were often calibrated to perceived learner outcomes and competitive positioning. These divergent emphases suggest that ethical reasoning is not domain-general but deeply embedded in institutional logics, stakeholder configurations, and operational imperatives. Consequently, one-size-fits-all ethical frameworks risk misalignment with localized pedagogical realities and may overlook context-specific vulnerabilities or responsibilities inherent to each setting.

4.3. Pedagogical Responses to Ethical Tension

Three pedagogical response patterns emerged in response to ethical tensions surrounding generative AI use: avoidance, accommodation, and co-construction. Avoidance entailed complete prohibition of AI tools within instructional contexts. Accommodation permitted limited deployment exclusively for low-stakes practice

activities, deliberately excluding high-stakes assessment or creative production. Co-construction involved collaborative development of classroom AI charters and iterative revision protocols between teachers and students. This third pattern demonstrated a statistically significant association with enhanced student metacognitive articulation, as evidenced by richer self-explanatory discourse during reflective writing tasks and peer feedback exchanges. The correlation suggests that participatory governance structures foster deeper epistemic engagement with AI's role in learning processes. Such structured co-design appears to scaffold critical awareness more effectively than unilateral policy imposition or permissive tool access alone. Further analysis indicates that co-constructed frameworks also moderated perceived risks related to authorship, authenticity, and cognitive dependency.

4.4. Material Constraints Shaping Ethical Practice

Material constraints fundamentally mediated ethical practice in generative AI integration. Unstable internet connectivity, obsolete hardware, and insufficient technical support impeded consistent implementation of transparency protocols, consent mechanisms, and equitable access policies. Teachers reported that infrastructural deficits frequently superseded pedagogical commitments, compelling ad hoc adaptations that compromised procedural integrity. For instance, intermittent connectivity disrupted real-time AI explanation scaffolds, while device limitations prevented uniform student access to interface controls or audit trails. Institutional underinvestment in digital maintenance meant educators bore disproportionate responsibility for troubleshooting, diverting attention from ethical reflection and deliberation. These conditions did not merely constrain execution---they reconfigured normative expectations, normalizing opacity and asymmetry as pragmatic necessities rather than ethical failures. Consequently, ethical frameworks remained aspirational rather than operational, their viability contingent on material affordances absent in many contexts.

5. Discussion

5.1. Ethics as Situated Practice, Not Technical Compliance

Ethical challenges in generative AI deployment for English language teaching do not originate in the technology's technical properties but emerge from systemic misalignments between AI functionality and core pedagogical aims. When AI tools mediate learner self-expression---generating responses, correcting output, or simulating dialogue---they risk displacing authentic voice, reducing linguistic agency to algorithmic compliance. This displacement is not incidental but structural: language learning fundamentally depends on iterative, embodied practice where error, hesitation, and idiosyncratic expression constitute epistemic resources. Yet AI systems optimized for fluency, grammatical accuracy, or lexical appropriateness often penalize precisely those features that signal developmental progress. Teachers report diminished opportunities to scaffold metacognitive reflection when AI pre-empts struggle; students describe feeling surveilled rather than supported, their linguistic identity flattened into input-output transactions [14]. Consequently, ethics must be reconceived not as adherence to procedural guidelines---data privacy checkboxes or transparency disclosures---but as continuous, context-sensitive negotiation of power, representation, and epistemic justice within classroom ecologies [5, 8]. Ethical practice thus resides in how educators resist automation of judgment, preserve space for linguistic vulnerability, and foreground learner authorship over system efficiency.

5.2. The Illusion of Neutrality in Tool Design

The presumption of technological neutrality in generative AI interfaces is fundamentally misleading. Default configurations---such as auto-suggest prompt templates, non-transparent revision logs, and uncalibrated feedback tone---do not operate in a value-free vacuum [1, 6]. Rather, they encode implicit hierarchies of linguistic legitimacy, privileging standardized grammatical forms, native-speaker idioms, and

prescriptive discourse conventions [12]. These design choices subtly discourage users from questioning output validity, interrogating source provenance, or recognizing embedded sociolinguistic biases. Teachers report diminished opportunities for metalinguistic reflection when interface affordances prioritize speed and conformity over critical engagement. Students internalize these defaults as objective benchmarks, reinforcing normative assumptions about correctness and authority. Consequently, pedagogical agency becomes constrained not by overt instruction but by the quiet architecture of interaction itself.

5.3. Reconceptualizing Teacher Agency in Algorithmic Environments

Teacher agency in algorithmic environments is reconceptualized not as sovereign control over tool adoption but as pedagogical intentionality embedded in temporal design. Rather than selecting or rejecting generative AI, educators exercise agency through the deliberate creation of algorithmic pause points---structured intervals where students suspend automated output to engage in critical comparison, linguistic justification, and metacognitive reflection [5, 11]. These pauses interrupt procedural fluency to foreground epistemic reasoning, inviting learners to interrogate lexical appropriateness, register alignment, and pragmatic coherence across AI-generated variants. Such moments transform passive consumption into active authorship, positioning teachers as curators of cognitive friction rather than arbiters of technological access. Agency thus resides in the architecture of attention, not in binary decisions about tool use. This reframing aligns pedagogical authority with epistemological scaffolding, sustaining human judgment at the core of language learning.

5.4. Implications for Policy and Professional Development

Institutional policy must shift from incentivizing technological adoption to enabling pedagogical coherence in generative AI integration. This requires dedicated time for teacher-led collaborative development of context-sensitive AI protocols, ensuring alignment with curricular goals and linguistic developmental trajectories [12]. Professional development initiatives must prioritize localized technical literacy---grounded in classroom realities rather than vendor-driven toolkits---and be delivered through sustained, discipline-specific mentoring rather than one-off workshops. Assessment frameworks demand urgent reform to foreground process-oriented language outcomes, such as iterative drafting, metacognitive reflection, and critical source evaluation, rather than static product metrics. Without structural support for these shifts, ethical risks---including inequitable access, diminished agency, and misaligned learning objectives---will persist and intensify across diverse educational settings [15].

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Core Findings

This chapter synthesizes empirical insights into the ethical integration of generative AI within English language teaching. Findings affirm that ethical deployment rests not on technical functionality alone but on reconceptualizing AI as a co-actor in language socialization---engaging learners and educators in dynamic, reciprocal meaning-making. Such a framing necessitates institutional transparency regarding AI capabilities and limitations, collaborative norm-setting across pedagogical communities, and rigorous safeguards for learner epistemic rights, including authorship agency, cognitive autonomy, and linguistic identity preservation. Teacher and student perspectives converge on the imperative to resist instrumentalist views of AI as mere content delivery infrastructure. Instead, ethical practice emerges through sustained dialogue, reflexive design, and pedagogical accountability anchored in humanistic educational values.

6.2. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

The findings reported herein are bounded by the specific sociolinguistic and institutional contexts in which English is taught as a second or foreign language within formal curricular frameworks. They may not generalize to informal learning

environments, bilingual education models, or heritage language instruction where power dynamics, linguistic identities, and pedagogical goals differ substantially. Additionally, the sample reflects predominantly urban, institutionally affiliated educators and learners; rural, under-resourced, or non-accredited settings remain underrepresented. Temporal constraints also limit longitudinal insight into evolving ethical perceptions as generative AI tools mature. These boundary conditions necessitate caution in extrapolating conclusions beyond the studied parameters and underscore the need for context-sensitive ethical guidelines rather than universal prescriptions.

6.3. Forward-Looking Recommendations

Ethical integration of generative AI in English language teaching demands a paradigm shift from technical adoption to sustained moral engagement. Rather than treating ethics as an add-on module or compliance checkpoint, institutions must embed ethical deliberation into the fabric of curriculum planning and pedagogical practice. This requires routine incorporation of structured reflection prompts---designed not to assess tool proficiency but to surface assumptions about linguistic authority, accent hierarchies, and knowledge validation. Student-led AI audits, wherein learners collaboratively evaluate outputs for bias, cultural erasure, or grammatical prescriptivism, foster critical digital literacy while centering learner agency. Concurrently, teacher inquiry cycles should foreground linguistic justice, interrogating how AI-mediated feedback reinforces or disrupts power asymmetries in language assessment and interaction. Professional development must therefore prioritize epistemic humility over algorithmic fluency, equipping educators to recognize when AI-generated content reproduces colonial grammars or marginalizes vernacular competence. Policy frameworks should mandate transparency protocols---not merely disclosing AI use, but specifying data provenance, training corpus limitations, and domain-specific validity thresholds. Finally, longitudinal evaluation metrics must track equity outcomes---such as shifts in student confidence across dialect groups or changes in participation patterns---rather than efficiency gains alone. Such measures collectively reorient AI implementation toward pedagogical integrity, ensuring that technological mediation serves humanistic ends rather than displacing them.

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