



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Redefining Teacher Roles in AI-driven Informal English Learning: Perspectives from Vietnamese EFL Educators

Giang Ngoc Tran<sup>1</sup>,  
Giang Van Ngo<sup>2,+</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of English, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam;

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of English, Hanoi University, Vietnam

<sup>+</sup>Corresponding author • Email: [giangnv@hanu.edu.vn](mailto:giangnv@hanu.edu.vn)

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### ABSTRACT

This exploratory mixed-methods study investigates Vietnamese EFL educators' perceptions of AI-driven informal English learning by examining their attitudes toward students' AI-mediated learning, perceived changes in pedagogical roles, professional challenges, and institutional support needs. Drawing on survey data from a sample of 36 Vietnamese EFL teachers across diverse educational contexts, the study examines attitudes toward AI-mediated informal learning, perceived shifts in pedagogical responsibilities, professional challenges, and institutional support needs. Quantitative findings reveal that the majority of educators recognize the value of AI tools in enhancing students' motivation and autonomous learning, while also acknowledging a clear shift toward facilitative rather than directive teaching roles. Educators express strong consensus that critical guidance, specific professional training, and institutional support are essential for navigating AI-driven informal learning contexts effectively. Qualitative narrative responses further illuminate the nuanced experiences, challenges, and adaptive practices of educators engaging with students who independently use AI tools. Findings highlight teachers' recognition of the need to facilitate, complement, and critically guide students' AI-mediated informal learning processes. While findings are based on a convenience sample and should not be generalized beyond the study population, they provide preliminary insights into how Vietnamese educators are beginning to conceptualize and respond to AI-driven informal language learning. Implications for teacher education and professional development are discussed, emphasizing the preparation of educators for effective engagement with AI-driven language learning contexts.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has fundamentally reshaped how language learners engage with English outside formal classroom settings. AI-powered applications such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, ChatGPT, and Grammarly have become integral to students' informal learning repertoires, enabling self-directed practice in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and conversational fluency at any time and place. This shift has introduced new complexities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators, who must now contend with learning environments that extend far beyond the physical classroom.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, AI-driven informal learning is particularly salient given the widespread use of smartphones and digital platforms among students at all educational levels. While formal English instruction in

Vietnam has long been shaped by examination-oriented curricula and teacher-centred pedagogies, the growing prevalence of AI tools for self-study is creating conditions under which learner autonomy and informal digital engagement challenge traditional instructional models. Vietnamese EFL educators thus find themselves navigating the intersection of established pedagogical norms and emergent, technology-mediated learning practices.

Despite the growing phenomenon, empirical research specifically examining Vietnamese EFL educators' perceptions of their evolving roles in relation to students' AI-driven informal learning remains scarce. Existing literature has addressed teacher attitudes toward technology integration more broadly (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018), the nature of informal language learning environments (Reinders & Benson, 2017), and the redefinition of educator roles in digital contexts (Hampel, 2015; Godwin-Jones, 2019), yet few studies have focused on the specific challenges and adaptive responses of teachers in developing country contexts where AI adoption is accelerating rapidly.

This exploratory study addresses this gap by investigating the perceptions of a sample of 36 Vietnamese EFL educators regarding their roles, attitudes, professional challenges, and support needs in the context of students' AI-driven informal English learning. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study combines quantitative survey data (N = 36) with qualitative narrative responses (n = 4) to explore preliminary patterns in educators' experiences and perspectives. As a preliminary investigation with a modest sample size recruited through professional networks, findings are intended to generate hypotheses and insights for future research with larger, more systematically representative samples. The research is guided by three overarching questions: (1) What attitudes do Vietnamese EFL educators hold toward AI-driven informal language learning among their students? (2) How do educators perceive their evolving pedagogical roles in light of students' informal AI-mediated learning? (3) What professional challenges and support needs do educators identify in navigating AI-driven informal learning contexts?

The study contributes to growing scholarly debates on the redefinition of teacher roles in technology-rich environments and offers practice-relevant insights for teacher education and professional development in Vietnam and comparable EFL contexts.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1. AI-Driven Informal Language Learning: Concepts and Recent Developments***

#### ***2.1.1 AI-Driven Informal Language Learning***

Informal learning, broadly defined as learning that occurs outside structured institutional settings, has gained increasing prominence in language education research (Reinders & Benson, 2017). The emergence of AI-powered language learning applications has significantly expanded the scope and accessibility of informal language practice, enabling learners to engage with authentic, adaptive, and personalized learning experiences independently. Tools such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, and large language models like ChatGPT offer learners opportunities for immediate feedback, pronunciation coaching, grammar correction, and open-ended conversational practice at minimal or no cost.

From a connectivist perspective (Goldie, 2016; Weller, 2012), informal digital learning is understood as a networked activity in which knowledge is distributed across human and technological nodes. AI tools serve as active agents in these networks, mediating learner engagement with language in ways that complement, supplement, and sometimes supplant formal classroom instruction. Research has documented positive associations between informal digital language engagement and increased learner motivation, self-efficacy, and target language use (Lai, Shum, & Tian, 2016; Reinders & Benson, 2017). However, concerns regarding the accuracy of AI-generated language content, potential for fossilization of errors, and the cultural limitations of AI tools remain salient (Trust & Whalen, 2020; Selwyn, 2016).

#### ***2.1.2. Generative AI and Large Language Models in Language Education***

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT (released November 2022) has significantly accelerated the integration of generative AI into both formal and informal language learning contexts. Recent empirical studies have begun documenting educator and learner experiences with these tools, revealing both significant affordances and emerging concerns. Research published between 2022-2025 has explored ChatGPT's applications in language education, demonstrating effectiveness for scaffolding language practice and providing personalized feedback at scale (Kohnke et al., 2023). Studies have examined generative AI adoption barriers among

language educators, identifying concerns about accuracy, data privacy, and cultural representation in LLM-generated content (Creely, 2024; Zheng & Wang, 2026).

Emerging AI literacy frameworks - particularly from Miao and Holmes (2023) and TESOL (2025) - emphasize the need for teachers to develop critical competencies beyond technical tool use, including evaluation of AI output for accuracy and bias, understanding of LLM limitations, and pedagogical judgment whether AI supports versus undermines learning in specific situations. These frameworks highlight that effective technology integration requires not only technical fluency but also critical digital literacy and ethical reasoning (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022). These recent developments have prompted urgent rethinking of how educators prepare for and respond to generative AI, particularly regarding critical evaluation, ethical concerns, and pedagogical adaptation.

The convergence of rapid LLM development with accelerating student adoption in informal contexts has created particularly acute challenges for educators in Vietnam and comparable EFL contexts, where institutional guidance on AI integration remains nascent. This study contributes to filling this gap by documenting Vietnamese educators' preliminary perceptions and readiness for navigating AI-mediated informal language learning.

## ***2.2. Evolving Teacher Roles in Technology-Mediated Learning Environments***

The integration of digital technologies into language learning has prompted extensive scholarly reflection on how teacher roles are being reconfigured. Hampel (2015) argues that digital environments necessitate new teacher competencies centred on facilitation, scaffolding, and the creation of collaborative learning opportunities rather than direct knowledge transmission. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2019) highlights the transition of educators from content providers to learning designers and facilitators in technology-mediated contexts, a shift that demands both technological fluency and pedagogical creativity. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) offers a useful conceptual lens for examining how educators integrate technology into their pedagogical repertoires. Within the TPACK framework, effective technology integration requires not only knowledge of specific tools but also an understanding of how technology shapes, and is shaped by, content knowledge and pedagogical practice. As AI-driven informal learning becomes more prevalent, educators face the challenge of developing TPACK competencies that extend beyond the classroom to encompass out-of-class learning environments.

## ***2.3. Teacher Challenges and Professional Development Needs***

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM; Hall & Hord, 2011) provides a structured framework for understanding how educators move through stages of concern when adopting new educational technologies, from awareness and informational concerns to personal, management, and consequence-focused concerns. Research applying CBAM to technology integration has consistently highlighted the importance of addressing educators' practical concerns and providing targeted professional development to support effective adoption (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Dooly & Sadler, 2020).

In the context of AI tools, educators face a distinctive set of challenges related to the accuracy, cultural relevance, and ethical implications of AI-generated content (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and the potential for AI tools to reinforce inaccurate or culturally inappropriate language models are particularly relevant for EFL educators who are responsible for guiding students toward accurate and contextually appropriate language use. Despite the growing recognition of these challenges, empirical evidence on how educators in Vietnamese EFL contexts perceive and respond to them remains limited.

## ***2.4. The Vietnamese EFL Context***

Vietnam represents a rapidly evolving EFL context in which government educational reform initiatives, including the National Foreign Language Project (NFLP), have prioritized communicative competence and digital literacy in English language education. Vietnamese learners increasingly use digital platforms and AI tools for self-directed English learning, a trend accelerated by widespread smartphone access and the availability of free or low-cost language learning applications. However, Vietnamese educational culture has historically emphasized teacher authority and examination preparation, creating potential tensions between emergent learner-driven, AI-mediated practices and established pedagogical norms (Tran et al., 2022). Within this context, Vietnamese EFL educators occupy a complex position: they must simultaneously maintain curricular responsibilities oriented toward formal assessment outcomes while acknowledging and responding to students' autonomous use of AI tools outside the classroom. Understanding how these educators perceive this tension, and what professional support they require to

navigate it effectively, has direct implications for teacher education policy and practice in Vietnam and comparable developing-country EFL contexts.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a predominantly quantitative survey design supplemented by qualitative narrative responses. Consistent with mixed-methods research, which combines quantitative and qualitative evidence to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the study used quantitative data to identify general patterns in educators' perceptions and qualitative responses to provide additional explanation and contextual detail. Given the substantial imbalance between the quantitative component ( $N = 36$ ) and the qualitative component ( $n = 4$ ), the design is more appropriately characterized as quantitatively driven rather than as a fully balanced concurrent mixed-methods design. The quantitative survey generates descriptive patterns of educator attitudes, while qualitative narrative responses from four participants provide illustrative depth and context. This design enables exploration of numerical patterns alongside individual experience, supporting the study's aim of generating preliminary insights about educators' evolving roles in AI-mediated contexts.

#### 3.2. Participants

A total of 36 Vietnamese EFL educators participated in the study. Participants were recruited through professional networks and educational institutions across Vietnam via an online survey distributed in March 2025. All participants confirmed voluntary, informed consent prior to participation. This convenience sample has several notable characteristics that limit representativeness: the sample comprised predominantly female educators ( $n = 31$ , 86.1%), with five male participants (13.9%); the majority (58.3%,  $n = 21$ ) taught at university or college level; and nearly all participants reported at least some familiarity with AI tools (83.3%). These demographic characteristics suggest the sample may not fully represent the heterogeneity of Vietnamese EFL educators across educational levels and regions. Participants taught across diverse educational levels: university or college ( $n = 21$ , 58.3%), high school ( $n = 9$ , 25.0%), secondary school ( $n = 4$ , 11.1%), language centres ( $n = 1$ , 2.8%), and primary school ( $n = 1$ , 2.8%). Regarding teaching experience, 18 participants (50.0%) had more than ten years of experience, seven (19.4%) had between six and ten years, five (13.9%) had between three and five years, and six (16.7%) had fewer than three years of experience. Most participants reported familiarity with AI-driven language learning tools: 18 (50.0%) identified as familiar, 12 (33.3%) as somewhat familiar, and six (16.7%) as very familiar.

*Table 1. Participant Demographics ( $N = 36$ )*

| Category            | Subcategory        | n (%)      |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Gender              | Female             | 31 (86.1%) |
|                     | Male               | 5 (13.9%)  |
| Teaching Experience | < 3 years          | 6 (16.7%)  |
|                     | 3-5 years          | 5 (13.9%)  |
|                     | 6-10 years         | 7 (19.4%)  |
|                     | > 10 years         | 18 (50.0%) |
| Teaching Context    | University/College | 21 (58.3%) |
|                     | High School        | 9 (25.0%)  |
|                     | Secondary School   | 4 (11.1%)  |

|                     |                         |            |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|
|                     | Language Centre / Other | 2 (5.6%)   |
| AI Tool Familiarity | Somewhat familiar       | 12 (33.3%) |
|                     | Familiar                | 18 (50.0%) |
|                     | Very familiar           | 6 (16.7%)  |

### 3.3. Survey Instrument

The quantitative component comprised a purpose-built Likert-scale survey developed on the basis of three theoretical frameworks: TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), Connectivism (Goldie, 2016; Weller, 2012), and CBAM (Hall & Hord, 2011). The survey included four thematic sections: (A) demographic information; (B) educator attitudes toward AI-driven informal learning (five items); (C) evolving educator roles (five items); and (D) professional challenges and institutional needs (five items). All Likert-scale items used a five-point response scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. An optional Section E invited participants to provide narrative responses to open-ended questions drawn from a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Four participants completed narrative responses, providing qualitative depth to the quantitative findings.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with frequency counts and percentage distributions computed for each survey item to identify patterns in educator attitudes, role perceptions, and professional concerns. Internal consistency for each survey section was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: Section B (Attitudes)  $\alpha = 0.72$ ; Section C (Roles)  $\alpha = 0.81$ ; Section D (Challenges)  $\alpha = 0.78$ . All values exceeded the threshold of 0.70, suggesting acceptable internal consistency for this exploratory study. Qualitative narrative responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with themes identified inductively from the four participant responses and subsequently interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical frameworks. While the small number of qualitative respondents ( $n = 4$ ) limited the depth of thematic saturation, qualitative data functioned primarily to provide illustrative context and explore nuances in the quantitative patterns.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Educator Attitudes Toward AI-Driven Informal Learning

Table 2 presents the frequency distributions for the five survey items examining educator attitudes toward AI-driven informal English learning.

Table 2. Educator Attitudes Toward AI-Driven Informal Learning ( $N = 36$ )

| Item                                                                    | SA           | A             | N             | D            | SD |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----|
| B1. AI tools significantly enhance students' informal English learning. | 5<br>(13.9%) | 16<br>(44.4%) | 15<br>(41.7%) | 0            | 0  |
| B2. Informal AI use complements classroom teaching effectively.         | 9<br>(25.0%) | 16<br>(44.4%) | 11<br>(30.6%) | 0            | 0  |
| B3. Informal AI learning encourages out-of-class engagement.            | 6<br>(16.7%) | 18<br>(50.0%) | 11<br>(30.6%) | 1<br>(2.8%)  | 0  |
| B4. Informal AI learning risks fostering incorrect language habits.     | 3<br>(8.3%)  | 10<br>(27.8%) | 15<br>(41.7%) | 8<br>(22.2%) | 0  |

|                                                                                 |              |               |              |              |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---|
| B5. Informal AI learning increases students' motivation to learn independently. | 6<br>(16.7%) | 17<br>(47.2%) | 7<br>(19.4%) | 6<br>(16.7%) | 0 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---|

*Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.*

The majority of educators expressed positive attitudes toward AI-driven informal learning. Items addressing the value of AI tools for enhancing students' informal learning, complementing formal instruction, and encouraging autonomous engagement attracted agreement or strong agreement from between 58.3% and 69.4% of respondents, indicating broad recognition of AI tools' potential in supporting language development. These findings align with Reinders and Benson's (2017) conceptualization of informal language learning as a productive complement to formal instruction and with connectivist perspectives on digitally networked learning (Goldie, 2016).

Notably, items addressing concerns about error fossilization and the adequacy of AI feedback attracted more divided responses. Approximately 36.1% of respondents expressed concern about fossilization while 22.2% disagreed and 41.7% remained neutral. This ambivalence reflects tensions documented in the literature between the affordances of AI tools for autonomous practice and concerns about accuracy, feedback quality, and error reinforcement (Trust & Whalen, 2020).

Qualitative responses reinforced this nuance; educators noted that students using AI tools develop varied vocabulary while those reliant on textbooks remain more limited in expression, yet stressed the importance of monitoring AI-generated output for accuracy.

#### 4.2. Evolving Educator Roles

Table 3 summarises findings related to educators' perceptions of their evolving roles in the context of students' AI-driven informal learning.

*Table 3. Educator Perceptions of Evolving Roles (N = 36)*

| Item                                                                                        | SA            | A             | N            | D           | SD          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| C1. Teachers need to reconsider their traditional roles due to AI-driven informal learning. | 14<br>(38.9%) | 16<br>(44.4%) | 5<br>(13.9%) | 0           | 1<br>(2.8%) |
| C2. Teachers should guide students in critically evaluating AI-generated content.           | 21<br>(58.3%) | 13<br>(36.1%) | 2<br>(5.6%)  | 0           | 0           |
| C3. Teacher role has shifted toward facilitation rather than direct instruction.            | 9<br>(25.0%)  | 18<br>(50.0%) | 8<br>(22.2%) | 1<br>(2.8%) | 0           |
| C4. Teachers need specific training to support AI-mediated informal learning.               | 18<br>(50.0%) | 13<br>(36.1%) | 5<br>(13.9%) | 0           | 0           |
| C5. Teachers should integrate insights from students' informal AI use into formal practice. | 12<br>(33.3%) | 19<br>(52.8%) | 5<br>(13.9%) | 0           | 0           |

*Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.*

The role perception items elicited some of the strongest and most consistent responses in the survey. Items addressing teachers' responsibility to guide students in critically evaluating AI-generated content attracted near-unanimous agreement, with 94.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This finding is highly significant and reflects a robust consensus that the rise of AI-driven informal learning demands a new layer of critical literacy facilitation from educators. The emphasis on critical guidance aligns closely with Selwyn's (2016) argument that educators bear responsibility for helping students develop critical digital literacy.

Items addressing whether teachers need to reconsider traditional roles and the shift from instructor to facilitator were endorsed by 83.3% and 75.0% of respondents respectively. These findings are consistent with Godwin-Jones's (2019) observation that technology-mediated learning accelerates the transition from content provider to learning



facilitator, and with Hampel (2015) articulation of facilitative competencies as central to digital language teaching. Items addressing the importance of professional training and bridging informal and formal learning achieved 86.1% agreement each, confirming that educators recognize both the necessity of specialized development and the value of integrating informal AI-driven learning with formal curricula.

#### 4.3. Professional Challenges and Institutional Support Needs

Table 4 presents findings related to educators' professional challenges and their perceptions of institutional support needs.

Table 4. Professional Challenges and Institutional Support Needs (N = 36)

| Item                                                                                      | SA            | A             | N             | D           | SD          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| D1. I face challenges keeping up with emerging AI language learning technologies.         | 3<br>(8.3%)   | 20<br>(55.6%) | 11<br>(30.6%) | 1<br>(2.8%) | 1<br>(2.8%) |
| D2. I am concerned about professional development opportunities for AI-mediated learning. | 5<br>(13.9%)  | 21<br>(58.3%) | 10<br>(27.8%) | 0           | 0           |
| D3. I am concerned about ethical issues (bias, privacy) with AI-mediated learning.        | 5<br>(13.9%)  | 24<br>(66.7%) | 7<br>(19.4%)  | 0           | 0           |
| D4. Students' use of AI-driven tools sometimes undermines classroom teaching.             | 2<br>(5.6%)   | 23<br>(63.9%) | 11<br>(30.6%) | 0           | 0           |
| D5. Teachers require institutional support to manage AI-driven informal learning.         | 10<br>(27.8%) | 18<br>(50.0%) | 7<br>(19.4%)  | 1<br>(2.8%) | 0           |

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

Items addressing professional challenges and support needs revealed educators' concerns about navigating AI-driven contexts. Items addressing ethical concerns such as bias and privacy attracted the highest level of agreement among challenge items, with 80.6% of respondents expressing concern. This finding resonates with Trust and Whalen's (2020) documentation of educators' growing awareness of ethical risks associated with AI platforms and Selwyn's (2016) critical perspective on educators' responsibilities in ethically complex digital environments.

Items addressing the potential for students' AI use to undermine classroom teaching were endorsed by 69.5% of respondents, reflecting tensions between the benefits of AI-driven informal learning and its potential to disrupt classroom coherence. A majority also expressed concern about keeping pace with rapid AI development (63.9%) and agreement that additional professional support is essential (72.2%-77.8% across relevant items). These findings provide empirical support for CBAM-based arguments that effective technology adoption requires sustained, structured professional support rather than ad hoc individual adaptation (Hall & Hord, 2011; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010).

#### 4.4. Prescriptive Implications for Vietnamese EFL Educator Development

Beyond the descriptive findings above, the study suggests several specific implications for teacher education and institutional practice in Vietnamese contexts.

##### AI Literacy Competencies

The strong endorsement of critical guidance (94.4%) aligns with emerging frameworks for AI literacy in language teacher education, including the Miao and Holmes (2023) AI and Education Competency Framework and recent TESOL (2025) guidance on generative AI. For Vietnamese educators specifically, AI literacy should encompass three core competencies:

1. Technical understanding: knowing how LLMs function, their current capabilities and limitations, training data considerations, and typical use cases in language learning

2. Critical evaluation: ability to assess AI-generated language content for accuracy, cultural appropriateness, bias, and alignment with learner goals

3. Pedagogical judgment: decisions about when AI tools support autonomous learning effectively versus when they may undermine classroom coherence or reinforce inaccurate patterns

### ***Professional Development Structures***

The high consensus on professional development needs (72.2%-77.8% agreement) suggests that ad hoc individual learning is insufficient. Vietnamese institutions should consider structured approaches such as:

- Monthly professional learning communities at the provincial or institutional level, focusing on recent AI developments, ethical concerns, and pedagogical adaptations
- Peer-led resource curation: teachers collectively building curated libraries of AI tools, lesson plans, and ethical guidelines relevant to Vietnamese EFL contexts
- Collaborative action research: small groups of teachers investigating specific challenges (e.g., managing AI output accuracy, integrating informal AI use into formal curricula) and documenting solutions

### ***Ethical Framework Development***

The 80.6% concern about ethical issues reflects educators' emerging awareness of algorithmic bias, data privacy, and cultural representation in AI tools. Institutions should invest in developing ethical guidelines specific to Vietnamese contexts, addressing concerns about whether English-language AI tools adequately reflect Vietnamese learner needs and cultural contexts.

### ***Alignment with National Initiatives***

These recommendations are consistent with Vietnam's continuing orientation toward strengthening foreign language education, digital transformation, and technology integration in education, while extending the communicative language teaching principles established under the National Foreign Language Project. Policymakers and institutional leaders should explicitly integrate AI literacy into English teacher certification standards and pre-service teacher education curricula.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This exploratory study provides preliminary insights into Vietnamese EFL educators' attitudes toward AI-driven informal language learning, perceived changes in pedagogical roles, professional challenges, institutional support needs, and the implications of these findings for teacher education and professional development. Across diverse teaching contexts and experience levels, participants demonstrated broad recognition of both the pedagogical value of AI-driven informal learning and the substantial challenges this trend creates for teachers.

### ***Interpretation and Theoretical Significance***

Three substantive findings merit emphasis and interpretation. First, Vietnamese EFL educators broadly recognize the value of AI-driven informal learning for enhancing student engagement, motivation, and autonomous practice, while maintaining nuanced concerns about accuracy and the risk of error fossilization. This finding underscores the need for educators to be equipped with strategies for monitoring and responding to students' AI-mediated language use rather than simply accepting or rejecting it.

These findings generate several insights relevant to theoretical frameworks used to interpret technology adoption in language education. The TPACK framework's emphasis on integrating technology with pedagogical content knowledge is clearly evident in educators' calls for training that addresses not just technical competence but also critical evaluation and ethical judgment. The connectivist perspective on networked learning is partially validated: educators recognize AI-driven informal learning as a legitimate and valuable learning mode that complements formal instruction. However, this recognition coexists with pragmatic concerns about coherence, accuracy, and equity - suggesting that strict connectivist optimism about networked learning must be tempered by attention to teacher role, institutional structure, and ethical governance. CBAM's emphasis on addressing educator concerns during technology adoption is strongly supported: the consistent calls for professional development and institutional support indicate that adoption will stall without meaningful investment in these areas.



Second, educators demonstrate strong consensus that their roles are shifting from direct instruction toward facilitation and critical guidance, particularly regarding the evaluation of AI-generated language content. This consensus is theoretically consistent with TPACK and connectivist frameworks and has direct implications for the design of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes.

Third, educators express significant concerns regarding ethical issues, the pace of AI development, and the adequacy of institutional support, pointing to a need for structured professional development and systemic engagement with AI governance frameworks in Vietnamese educational institutions.

### Limitations and Future Directions

The study has several limitations that constrain interpretation of findings. The sample was relatively small (N = 36) and predominantly female and university-based, which may limit the generalizability of findings across the diverse landscape of Vietnamese EFL teaching. Furthermore, narrative responses were provided by only four participants, constraining the depth of qualitative analysis. These demographic characteristics mean findings may not represent the full heterogeneity of Vietnamese EFL teaching contexts, particularly secondary school environments or teachers with limited access to AI tools or professional networks.

Future research should employ larger, more systematically representative samples using stratified sampling across teaching levels and regions. Longitudinal studies examining how educators' AI-related competencies and concerns evolve over time would also strengthen understanding of the change process. Additionally, future work should investigate specific institutional or contextual factors that either facilitate or inhibit educators' adoption of critical guidance and facilitative roles around AI-mediated learning. The marked variation in responses to several items suggests that teaching context, student population, and institutional culture may shape educators' perceptions in important ways - factors that warrant explicit investigation.

### Forward-Looking Conclusion

As AI tools continue to proliferate in language learning landscapes globally, the capacity of educators to guide, complement, and critically mediate students' informal AI-driven practice represents a crucial competency for language teaching. This exploratory study of Vietnamese EFL educators suggests that readiness for this role exists - educators recognize its importance and seek professional development support. However, realizing this readiness through structured, ongoing professional learning and institutional support remains an urgent challenge for Vietnamese educational policy and practice.

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