



Can ChatGPT Replace Human Teachers? Insights from Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study explores Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating ChatGPT into English language instruction. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from different educational contexts. Thematic analysis, supported by the NVivo software, disclosed that teachers usually see ChatGPT as a worthwhile supplementary device, especially for tasks like grammar correction, essay generation, and lesson planning. Teachers admitted its potential to enhance student engagement and boost autonomous learning, especially among weaker learners. However, critical concerns were raised about ethical implications, including misinformation, plagiarism, and reduced critical thinking. The participants unanimously accentuated that ChatGPT cannot replace the emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and real-time responsiveness suggested by human teachers. Instead, it was seen as a digital assistant that needs pedagogical mediation and ethical oversight. The findings are in agreement with global literature, underscoring the necessity for teacher training, prompt literacy, and well-defined institutional policies to ensure responsible AI integration. This research contributes to the growing discourse on AI in education by offering context-specific insights and recommendations for ethical and effective use of ChatGPT in EFL classrooms undergoing digital transformation.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Language education, Qualitative research, Teacher attitudes, AI in education, Digital transformation.

I | Review

Numer The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has introduced new possibilities and challenges, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Among the emerging AI tools, ChatGPT, an advanced language model, can generate human-like responses, correct grammar, expand vocabulary, and simulate conversations (Kohnke et al., 2023). However, debates continue over whether such tools could replace “real teachers”. In this study, “real teachers” refers to human educators who provide not only subject-matter instructions but also formative feedbacks, socio-emotional support, classroom management, and culturally responsive guidance, i.e., dimensions of teaching that AI tools currently cannot replicate.

The Iranian EFL context offers unique conditions that shape teachers' perceptions of AI integration. English is taught as a foreign language within a centralized national curriculum, with public schools



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emphasizing grammar and reading and private institutes often adopting communicative or exam-preparation methods. Opportunities for authentic English use outside the classroom are limited, making instructional materials and cultural appropriateness especially important. High-stake examinations and sociocultural sensitivities further influence how educational innovations are adopted. Despite the growing global research on ChatGPT in EFL contexts, studies focusing on such a culturally specific and curriculum-bound environment remain scarce.

Digital resources have long supported language learning, from electronic dictionaries to automated assessments. ChatGPT, however, represents a step-change by producing context-sensitive, adaptive responses and simulating a variety of conversational situations (Klimova et al., 2024). Successful integration of such tools depends on teachers' perceptions, as described in models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which emphasizes how teachers' adoption is influenced by the perceived usefulness of the tool and its ease of use (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2024). This study also draws on key pedagogical frameworks including a) the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which examines how teachers combine technology with subject expertise and pedagogy, b) Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which focuses on what learners can achieve with guidance, c) and Activity Theory, which analyzes learning as a system of interactions between tools, participants, and the broader community. Given the potential of ChatGPT to both support and disrupt established teaching practices, understanding teachers' views is critical for guiding ethical, effective implementation in the Iranian EFL context.

II. Review of literature

2.1. Theoretical foundations

Digital tools have consistently aided language learning, ranging from electronic dictionaries to online platforms and automated assessments. Nevertheless, ChatGPT represents a notable advancement by providing interactive, context-sensitive replies that can improve students' reading, writing, and speaking abilities. By producing rich, sophisticated language and mimicking various conversational scenarios, it offers practice opportunities to learners. However, the successful application of such AI-driven instruments depends on educators' perceptions and acceptance of them. The incorporation of artificial intelligence, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, has greatly changed language education. ChatGPT, has specifically emerged as a valuable source for transforming writing instruction. As worldwide education systems adjust to the demands of digital change, the introduction of AI in teaching is increasingly regarded as vital. However, this transition necessitates careful planning and thorough investigation to guarantee meaningful and equitable application (Werdingisih et al., 2024).

ChatGPT is recognized as a sophisticated AI tool that mimics human communication and aids English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction by offering innovative and engaging resources (Klimova et al., 2024). Its primary features include understanding word meanings in context, grammar correction, generating texts in various styles, designing quizzes, and providing translations (Kohnke et al., 2023). Nonetheless, effective implementation in educational settings largely depends on the perspectives of teachers. Some educators are open to its advantages, while others may exhibit reluctance due to doubts, which could hinder its overall effectiveness (Ertmer et al., 2012). Therefore, grasping teachers' viewpoints is essential for evaluating the potential of ChatGPT in the classroom. AI-generated sample texts can provide valuable references for language learners. However, as highlighted by Tseng and Lin (2024), the successful and responsible use of AI tools like ChatGPT requires significant professional development that addresses the specific needs and concerns of educators.

AI technologies such as ChatGPT are gaining recognition for their ability to foster more equitable educational settings. Ulla et al. (2022) and Korucu-Kiş (2024) suggest that the texts generated by AI can effectively model fluent and grammatically correct writing, assisting EFL learners in understanding and emulating these skills. By offering clear examples, ChatGPT helps students enhance their writing abilities through imitation (Werdingisih et al., 2024). However, perceptions differ; while some teachers view AI as a revolutionary resource, others express concerns regarding academic integrity (Elsary, 2024). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) indicates that these viewpoints are influenced by the perceived benefits and ease of utilization (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2024). ChatGPT also aids in peer feedback and critical thinking by assessing student responses based on established reasoning criteria (Tang et al., 2024).



Furthermore, it promotes analytical skills by demonstrating problem-solving approaches and assisting students in identifying patterns and making decisions based on evidence (Jiang et al., 2024), thereby positioning AI as a valuable means of education.

While ChatGPT presents benefits for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing education, its application brings significant ethical issues to the forefront. Teachers have voiced increasing concerns regarding the ability of AI to propagate biases and misinformation, which could disrupt students' educational experience (Zheng & Stewart, 2024). Additional worries include the accuracy of outputs, intellectual property concerns, and the potential for plagiarism and the spread of misinformation (Kohnke et al., 2023; Sallam, 2023). This deficiency in cultural richness can impede language learning and meaningful exchanges. As Goldenthal et al. (2021) contend, ethically, incorporating AI in education must maintain the vital human aspects of teaching, particularly concerning language acquisition and cultural awareness.

2.2. Empirical foundations

Recent empirical research in various contexts underscores both the potentials and obstacles of incorporating ChatGPT into EFL/ESL education. Dilzhan (2024) investigated the use of ChatGPT in Kazakhstan, uncovering useful perspectives on AI-supported language teaching. Ulla et al. (2023) discovered that Thai university instructors had a favorable perspective on ChatGPT, especially for planning lessons and designing activities, although issues regarding reliance and trust surfaced. Likewise, Allehyani and Algamdi (2023) highlighted the importance of the tool in early childhood ESL education, particularly for aiding basic language acquisition. In a quantitative study, Shaikh et al. (2023) showed the effectiveness and usability of ChatGPT in learning formal English. Xiao and Zhi (2023) emphasized ChatGPT's capability to boost student engagement by providing real-time feedback and fostering skill development. Although these studies confirm the educational benefits of ChatGPT, they also highlight the necessity for careful, structured application to alleviate concerns regarding autonomy, academic honesty, and teacher readiness.

Research based on experience regarding AI chatbots in EFL settings shows varied results. Research by Tai and Chen (2024) indicates that chatbots can alleviate speech-related anxiety and enhance conversational abilities, while findings by El Shazly (2021) highlight ongoing or heightened learner anxiety caused by miscommunication and restricted chatbot responsiveness. Dizon (2020) discovered speaking enhancements without corresponding advancements in listening. Conversely, Huang et al. (2022) emphasize the effectiveness of chatbots in setting goals and fostering learner growth, particularly when combined with dynamic assessment. Even with the increasing attention, execution is still in initial phases, featuring few extensive assessments. Chocarro et al. (2023) discovered that adoption relies on perceived ease and relevance, while Pokrivcakova (2022) observed that pre-service teachers frequently prefer human interactions to chatbot usage, despite recognizing the educational value of chatbots.

Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT are being recognized more and more as important educational resources, yet they come with intricate difficulties. Elkhatat et al. (2023) emphasize the shortcomings of the existing detection methods, such as inaccurate positives and variable outcomes. Mandal and Mete (2023) discovered that EFL students and teachers recognize the possibilities of AI integration, but educators voiced concerns regarding AI potentially taking over their positions. In the meantime, Kohnke et al. (2023) highlight the practical uses of ChatGPT in the classroom, including producing genre-specific texts, modifying reading difficulty, crafting bilingual vocabulary tools, and designing comprehension activities. These results highlight the necessity for a balanced, policy-driven application of AI that enhances education while tackling ethical and educational issues.

Although ChatGPT provides numerous educational benefits, its shortcomings in emotional depth, cultural sensitivity, and multimodal engagement are still a concern (Barrot, 2023). Excessive dependence on the tool could impede learners' social interaction and critical cultural understanding. Nevertheless, research indicates the advantages of ChatGPT. For instance, Bin-Hady et al. (2023) discovered that EFL university educators appreciated ChatGPT for improving language application, supporting learning, and fostering independence. ChatGPT is receiving acknowledgment for its involvement in EFL material creation and evaluation, which is due to its capability to produce individualized and context-specific content (Ghoraishi, 2023). Studies by Sowa et al. (2021) indicate that AI ought to be a support tool for teaching, rather than a substitute for teachers. Kohnke et al. (2023) warn that the quality of ChatGPT outputs is significantly influenced by prompt formulation; incorrect or biased replies may still be provided. To reduce risks, Baskara



(2023) asserts that educators should proactively influence AI applications in classrooms, directing students and creating assignments that incorporate ChatGPT as a resource, making sure that technology enhances rather than substitutes human teaching.

Ugli et al., (2025) investigated the views of Uzbek university EFL instructors on ChatGPT via mixed-methods research involving seven participants. The educators identified significant advantages including immediate feedback, enhanced student independence, grammar correction, and editing support. Nonetheless, worries arose regarding students' dependence, restricted emotional engagement, and inconsistent grammar recommendations. ChatGPT was viewed as a beneficial framework consistent with Vygotsky's ZPD, yet not as a substitute for human teaching. The research found that, although ChatGPT can aid independent tailored learning, its ethical and educational constraints necessitate training, critical awareness, and thoughtful incorporation into EFL classrooms.

Mabuan (2024) investigated the viewpoints of 115 English language instructors in Metro Manila on the application of ChatGPT in ELT (English Language Teaching). Through surveys and focus groups, the research revealed that educators valued ChatGPT's ability to enhance vocabulary, writing, and communication skills, particularly for adult and disadvantaged students. Advantages comprised translation assistance, dialogue practice, and cultural awareness. Nonetheless, worries arose regarding plagiarism, excessive reliance, data privacy, and lack of contextual subtlety. The educators highlighted the importance of the technology skills and integration informed by the TPACK model. The research emphasized the need for ethical standards and training to promote balanced and responsible AI integration in ELT.

Allali and El Ghouati (2025) investigated the views and intentions of Moroccan EFL instructors regarding the use of ChatGPT in language instruction, based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The research employed a sequential mixed-method strategy to survey 70 high school educators. The findings indicated that the majority perceived ChatGPT as user-friendly and beneficial, showing a significant relationship between its perceived usefulness and the intention to adopt the tool. The educators recognized opportunities in lesson design, evaluation, and career development. Nonetheless, worries regarding digital infrastructure and training deficiencies continued. The research advocates for professional growth and support frameworks to enable efficient and responsible AI incorporation in educational settings.

Al-Salem (2024) examined Saudi EFL educators' views on utilizing the AI-driven grading tool CoGrader for writing evaluations. Utilizing the Activity Theory as a framework, the research conducted a survey of ten university instructors and carried out interviews with four of them. The findings indicated overall endorsement for CoGrader as an additional resource to save time and deliver consistent feedback. Nonetheless, the educators expressed concerns regarding its dependability, cultural awareness, and possible excessive reliance. The educators highlighted the necessity of preserving their discernment and supported the need for organizational training and policy assistance. CoGrader was viewed as beneficial, yet not a substitute for teacher-directed assessment in EFL writing situations.

Widaningtyas, Mukti, and Silalahi (2023) conducted a survey involving 100 teachers of the languages spoken in Indonesia (including English, Indonesian, and Mandarin) to investigate their views on ChatGPT in language teaching. The findings indicated a strong awareness of AI tools and a consensus on ChatGPT's effectiveness in improving grammar, vocabulary, and self-directed learning. Nevertheless, just 33% of the educators indicated they were actively incorporating it into their teaching. Issues raised involved excessive reliance, reduced student creativity, and ethical problems such as plagiarism. Although numerous educators recognized its ability to enhance teaching effectiveness, the research emphasized the necessity for training, ethical standards, and balanced AI incorporation to foster critical thinking and genuine learning.

Van Horn (2024) examined the perceptions and usage of ChatGPT among Korean university students in relation to English language learning during a 15-week semester. A systematic training program familiarized the students with hands-on ChatGPT activities, such as grammar revision, dialogue generation, and vocabulary improvement. The findings from the surveys, interviews and observations indicated heightened learner independence, self-assurance, and practical application. Numerous students kept using ChatGPT following the course. Though the views were largely favorable, the issues included dependence, false information, and inconsistent participation. The research found that, when directed



well, ChatGPT can boost motivation and language practice in EFL settings, advocating for its use in learner-centered teaching methods.

Durazno et al. (2025) analyzed the effects of ChatGPT on vocabulary learning by 60 high school students from Ecuador. Employing a mixed-methods quasi-experimental approach, they evaluated a control group receiving traditional instruction alongside an experimental group taught with ChatGPT for four weeks. The experimental group exhibited notable improvements (from 7.52 to 8.83), whereas the control group stayed unchanged. The surveys showed that the students had a favorable impression of ChatGPT, highlighting its ability to boost motivation, user-friendliness, and enhanced vocabulary retention. The research found that ChatGPT serves as a powerful educational resource, particularly when paired with specific learning objectives and instructor support.

Neff et al. (2024) examined ethical viewpoints regarding AI tools among 543 Japanese EFL learners and 16 teachers using surveys and hypothetical situations. Although the majority of the participants recognized AI (e.g., ChatGPT), their actual engagement was restricted. The students and teachers mostly concurred on two out of three ethical situations; AI-driven proofreading and AI-created images were viewed as permissible, whereas employing AI to finish assignments sparked ethical issues, especially among the educators. The disparities emphasized the necessity for well-defined institutional regulations. The research supports continuous conversation, scenario-driven exploration, and professional growth to encourage ethical AI incorporation in language education.

Zimotti et al. (2024) conducted a survey on 65 international L2 teachers to investigate their views about ChatGPT and comparable large language models (LLMs) in language learning. The findings showed a blend of emotions such as enthusiasm for ChatGPT capabilities in lesson planning and tailored feedback. Also, language activities were offset by worries regarding academic integrity, diminished critical thinking, and ambiguous policies. Although numerous educators were assured in identifying AI-created student assignments, they acknowledged difficulties with higher-level detection and ethical concerns. The research endorses student-focused and creative teaching methods. It also highlights the importance of educator preparation, careful AI integration, and adaptive policies to responsibly utilize LLMs in language education. Tayşı et al. (2025) conducted a survey with 153 Turkish EFL educators to examine their awareness and views regarding ChatGPT in language teaching. The majority of the instructors recognized ChatGPT and considered it beneficial for creating materials, planning lessons, and tailoring learning experiences. They voiced worries regarding inaccuracies, ethical dilemmas, student overdependence, and challenges in creating effective prompts. Frequent difficulties comprised unrealistic outcomes, high editing requirements, and prompt precision. The research emphasizes the significance of teacher development, ethical instruction, and timely literacy. The results highlight the importance of weighing the advantages of ChatGPT against responsible usage and professional growth to guarantee its effective incorporation into language education.

Hossain and Al Younus (2025) examined the views of Bangladeshi EFL teachers regarding the incorporation of ChatGPT into writing education. Employing a phenomenological method with input from 22 university educators, the research discovered a broad acknowledgment of ChatGPT advantages, such as boosting student involvement, idea generation, grammar enhancement, and assistance in academic writing. Nonetheless, the instructors also expressed worries regarding excessive reliance, ethical concerns, and unequal advantages for students. They preferred organized, methodical, and cooperative teaching approaches for execution. Utilizing ChatGPT effectively necessitates professional growth, ethical consciousness, and a harmony between AI assistance and core writing abilities.

Previous studies in countries such as Uzbekistan (Ugli et al., 2025), Morocco (Allali & El Ghouati, 2025), and Thailand (Ulla et al., 2023) have identified both instructional benefits, such as increased engagement and efficiency, and risks including plagiarism and overreliance. However, few have examined these dynamics in contexts with centralized curricula, limited English exposure outside classrooms, and heightened sensitivity to cultural appropriateness, such as Iran. The interplay between teachers' openness to technological innovation and their commitment to safeguarding pedagogical and ethical standards in such settings remains underexplored. The research highlights the significance of directed integration to enhance educational benefits while preventing misuse. Drawing upon the review outlined above, this study will address the following research questions:

a. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT as an educational tool in language teaching?

- b. To what extent do Iranian EFL teachers believe ChatGPT can support or replace traditional teacher roles in English language teaching?
- c. What benefits and concerns do Iranian EFL teachers associate with integrating ChatGPT into classroom practices?



III. Methodology

3.1. Research design and contexts

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Iranian EFL teachers who have interacted with ChatGPT in their teaching practice. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of how participants perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences with this AI tool. Following the guidance of Creswell and Poth (2018), we sought to bracket researcher assumptions and focus on the participants' first-person accounts. To capture their lived experiences, the interview guide was designed with open-ended, exploratory questions that prompted the participants to recount concrete instances rather than provide abstract opinions. For example, they were asked to "Describe a specific classroom moment where ChatGPT affected your teaching", followed by probes such as "How did you feel during that experience?" and "What changes, if any, did you make afterward?" These prompts encouraged rich narratives grounded in real-life contexts. The follow-up questions were tailored to each participant's responses to elicit further depth and clarity. The study was conducted in Iran, where English is taught as a foreign language in both public schools and a wide network of private institutes. Public-sector EFL teachers follow national curriculum guidelines with an emphasis on reading and grammar, while private language institutes often use communicative and exam-oriented syllabi. EFL teachers in Iran play a pivotal role in bridging limited in-class exposure to English with supplementary digital tools, making them a particularly relevant group for studying AI integration in education.

3.2. Participants and sampling

A total of 12 Iranian EFL teachers participated in the study. All the participants had prior experience using ChatGPT for professional or instructional purposes. They ranged from 3 to 25 years of teaching experience, included both male and female teachers, and taught in public schools, private institutes, and university programs across urban and semi-urban areas. We used purposive sampling to ensure that the participants were information-rich cases, teachers who could meaningfully reflect on ChatGPT use in teaching. The inclusion criteria required the participants to a) be currently teaching English in Iran, b) have used ChatGPT at least once in a teaching-related task, and c) be willing to share specific experiences and reflections. We also employed maximum variation sampling to capture a range of perspectives. The participants were selected to reflect diversity in years of teaching experience (ranging from 3 to 25 years), institution type (public schools, private institutes, and university EFL departments), digital literacy (self-rated as low, moderate, or high), and geographic region within Iran (urban and semi-urban areas). This variation was intended to ensure that the themes identified were not tied to a single demographic group or institutional setting, enhancing the transferability of the findings (Patton, 2015).

3.3. Data collection instrument

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview format, designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of teachers' lived experiences with ChatGPT. This approach balanced consistency across the participants with flexibility to follow up on unique insights. The interview guide (Appendix A) was informed by two theoretical lenses: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), first introduced by Davis (1989), posits that an individual's adoption of technology is primarily influenced by his or her perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. To capture these dimensions, several interview questions were crafted around how teachers evaluated ChatGPT practicality for tasks such as lesson planning, grammar correction, and student engagement, as well as the degree of the effort required to integrate it into classroom practice. In parallel, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the difference between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).



This concept shaped the interview prompts about whether ChatGPT was seen as supporting learners in bridging this gap, for example, providing scaffolding in writing or feedback that allowed poorer students to move beyond their current competence. The follow-up probes encouraged the teachers to reflect on concrete classroom instances where ChatGPT either facilitated or hindered this process. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or online via Zoom and WhatsApp, depending on the participants' preference and accessibility. To ensure comfort and authenticity, the participants were interviewed in English, Persian, or a combination of both, according to their linguistic preference. All the interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. The translations from Persian into English were carefully reviewed to preserve the meaning and nuances of the teachers' statements. The data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, when additional interviews no longer yielded new codes or themes. Saturation was achieved after the twelfth interview, where the dataset was deemed sufficient for robust analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis was based on the six-phase thematic analysis performed by Braun and Clarke (2006), but it was adapted for this study. After repeated reading of the transcripts to gain familiarity with the ideas, we generated initial codes directly from the participants' language (e.g., "It saves me a lot of time", "Students feel more confident", "Sometimes gives wrong information"). These descriptive codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories (e.g., Efficiency, Increased Engagement, Accuracy Concerns). Through iterative clustering and comparison, these categories evolved into the final themes such as Perceived Usefulness, Student Engagement, and Limitations. The coding was conducted using the NVivo software to ensure systematic organization and easy retrieval of coded segments. Two transcripts (17% of the dataset) were independently coded by a second qualified researcher to check for consistency; minor differences were resolved through discussion. An audit trail of coding decisions and theme development was maintained to enhance dependability.

3.5. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

To ensure credibility, member checking was conducted with 7 of the 12 participants. They reviewed a summary of the preliminary themes and confirmed that they accurately reflected their experiences, with minor clarifications incorporated into the final analysis. Peer debriefing involved two colleagues with doctoral degrees in applied linguistics who reviewed the coding framework and thematic summaries, offering feedback on clarity, potential bias, and alignment with the data. Transferability was supported through thick description of the Iranian EFL context and participant diversity. Dependability was enhanced by maintaining an audit trail of all the methodological decisions, coding notes, and theme revisions. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling, in which the lead researcher documented the assumptions, potential biases, and decision-making processes throughout the study. The study adhered to ethical protocols, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity. The participants were informed of the aims of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the confidential handling of their data.

IV. Results

This section reveals the outcomes of the study derived from the interviews with Iranian EFL educators concerning their views on ChatGPT in teaching English. Thematic analyses were conducted on the data, and significant themes were presented in accordance with the three research questions.

RQ1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT as an educational tool in language teaching?

Table 1. Teacher's perception of ChatGPT as a tool



Theme	Subthemes / Codes	Example quotes	Frequency	Percentage
Perceived usefulness	Essay generation, grammar correction, lesson planning	"It saves a lot of time" (T1), "creative prompts" (T3)	5	41.67%
Student engagement	Confidence boost, autonomous learning	"Weak learners are more confident" (T5), "democratize access" (T6)	3	25%
Limitations	Accuracy issues, contextual mismatch	"Sometimes provides wrong information" (T4), "not perfect for our context" (T2)	3	25%
Teacher as a mediator	Need for monitoring, selective use	"Teachers must double-check" (T4), "I adapt prompts" (T3)	2	16.67%

Table 1 revealed four significant themes: perceived usefulness, student engagement, limitations, and the role of the teacher as mediator. Perceived usefulness was the most frequent theme. The teachers asserted that ChatGPT saved time and assisted in tasks such as grammatical accuracy, essay writing, and lesson planning. For example, one teacher stated, "It saves a lot of time", while another admitted its "creative prompts". Student engagement also appeared as a critical theme. The teachers showed that students, especially less talented ones, gained confidence and were more prone to write when using ChatGPT. This pertained to the capacity of the tool to present quick feedback and practice opportunities. Limitations were often mentioned. Some teachers voiced worries about the contextual pertinence and correctness of ChatGPT responses. One asserted that it "sometimes provides wrong information", and another maintained that it is "not perfect for our context". Lastly, the theme 'teacher as a mediator' accentuated the prerequisite of human supervision. The teachers touched upon the importance of reviewing and adapting ChatGPT outputs to synchronize with pedagogical targets and classroom truths. In other words, Iranian EFL teachers mainly see ChatGPT as a handy instructional device, especially for writing support, lesson planning, and increasing learner engagement. The teachers accentuated that ChatGPT can be a time-saving and creativity-boosting gadget. Some participants asserted its role in ameliorating student autonomy and motivation, particularly among poorer learners. However, concerns were voiced about content accuracy, lack of contextual awareness, and the risk of overreliance. The teachers held that human accountability is essential to optimize the educational worth of the tool and refrain from misinformation. Overall, teachers perceive ChatGPT as a complementary gadget, not a replacement, underscoring the importance of teacher mediation in AI-integrated instruction.

RQ2. To what extent do Iranian EFL teachers believe ChatGPT can support or replace traditional teacher roles in English language teaching?

Table 2. ChatGPT as a supporter or replacement of teachers

Theme	Subthemes / Codes	Example quotes	Frequency	Percentage
Example Quotes	Grammar/vocabulary aid, feedback generation	"It helps with feedback" (T2), "support my work" (T1)	5	41.67%
Example Quotes	Emotional intelligence, real-time guidance, classroom management	"Lacks emotional intelligence" (T2), "can't manage a classroom" (T1)	4	33.33%
Example Quotes	Digital assistant, teacher-led integration	"It complements our role" (T3), "not a replacement" (T4)	4	33.33%



Example	Repetitive tasks,	“Good for repetitive tasks”	3	25%
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Theme	Subthemes / Codes	Example quotes	Frequency	Percentage
Quotes	efficiency boost	(T5), "reduces our burden" (T6)		

Table 2 introduces ChatGPT as a supportive, non-substitutive tool. Four themes are enumerated, including supportive role, human irreplaceability, complement and non-substitution, and task automation. Under the first theme, the participants admitted that ChatGPT could aid in syntactical and lexical instruction and give basic feedback. "It helps with feedback" and "supports my work" were common statements. Human irreplaceability was a major theme. The teachers strongly stated that ChatGPT lacks the emotional intelligence, real-time adaptability, and classroom management skills essential for effective teaching. As one teacher put it, "It can't manage a classroom or respond to real-time needs". The theme Complement and Non-substitution was reflected in the responses depicting ChatGPT as a "digital assistant". The teachers identified its worth in improving instruction but turned down the idea of full substitution. Finally, Task Automation was identified as a gain. The teachers admitted the ability of the tool to manage repetitive tasks, which could diminish their cognitive and administrative workload. In other words, the participants generally agreed that ChatGPT supports traditional teacher roles rather than replacing them. The tool is viewed as a digital assistant practical for repetitive tasks such as grammar accuracy, vocabulary building, and initial feedback. The teachers asserted that ChatGPT can enlarge instructional efficiency. However, all the interviewees admitted that the core aspects of teaching, such as emotional support, real-time adaptability, and classroom management, cannot be replicated by AI tools. They stressed that ChatGPT lacks the human competence to see subtleties, respond empathetically, or gear instruction to students' socio-emotional needs. They hold that human guidance is a must to help students interpret, assess, and utilize AI-generated contents meaningfully. The widespread perception is that, while ChatGPT is a valuable complement, it is not a replacement for traditional teaching jobs.

RQ3. What benefits and concerns do Iranian EFL teachers associate with integrating ChatGPT into classroom practices?

Table 3. The benefits and concerns of ChatGPT integration

Theme	Subthemes / Codes	Example Quotes	Frequency	Percentage
Benefits: engagement & autonomy	Enjoyment, confidence, independent learning	"It makes writing more fun" (T1), "revise without waiting" (T3)	4	33.33%
Benefits: personalization	Adaptive prompts, level differentiation	"Personalized learning" (T5)	2	16.66%
Concerns: overreliance	Reduced critical thinking, loss of skills	"Too reliant on it" (T4), "won't learn how to think critically" (T4)	3	25%
Concerns: ethics & misinformation	Plagiarism, inaccuracies, cultural mismatch	"Plagiarism is a big concern" (T2), "culturally inappropriate" (T6)	4	33.33%

Based on Table 3, the responses revealed a balanced attitude, identifying both major benefits and vital problems. The themes extracted were engagement and autonomy, personalization, overreliance, and ethical/misinformation concerns. The theme Engagement and Autonomy focused on how ChatGPT caused writing to be more enjoyable and accessible, accelerating independent learning. The teachers noticed that students understood being able to revise their work without waiting for the teacher feedback. Personalization was another benefit. The teachers perceived that ChatGPT could create level-appropriate prompts and support varied instruction. However, Overreliance was a recurring concern. The teachers warned that extra use might reduce students' critical thinking and language productive abilities. One teacher worried that students "won't learn how to think critically". Lastly, the theme Ethics



and Misinformation was often mentioned. The teachers listed the risks of plagiarism, inaccurate content, and cultural insensitivity. These problems emphasized the need for ethical strategies and teacher mediation. In other words, Iranian EFL teachers identified many benefits and concerns involved in the use of ChatGPT in classroom procedures. On the positive side, the tool supports student engagement, diminishes writing-related stress, and promotes independent learning. Many participants noticed that students perceive the immediate feedback and examples, which can increase motivation and self-correction. The teachers also recognized benefits pertinent to personalization, such as adapting tasks to learners' proficiency levels. However, there was noticeable concern about overreliance, where students might become passive recipients rather than critical thinkers. Ethical issues appeared as a major theme. The teachers worried about plagiarism, blind trust in AI-generated content, and cultural insensitivity. Misinformation was also frequently mentioned suggesting the need for teacher intervention in confirming AI outputs. Overall, the integration of ChatGPT is viewed as promising but must be monitored and scaffolded carefully to prevent the subversion of essential language learning goals. The results also disclose that Iranian EFL teachers see ChatGPT as a powerful but limited tool, effective when used with pedagogical guidance but inadequate as a standalone teaching solution.

V. Discussion

This study offers an integrated perspective on Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, the perceived role of ChatGPT, and the benefits and concerns associated with its integration into language teaching. Rather than treating each research question in isolation, the findings collectively paint a nuanced picture of ChatGPT as a promising yet imperfect educational tool whose value is shaped by pedagogical guidance, contextual adaptation, and ethical safeguards.

Across the interviews, the teachers consistently recognized the utility of ChatGPT for tasks such as grammar correction, essay drafting, and lesson planning, aligning with the reports from other contexts such as Uzbekistan (Ugli et al., 2025) and Morocco (Allali & El Ghouati, 2025). However, the Iranian educators highlighted culturally specific constraints, most notably, the contextual mismatch of AI-generated contents with local classroom realities and sociocultural norms. This was seen as more pressing than in some other contexts, possibly due to Iran's centralized curriculum, strong emphasis on exam preparation, and sensitivity to culturally inappropriate examples in English learning materials. These findings suggest that, while global trends point to the growing acceptance of ChatGPT in EFL teaching, local cultural and institutional factors continue to shape how the tool is evaluated and used.

The consensus that ChatGPT can support but not replace teachers reinforces the global consensus that large language models lack emotional intelligence, real-time adaptability, and classroom management capabilities (Goldenthal et al., 2021; Hossain & Al Younus, 2025). However, Iranian teachers' emphasis on their role as 'pedagogical mediators' suggests that, in this context, safeguarding students from misinformation and ethical breaches is a core component of their professional identity. This nuance adds depth to the broader literature; in contexts where teacher authority and responsibility are highly valued, AI is likely to be positioned as an assistant rather than a co-instructor. The benefits identified in this study, enhanced student engagement, confidence-building, and opportunities for autonomous learning, mirror those reported in Thailand (Ulla et al., 2023) and Ecuador (Durazno et al., 2025). Yet, the Iranian teachers placed comparatively greater emphasis on motivational benefits for poorer learners, suggesting that, in resource-constrained contexts, ChatGPT may help narrow achievement gaps by providing instant, nonjudgmental feedback. This raises an important consideration for policymakers; that is, targeted integration of ChatGPT could serve as an equity tool in settings with diverse learner proficiency.

Concerns about plagiarism, misinformation, and diminished critical thinking are also widespread globally, but the interviewed Iranian teachers appeared especially cautious about cultural mismatch and contextual irrelevance in AI outputs. This points to a need for professional development not only in prompt engineering but also in prompt localization, training teachers to design queries that yield culturally and contextually appropriate contents. Such training could include workshops where teachers iteratively test, adapt, and critique AI outputs, focusing on aligning responses with the Iranian curriculum and student needs. Ethical oversight is another area where Iranian perspectives aligns with global findings. While concerns about plagiarism and overreliance are shared internationally, the Iranian teachers' insistence on active monitoring reflects an educational culture that values teacher-led evaluation over automated

assessment. This reinforces the argument that responsible AI integration must be grounded in existing pedagogical norms rather than imposed as a universal model.

In sum, the present findings both confirm and extend the growing global consensus: ChatGPT has a legitimate place in EFL education as a supplementary tool, but its effectiveness hinges on human mediation, contextual adaptation, and ethical governance. For Iran, this means framing AI integration as part of a teacher-empowered approach that safeguards cultural appropriateness, maintains academic integrity, and enhances, rather than replacing, human-led instruction.

VI. Conclusion

This study explored Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of ChatGPT and its potential role in supporting or replacing traditional teaching functions. The findings reinforce the global consensus that large language models can be valuable supplementary tools in language education, especially for tasks such as writing assistance, grammar correction, and lesson planning. Yet, in the Iranian context, their use is influenced by heightened attention to cultural appropriateness, contextual accuracy, and the necessity of sustained teacher involvement. The teachers in this study recognized ChatGPT's capacity to increase engagement and promote learner autonomy, with particularly notable benefits for poorer students who may lack confidence in their abilities. However, they emphasized that these advantages can only be fully realized when teachers actively guide the process, adapt AI-generated outputs to the local curriculum, and address potential pitfalls such as plagiarism, misinformation, and diminished critical thinking. The perception of ChatGPT as a "digital assistant" rather than a replacement reflects a strong professional commitment to maintaining the human dimensions of teaching, including emotional intelligence and real-time responsiveness.

To maximize the benefits of ChatGPT in Iranian EFL classrooms, professional development should focus on equipping teachers with skills for localized prompt creation, strategies for fostering critical evaluation of AI-generated contents, and approaches to integrating AI in ways that are both culturally relevant and pedagogically sound. Institutional policies need to provide clear guidance on appropriate uses of AI tools, ensuring that technological innovation complements rather than undermines teacher-led instruction. By positioning educators as active mediators, the integration of ChatGPT can enhance language learning outcomes while preserving the cultural and pedagogical integrity of English language education in Iran.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

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1. Can you describe your experiences using ChatGPT in your English language teaching practice, if any?
2. In your opinion, what are the main advantages and disadvantages of using ChatGPT as a teaching tool in EFL classrooms?
3. To what extent do you believe ChatGPT can support or replace the traditional role of a language teacher?
4. What concerns, if any, do you have about the ethical implications of using ChatGPT in language education?
5. How do you think tools like ChatGPT could be effectively integrated into English teaching in the future?