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TEACHERS' VOICES: THE IMPACT OF AI TOOLS ON ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has transformed English language teaching practices, particularly in Vocational High Schools where technology-based learning is widely implemented. This study aimed to explore English teachers' perspectives on AI use, analyze its positive and negative impacts on teaching practices, and identify strategies for integrating AI into classroom instruction. The study employed a qualitative approach using a narrative inquiry method. The population consisted of vocational high school English teachers, while four teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on their teaching experience and use of AI in learning activities. Data were collected through narrative-based semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation, and were analyzed using narrative analysis. The findings revealed that teachers viewed AI positively while maintaining a critical stance toward its implementation. AI was utilized to improve material preparation efficiency, facilitate information access, and enhance student engagement. However, AI also created challenges, including student dependency, reduced critical thinking, and difficulties in assessing authentic student performance. Teachers addressed these challenges by combining AI-assisted exploration with direct instruction, clarification, and continuous supervision. In conclusion, AI serves as an effective supporting tool in English language teaching when applied purposefully, while teachers remain the central agents responsible for maintaining instructional quality, ethical use, and learning objectives.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, English Language Teaching, Narrative Inquiry, Teacher Perspectives, Vocational High School

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has driven the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in various aspects of life, including education. In English language learning, AI is present through various applications such as chatbots, grammar checkers, and adaptive learning platforms that can assist teachers in developing materials, providing feedback, and tailoring instruction to students' needs. In the context of Vocational High Schools (SMK), English language proficiency is a critical competency to ensure graduates are prepared for the workforce and the global industry. Therefore, the integration of AI into English language learning is viewed as an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness, personalization, and quality of learning. Several studies indicate that AI can assist teachers in developing instructional materials, improving work efficiency, and providing more adaptive learning experiences for students (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke, Moorhouse, & Zou, 2023). Furthermore, advancements in AI align with the demands of 21st-century learning, which emphasize

mastery of digital technology as part of the professional competencies of both teachers and students (Dai et al., 2024; Zhai & Wibowo, 2024).

The use of AI is becoming increasingly evident in vocational high schools, which are characterized by technology-based learning and specific workplace competency requirements. In specialized programs such as Software Engineering, students are accustomed to interacting with computers, the internet, and various digital applications, making the integration of AI into the learning process relatively straightforward. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the use of AI has the potential to help students understand technical terms, develop professional communication skills, and improve access to learning resources relevant to their fields of expertise. These conditions indicate that vocational high schools (SMK) provide a strategic context for examining the implementation of AI in English language learning, as they demonstrate a tangible interplay between the demands of the workforce, technological proficiency, and teachers' pedagogical practices (Kohnke et al., 2023; Huang & Tan, 2022).

Although it offers various benefits, the use of AI in English language learning also raises a number of pedagogical issues that require attention. One widely discussed issue is students' increasing reliance on AI to complete academic tasks, which has the potential to diminish their critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-reflection skills. Furthermore, AI's ability to generate text and provide instant answers poses challenges regarding academic integrity and the authenticity of students' learning outcomes. Kasneci et al. (2023) emphasize that while the use of large language models in education can offer significant benefits, it also has the potential to reduce students' cognitive engagement if not balanced with appropriate pedagogical management. These findings are reinforced by Çela et al. (2024), who show that excessive reliance on AI can negatively impact critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills.

The next issue concerns teachers' readiness to systematically integrate AI into their teaching strategies. Although various studies indicate that teachers have a positive perception of AI use, its implementation is still often limited to preparing materials, searching for references, or completing administrative tasks. Integrating AI in a way that aligns with learning objectives, student characteristics, and curriculum needs remains a challenge for many teachers. Research by Rahmawati et al. (2023), Lestari (2023), and Wijaya (2024) indicates that English teachers accept AI as a learning aid but still face concerns regarding students' control over AI use, a decline in the quality of critical thinking, and the lack of structured implementation strategies. In line with this, Lee (2023) and Dai et al. (2024) emphasize that the success of AI integration is greatly influenced by teachers' pedagogical beliefs, decision-making, and ability to manage the use of technology in the classroom.

Given these circumstances, this study aims to describe English teachers' perspectives on the use of AI, analyze the positive and negative impacts of AI on teaching practices, and identify teachers' strategies for integrating AI into English language learning at vocational high schools. This study is important because teachers play a central role as pedagogical decision-makers who determine how AI is utilized effectively, ethically, and in alignment with learning objectives. The novelty of this study lies in its focus, which not only explores teachers' perceptions of AI but also delves into their professional experiences, pedagogical reflections, and actual practices of integrating AI within the context of English language learning at vocational high schools through a narrative approach. Unlike previous studies, which have largely highlighted the effectiveness of AI or general perceptions of its use, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how teachers interpret, manage, and adapt AI in their daily teaching practices, thereby laying the foundation for the development of more contextual and sustainable AI integration strategies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the narrative inquiry method to explore in depth the experiences, perspectives, and professional reflections of English teachers in integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into teaching at Vocational High Schools (SMK). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning of teachers' experiences through their stories and professional experiences in utilizing AI as part of their teaching practices. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry focuses on human experiences constructed through stories,

while Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that narrative research aims to deeply understand individual experiences within specific contexts. This approach is relevant to research on the use of AI in education because it can reveal the process of technological adaptation, pedagogical challenges, and the strategies teachers develop in response to the transformation of digital learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023).

The population of this study consists of English teachers at the vocational high school level, while the sample consists of four English teachers selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria: they are currently teaching at vocational high schools, have at least two years of teaching experience, have previously used AI-based applications in their teaching, and are willing to participate in the entire research process. This technique was used because qualitative research prioritizes the depth of information over the number of participants; thus, informants were selected based on their ability to provide data relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023; Emzir, 2023). The four participants had teaching experience ranging from four to twenty-nine years and had utilized various AI applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Canva AI, and Google Translate in English language instruction.

The primary instruments used in this study were the researchers, aided by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and supporting research documents. Data were collected through narrative-based semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation to obtain in-depth data and enhance the validity of the findings through triangulation of sources and techniques (Denzin, 1978; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences and perspectives on the use of AI in English language learning; observations were conducted to directly observe AI usage practices in the classroom; and documentation was used to supplement data in the form of learning tools, teaching materials, and assignments related to the use of AI in the learning process.

Data analysis was conducted using narrative analysis, which focuses on understanding the meaning of the experiences conveyed by participants through their stories and professional reflections. According to Riessman (2008), narrative analysis considers not only the content of the story but also how experiences are constructed and interpreted by the narrator. The analysis process involved transcribing the interview results, reading the data repeatedly, identifying key experiences related to the use of AI, grouping these experiences into narrative themes, and interpreting their meanings within the context of English language learning at vocational high schools. Through this technique, the study is expected to yield a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives, the impact of AI use, and strategies for integrating AI into learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Zhai & Wibowo, 2024).

The research procedure was carried out in four stages: preparation, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the research report. The preparation stage included problem identification, a literature review, instrument development, and selection of research participants. Data collection was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation. Next, the data were analyzed using narrative analysis to identify the main themes emerging from the participants' experiences. The final stage involved compiling the research results, drawing conclusions, and performing triangulation and member checking to ensure the credibility and validity of the data in accordance with the principles of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers Perspectives in the Use of AI Tools in English Teaching

Based on observational data, teachers at this vocational school demonstrated an open attitude toward the development of digital technology in the classroom. During the learning process, teachers were seen actively assisting students as they interacted with AI applications to ensure the technology was only used to supplement the material. Teachers integrated AI as collaborative partners to initiate initial interactions with students. This phenomenon was evident when teachers utilized AI to provide provocative questions at the beginning of the lesson as a quiz tool during the material presentation, such as instructing students to find the reason why someone wrote a letter ("why do you send a letter to someone?"), as documented in Figure 1. Teachers deliberately asked students to check the AI on their phones first to shorten the time needed to search for information, before finally taking over control of the class to provide further explanations of the material.

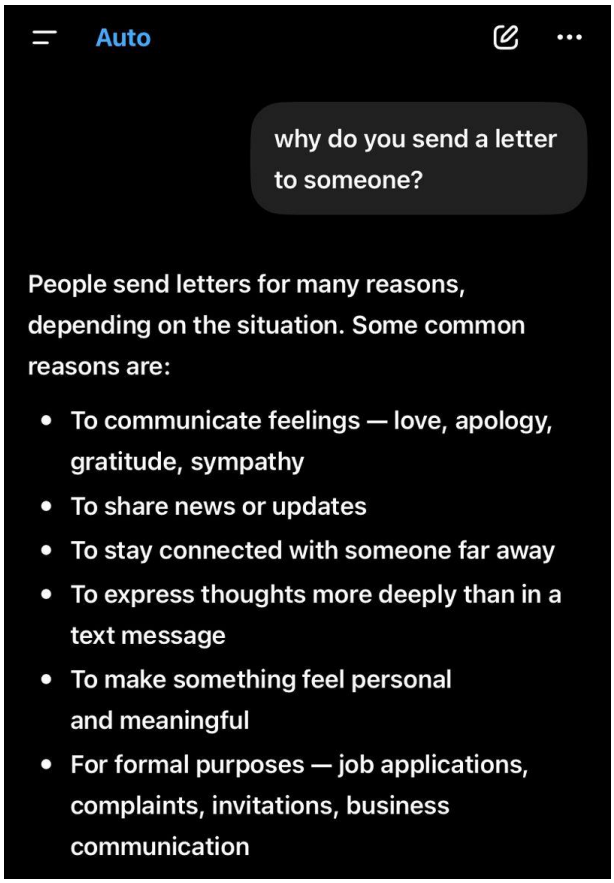

Figure 1 Screenshot of a warming-up prompting question about letter-writing processed through ChatGPT.

Furthermore, an analysis of the English lesson plan for 10th grade at a vocational school reflects the teachers' perspectives, which are oriented toward digital advancement. Although AI is not explicitly used in the formal document, the drafts of the module's components, such as the Hortatory Exposition text on Cyber bullying, were actually compiled and designed with the assistance of AI technology behind the scenes. This phenomenon demonstrates the teachers' perspective of viewing AI as a highly solution-oriented administrative tool, embracing and utilizing AI to streamline the process of creating teaching materials.

This practical understanding behind the scenes is reinforced by in-depth interviews, which revealed that teachers' perspectives on AI are based on a strong awareness of students' future demands. P3 expressed his philosophical view that rejecting AI in the modern era is impossible for a teacher to do in order to maintain the relevance of teaching:

> *"Whether we like it or not, we have to keep up with AI developments because times are constantly changing."*

Despite their optimistic assessment of the efficiency of material creation, teachers remain critical and do not accept this technology at face value. P1, for example, offered a very balanced view of the duality of digital tools for students' thinking capacity in the classroom:

> *"AI for students is a 50%/50% ratio. So on the one hand, it can be very beneficial in helping them learn, but on the other hand, it can also be detrimental if they don't know the limits and just accept it as it is."*

Therefore, a collective agreement emerged among the participants that no matter how sophisticated technology develops, it will never be able to replace the central position and human touch of a teacher. P3 consistently emphasized that primary control in the classroom must remain in human hands by emphasizing that:

> *"AI is only a tool."*

This cautious perspective is then combined with optimizing the practical functions of technology to accelerate language comprehension. P2 believes that the use of AI is actually a breath of fresh air, especially for students just starting to learn basic English, which he emphasized:

"AI is very useful for basic foreign language learning."

As a result of the data collaboration, it can be concluded that teachers' views on AI are a form of rational and objective acceptance, where educators hold primary control over education.

Positive and Negative Impacts of AI Use on Teaching Practices

Direct classroom observations revealed a contrasting dual impact dynamic when AI technology was incorporated into classroom instructional activities. On the positive side, the instant use of AI created high time efficiency while simultaneously sparking a dynamic learning enthusiasm among students. This ease of digital access stimulated active student participation in discussions and independent exploration of the material using their respective devices. The atmosphere of active engagement and student enthusiasm in this classroom is clearly documented in Figure 2, which shows how students interact intensively with each other using the digital devices at their desks. However, behind this smooth process, researchers also observed a negative impact in the form of a decline in learning motivation. The rapid response of AI triggered a tendency for some students to surrender and immediately accept every answer from the application without making any effort to critically reanalyze its meaning.



Figure 2 Students' learning engagement and quiz sheet dynamics during the implementation of AI tools.

Analysis of students' answer sheets and written assignments also demonstrates the reciprocal impact of this technology's capabilities. Textually, student work documents demonstrate excellent English production quality, no mechanical errors, and high grammatical accuracy thanks to the autocorrect feature. One drawback of portfolio documents and evaluation sheets is that they exhibit a high degree of uniformity in sentence patterns across students. As a result, student writing loses its individual character and the depth of genuine human emotion. Ultimately, this phenomenon creates new problems in teachers' gradebooks. These books display students' technically perfect scores on paper, but fail to reflect their actual productive abilities and language development.

Interviews with teachers reinforced the findings regarding the positive and negative impacts of AI technology. On the one hand, this technology has proven effective in increasing student motivation in the classroom. P4 confirmed increased student enthusiasm during the learning process:

"Students are more enthusiastic about learning."

However, on the other hand, this easy access to technology has triggered digital dependency. P1 highlighted the tendency for students to become lazy in thinking due to relying too much on instant answers from AI without close supervision:

"Students become dependent on AI and tend to be lazy because everything becomes easier and faster."

Students' reliance on instant answers ultimately makes it difficult for teachers to measure their true cognitive abilities. This obstacle to objective evaluation was conveyed by P3:

"It made it difficult to assess their true abilities."

Based on this data analysis, it can be concluded that while the use of AI in English teaching increases student motivation and improves time efficiency, it also has the potential to harm students' academic performance. Therefore, teachers must set strict limits so that the benefits of this technology do not interfere with students' independent thinking skills.

Teacher Strategies for Integrating AI into Learning

Based on classroom observations, the teacher implemented a combination of student self-exploration and direct teacher explanations. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher allowed students to use applications such as chatGPT or Gemini to search for basic information or new vocabulary related to the material being discussed. After students received initial answers from the AI, the teacher would immediately take over the class. The teacher stood in front of the whiteboard to re-explain and clarify the material in depth so that students did not accept the AI's results at face value. The teacher's activity while providing direct explanations at the whiteboard after this AI session can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3 The teacher's explicit instruction on the whiteboard following students' AI exploration.

This integration strategy is also reflected in the teacher's lesson plan development. In a 10th-grade English teaching module document at a vocational high school, the teacher prepared a Hortatory Exposition text on the topic of Cyberbullying. Although the document does not explicitly mention the terms "AI" or "ChatGPT," the teacher actually used AI assistance behind the scenes to draft the lesson plan. The teacher then independently filtered the material by simplifying the language so that the AI-generated material remained appropriate for the students' actual ability levels.

Through in-depth interviews, teachers explained the rationale behind implementing this combination strategy in their classrooms. Participant P4 stated that AI-generated materials or texts

were often too idealized and inappropriate for students' real-world situations if not revised by the teacher:

> *"AI doesn't always fit the bill in a classroom that's focused on perfect classrooms. Sometimes what AI produces is too idealized and doesn't match the actual abilities of the students in my class."*

Despite having to make many adjustments in the classroom, teachers still acknowledge that AI is very helpful in terms of time efficiency. Participant P2 shared the use of AI to simplify administrative tasks such as developing lesson plans:

> *"Previously, it took a long time to create lesson plans, but now it's easier."*

Thus, the teachers' strategy at this school is focused on utilizing AI as a tool at the beginning of the learning session and in preparing materials, while full control in the classroom remains with the teacher through direct explanations on the board.

Discussion

Teachers Perspectives in the Use of AI Tools in English Teaching

The findings of this study indicate that English teachers in schools have an open yet selective and cautious assessment of AI. They do not view AI as a threat that will replace their profession or role, but rather as a tool to expedite classroom administration and prepare teaching materials. This perspective shows that teachers in the field are ready to implement digital innovation within the TPACK framework, particularly through a solid mastery of the Technology Knowledge (TK) component, which enables them to understand the operational functions of digital tools. Educators are able to see the practical side of digital innovation without losing direction or control over the learning process.

Regarding the theoretical basis, the attitudes demonstrated by these teachers fully support the basic theory of TPACK formulated by Mishra and Koehler (2006). A concrete example of this support is seen when teachers intentionally use generative AI like ChatGPT only as a warm-up tool to trigger students' initial vocabulary, but soon take over control of the lesson by manually explaining the core material on the board. Field data indicates that their theoretical views on teacher technology integration are not solely based on technical aspects (TPACK). Instead, this instructional adoption is always guided by their pedagogical knowledge (PK). Teachers in the field consistently stated that "AI is just a tool," a statement that demonstrates that good mastery of technology must align with teachers' teaching goals. This approach demonstrates that their use of technology (TK) is tightly controlled by their Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) to maintain lively classroom interactions.

This selective attitude also aligns with research findings by Rahmawati et al. (2023) and Lestari (2023). In their research, they found a similar pattern: high school English teachers welcomed the efficiencies AI offers for module design, but they quickly set strict limits once it entered the classroom. Furthermore, this cautious mindset is consistent with Dai et al. (2024), who emphasized that technology adoption by vocational teachers is highly dependent on their pedagogical beliefs. This also reinforces the classic principles by Koehler et al. (2014) and Chai et al. (2019), which state that technology integration works best when digital tools serve as extensions of teachers' PK and PCK, not as substitutes for human instruction. This balance between increased work efficiency and educational vigilance suggests that the teachers in this study are successfully integrating their TK and PK components amidst the current AI onslaught.

Positive and Negative Impacts of AI Use on Teaching Practices

The direct application of AI in English classes has had a significant impact on teachers. On the positive side, the use of AI applications has been shown to increase student enthusiasm for learning and save time during class. Students can search for information directly on their phones, making the classroom atmosphere more lively and less boring. This aligns with the OECD (2023) discussion on the importance of utilizing digital technology to reduce boredom and create student-centered classrooms.

However, on the other hand, researchers have also found a negative impact, namely that students become overly dependent on technology. Accustomed to receiving instant answers from AI, students tend to be reluctant to think for themselves and always seek shortcuts. As a result, student assignments submitted appear very neat and flawless. However, this actually leaves teachers feeling uncertain and trapped during the assessment process, as they are unable to distinguish between students' true abilities and those of AI. To address this negative side, teachers must shift their evaluation approach from focusing solely on the final written product to incorporating process-based assessment. A prime example of this assessment is when teachers grade students not only based on their submitted final essays, but also through direct classroom observations, hands-on drafting sessions, and spontaneous oral presentations. By evaluating how students formulate ideas step-by-step during class time without smartphone access, teachers can accurately gauge authentic language development and ensure academic honesty.

This issue strongly supports the basic theory of TPACK (Teaching and Assessment for Students) regarding the challenges of honestly assessing student abilities. TPACK theory warns that if technology (TK) is allowed to enter unchecked and is not balanced by strong teaching methods (PK) from teachers, the assessment results of class content will be biased. One real example of dealing with this problem is when teachers use unexpected activities in class to balance out AI's perfect responses. For instance, they might ask students to do impromptu speaking exercises or write short paragraphs by hand without using their phones. By using these flexible teaching methods, teachers can better use their understanding of teaching to clearly identify and properly assess students' real knowledge of the subject. As warned by Kasneci et al. (2023) and Çela et al. (2024), when students use machines to assist with assignments and the results appear too perfect, it can undermine their academic honesty if teachers do not closely monitor what happens in the classroom. Furthermore, this important finding is consistent with Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) and Ouyang and Chang (2023), who stated that the dominance of automated tools often reduces students' cognitive engagement and forces teachers to redesign their assessment criteria. This dilemma also supports an empirical study by Amasha et al. (2024), which highlights that without proactive pedagogical intervention from teachers, AI-generated content will inevitably create a false impression of language mastery and blind teachers to their students' real learning gaps.

Teacher Strategies for Integrating AI into Learning

To address students' dependence on AI, teachers in the field employ intelligent and flexible teaching methods. At the beginning of class, teachers typically utilize their technological knowledge to allow students to open AI applications such as GPT or Gemini. However, the use of AI is limited to searching for meaning or accurately finding basic ideas to save time. After students receive answers from the AI, the teacher doesn't simply allow them to copy them; instead, she takes full control of the class to explain further.

Then, the EFL teacher immediately utilizes her teaching skills (PK) and material mastery (CK) by standing in front of the class. In front of the whiteboard, she manually analyzes, corrects, and re-filters the students' answers generated by the AI. This integrated teaching method demonstrates the practical application of TPACK theory in the field. Findings indicate that the components of TPACK don't always operate in parallel or rigidly. Instead, their implementation is tailored to classroom conditions, with technology (TK) used initially to foster student engagement, followed by teaching methods (PK) and material understanding (CK) as the primary filters.

The teacher's direct explanation on the blackboard strongly supports Lee's (2023) assertion that the teacher's active role in the classroom is crucial for maintaining student focus and preventing distractions from technology. Furthermore, the teacher's use of AI at home to create teaching modules or syllabi also supports the views of UNESCO (2023) and Lestari (2023). To reinforce this strategic framework, this pedagogical intervention aligns with the empirical evidence provided by Kim and Lee (2022) as well as Wang (2024), who argued that the instructor's physical presence at the whiteboard acts as a cognitive anchor that keeps vocational students grounded during digital transitions. Additionally, this balanced integration perfectly mirrors the classic models by Ertmer et al. (2012), Voogt et al. (2013), and Koehler et al. (2014), which emphasize that successful technology

inclusion relies entirely on the instructor's ability to treat digital software as a preliminary catalyst while maintaining human-led pedagogical delivery as the ultimate quality filter. The findings of this study suggest that while teachers are still busy with school administration, the use of AI can make their time more efficient and allow them more time to enhance creativity in classroom learning. The findings of this study suggest that while teachers are still busy with school administration, the use of AI can make their time more efficient and allow them more time to enhance creativity in classroom learning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that English teachers at vocational high schools have a positive yet critical perspective on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching. Teachers view AI as a tool capable of improving work efficiency, speeding up the preparation of teaching materials, facilitating information retrieval, and increasing student participation and enthusiasm during the learning process. On the other hand, teachers are also aware of negative impacts, such as increased student dependence on technology, a decline in critical thinking skills, and difficulties in assessing students' authentic abilities. To address these challenges, teachers implement AI integration strategies that position technology as a supporting tool during the initial exploration phase, while the processes of clarification, concept reinforcement, and learning guidance are still carried out directly by the teachers. These findings confirm that the success of AI integration heavily depends on teachers' pedagogical skills in managing the use of technology wisely and purposefully.

This study has limitations due to the relatively small number of participants and the fact that it was conducted in only one school setting; therefore, the findings cannot yet be widely generalized. Furthermore, the study's focus remains limited to the teachers' perspective without incorporating students' experiences or those of other school stakeholders. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a more diverse group of participants, encompassing various educational levels and different regions, and to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of AI use in English language learning. In practical terms, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for teachers, schools, and policymakers to design guidelines for the effective, ethical, and sustainable use of AI, thereby optimizing the benefits of the technology without diminishing the vital role of teachers in the educational process.

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