

Research Article

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Mind the Gap: A Comparative Study of Faculty and Student Readiness for AI-Integrated ELT in Azerbaijani Higher Education

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Azerbaijani higher education is undergoing a rapid digital transformation in response to global advances in artificial intelligence (AI). Within this context, English language teaching (ELT) faces the challenge of integrating AI tools to enhance learning outcomes. However, little is known about how prepared educators and learners are for this shift. This study compares ELT faculty and student readiness for AI-integrated teaching and learning at a public Azerbaijani university, identifying gaps and capacity-building needs.

Materials/methods. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitatively, a survey measured technological and mindset readiness among 150 bachelor-level ELT students and 16 ELT faculty members. Qualitatively, two focus group interviews explored perceptions, perceived benefits, and concerns regarding AI in education.

Results. Survey findings indicate that students reported higher technology familiarity and more positive attitudes toward AI compared to faculty, who demonstrated cautious optimism but lower self-assessed AI skills. Focus groups revealed that both groups recognised potential benefits, such as personalised learning support, while also expressing concerns about ethical use, data privacy, and insufficient training opportunities.

Conclusion. A readiness gap exists: students appear more comfortable adopting AI, whereas faculty require targeted support to integrate AI pedagogically. To bridge this gap, institutions should prioritise professional development, establish clear guidelines, and implement supportive policies for AI adoption in ELT.

1. Introduction

Higher education in Azerbaijan has expanded significantly and undergone modernization since its independence in 1991. National initiatives—such as extensive ICT programs in the 2000s and the “Digital Education Concept” policy launched in 2018—have driven a digital transformation in education to integrate technology into teaching. These efforts have improved university infrastructure and internet access nationwide. However, the integration of new technologies into everyday classroom practice remains uneven, suggesting that infrastructure upgrades alone are not sufficient to achieve educational innovation.

Recently, the emergence of powerful artificial intelligence (AI) tools—such as large language models like ChatGPT—has introduced new opportunities and challenges for higher education. Azerbaijan’s engagement with this AI revolution is growing: the country now ranks roughly 74th out of 181 on global AI readiness indices, indicating moderate progress but also considerable room for growth. Within English language teaching (ELT), AI-driven applications (e.g., intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluation, chatbots for language practice) hold great promise for boosting student engagement and personalizing learning. However, the successful adoption of these tools hinges on both instructors and students being ready and able to use them effectively.

In the context of AI integration, “readiness” refers to both technical ability (digital skills and access to tools) and mindset (attitudes and willingness to embrace change). Initial observations point to a generational divide in digital readiness: students—as “digital natives”—tend to adopt new technologies faster than their instructors, who are often “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001). This dynamic is already apparent with AI tools: students experiment with them readily, whereas many faculty members remain cautious or skeptical. If unaddressed, this gap could hinder effective AI integration. Faculty may continue to hesitate due to insufficient training or fears that AI could undermine academic integrity or their teaching roles, while students lacking guidance might misuse AI for shortcuts (e.g., automatically generating translations or essays).

Empirical research on AI readiness in higher education is still in its infancy globally, and virtually nothing is known in the Azerbaijani context. Notably, no published study has directly compared faculty and student readiness for AI integration in Azerbaijan, leaving a significant gap in the literature. Without such local data, institutions cannot effectively design training programs or policies to support AI-driven education. To address this gap, this study examined the AI readiness of ELT faculty and students at Nakhchivan State University (NSU) in Azerbaijan, investigating how prepared each group is to leverage AI in teaching and learning and whether any readiness discrepancies exist between them. Using a convergent mixed-methods design that combined a quantitative survey with qualitative focus group interviews, the study provides a nuanced picture of current readiness levels and underlying factors. These findings can inform targeted capacity-building initiatives and policies for effective AI integration.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the levels of technological and mindset readiness for AI-integrated ELT among university faculty and students in Azerbaijan?

RQ2: How do faculty and student readiness for AI integration differ from each other?

RQ3: What do ELT faculty and students perceive as the main opportunities and challenges of integrating AI into English language teaching and learning?

2. Literature Review

Internationally, initial studies have begun examining educators’ and learners’ perceptions of AI in education. A systematic review by Kallogiannakis et al. (2023) found both excitement and concern

in academia over ChatGPT's educational impacts, highlighting positive prospects (e.g., tutoring support) but also negative issues like cheating and factual inaccuracies. In EFL contexts, educators are weighing the pedagogical and ethical implications of AI. For example, while AI can enhance language practice, teachers worry about maintaining academic honesty and preserving the human element in teaching. A recent review noted that instructors see AI's pedagogical potential but call for clear ethical guidelines (Alghamdy, 2023). Likewise, faculty surveys in the Middle East reported generally positive views on AI alongside concerns about integrity; for instance, an empirical study in Saudi Arabia found EFL instructors had moderately high awareness of AI's benefits and believed in training students on proper use to mitigate ethical risks (Aljabr & Al-Ahdal, 2024).

Regional research is also beginning to shed light on digital readiness. In Azerbaijan and similar contexts, studies on technology integration suggest that university instructors have improved access to ICT infrastructure but still need professional development to effectively incorporate new tools. A World Bank (2024) report observed that many Azerbaijani faculty and administrators are aware of AI's importance, yet only 18% had actively used AI tools in their work, citing insufficient training and a lack of institutional guidance on AI integration. On the student side, there is evidence of enthusiasm for digital learning tools. A recent Azerbaijani study by Alisoy et al. (2024) surveyed 540 university students and found that most recognized the value of smartphones for language learning outside the classroom. However, that study also noted issues of distraction and unequal access, and it emphasized a "critical gap" in effective integration strategies and training for using such technology in the curriculum. These findings underscore that simply having technology is not enough – stakeholders must be prepared and supported to use it productively.

In terms of guiding theory, this study is conceptually grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), which posits that an individual's adoption of a new technology is driven largely by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. We apply TAM to interpret faculty and student readiness as a function of their beliefs about AI's value in ELT and their confidence in handling AI tools. If faculty do not see clear benefits or feel insufficiently skilled, their intention to integrate AI will be low, and they may resist adoption – a pattern consistent with TAM-based research on teachers' technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Conversely, students who find AI tools useful for learning and easy to access are more likely to employ them, even sometimes without formal instruction. Additionally, for the teacher participants, we considered the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which suggests that effective technology integration in teaching requires combining content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge. In our context, an AI-ready ELT instructor would need not only general digital skills but also an understanding of how AI applications align with language pedagogy and curriculum. Thus, our survey and interview protocol probed both technical comfort and pedagogical mindset regarding AI.

In summary, prior literature indicates a mix of optimism and caution toward AI in education, and a likely gap between student and teacher readiness, especially in under-resourced settings. However, no study to date has examined this issue in the Azerbaijani context by directly comparing faculty and students. The present study seeks to fill that gap by providing empirical insight into both groups' readiness for AI integration in an Azerbaijani university ELT setting.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to obtain both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth on the research questions. In a convergent design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged for interpretation. This approach was suitable for exploring "readiness," a multifaceted construct, by corroborating survey measures with personal experiences from participants.

3.2. Setting and Participants

The study took place at Nakhchivan State University (NSU) in Azerbaijan during the 2024–2025 academic year. NSU is a regional public university serving students primarily from the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and surrounding provinces. The ELT program at NSU prepares pre-service English teachers and also offers English language courses to students of other majors. At the time of the study, no formal curriculum on AI in education existed, though interest was growing informally among faculty. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee, and permission was granted by the NSU Faculty of Foreign Languages. Participants provided informed consent, were assured of anonymity, and were free to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms (e.g., "S1" for Student 1, or "T1" for Teacher 1) are used when reporting qualitative quotes.

We targeted two groups of participants: undergraduate ELT students and ELT faculty members at NSU. A total of 150 bachelor-level students (approximately 75% of those invited) and 16 faculty members (all ELT instructors in the Foreign Languages faculty, ~80% of those invited) participated in the study. The student sample (60% female; mean age $\approx$ 20.4 years, SD $\approx$ 1.2) reflected the typical makeup of the ELT program, which enrolls many students from provincial towns and rural areas. Indeed, about 80% of student respondents hailed from outside the regional capital, consistent with NSU's role in serving outlying communities. The faculty sample (62.5% female; mean age $\approx$ 38.1 years, SD $\approx$ 9.4) included lecturers and senior teachers with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 22 years (mean $\approx$ 11 years). Most faculty held at least a master's degree in TESOL or related fields, and none had formal training in AI prior to the study.

Quantitative Component: Survey

We developed a questionnaire titled "AI Integration Readiness Survey" with input from three experts in educational technology to ensure content validity. The survey consisted of two main scales – Technological Readiness and Mindset Readiness – along with demographic and background items. Each readiness scale comprised 8 Likert-type items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Technological Readiness measured practical competencies and access (e.g., "I have the necessary technical skills to use AI-based tools for language learning/teaching" and "I can easily access AI tools when I need them"). Mindset Readiness assessed attitudes and confidence (e.g., "AI tools can make language learning more engaging" and "I feel confident in my ability to integrate AI into the classroom"). Additional questions asked about prior experience with AI (usage of any AI applications) and any training received.

The survey was administered in December 2024. Students completed it during class sessions (with instructor permission), and faculty completed it during a department meeting or via an online link. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no incentives offered. Survey responses were analyzed using SPSS 28. We calculated descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, percentages) and conducted independent-samples *t*-tests to compare faculty and student readiness scores. Welch's *t*-test was used when variances were unequal. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was set for statistical tests.

Qualitative Component: Focus Groups

In parallel with the survey, we conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews to gather qualitative insights – one with students and one with faculty. The focus group format was chosen to enable participants to discuss AI integration openly and spur ideas through group interaction, capturing richer perspectives than a one-on-one interview might in this exploratory stage.

Participants: From those who completed the survey, we recruited a subset for the focus groups using purposeful sampling to ensure diverse representation. The student focus group had eight

volunteers (5 female, 3 male; a mix of second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduates, aged 19–22). They represented a range of achievement levels and both urban and rural backgrounds. The faculty focus group included 6 participants (4 female, 2 male; ranks ranging from assistant teacher to associate professor), with teaching experience ranging from 4 to 18 years. All focus group participants provided additional consent for audio recording of the discussion and agreed to the ground rules for respectful dialogue and confidentiality.

Procedure: Each focus group met in a quiet seminar room on campus in December 2024, about one week after the surveys. Sessions lasted approximately 60 minutes each. A bilingual moderator (fluent in English and Azerbaijani) led the discussions following a semi-structured guide aligned with the research questions. Example prompts included: “*What comes to mind when you think of using AI in language teaching or learning?*” (warm-up); “*Can you share any experiences you have had using AI tools (like ChatGPT, Google Translate, etc.) for teaching or studying English?*”; “*How prepared or confident do you feel to use AI in the classroom (as a teacher or student)? Why?*”; “*What do you see as the benefits of integrating AI into English learning? What about the drawbacks or concerns?*” and “*What support or resources would you need to effectively use AI in your teaching/learning?*” The moderator used probing questions to elicit detail (e.g., “*Can you give an example?*”) and ensured that all participants had the chance to speak. The faculty focus group tended to revolve around professional concerns and pedagogy, whereas the student group discussed their personal study habits and expectations. Both sessions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. The discussions were primarily in English (given participants’ proficiency), but the moderator allowed code-switching to Azerbaijani when needed for clarity or emphasis. Any Azerbaijani remarks were translated into English during transcription by the bilingual moderator, then cross-checked by another bilingual researcher for accuracy.

Qualitative Analysis: We employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine the focus group data. First, two researchers independently read the transcripts multiple times to familiarize themselves with the content. They then openly coded the data, assigning labels to meaningful segments (using MAXQDA software for organization). The researchers met to compare codes and reconciled any differences through discussion, merging similar codes and agreeing on a codebook. Next, codes were grouped into broader candidate themes. For instance, initial codes such as “AI as threat to academic honesty,” “fear of student cheating,” and “integrity policies” were grouped under the theme “Assessment & Ethics Concerns.” We iteratively refined the themes by reviewing all excerpts under each theme to ensure coherence and distinctness. Ultimately, four major themes were identified from the qualitative data: (1) *Perceived Benefits of AI for ELT*, (2) *Confidence and Competence (Self-Efficacy)*, (3) *Concerns and Misgivings* (including ethical and reliability issues), and (4) *Support Needed* (training and institutional policies). These themes were used to structure the reporting of qualitative results. To enhance trustworthiness, we employed investigator triangulation (both analysts had to agree on theme definitions) and member checking – a summary of key themes was emailed to participants who had expressed interest. The participants indicated that the summary resonated with their views, and two individuals requested minor clarifications, which were incorporated into the analysis.

Finally, in the integration phase of this mixed-methods study, we merged the quantitative and qualitative findings during interpretation. We looked for points of convergence (e.g., the quantitative gap in readiness scores between students and faculty, which aligned with qualitative comments about one group being more confident) and divergence (e.g., nuances that one method captured but the other did not). The joint interpretation of both data sets is presented in the Discussion section. Priority was given to qualitative insights when they explained the “why” behind numeric trends, in line with the study's aim of emphasizing depth of understanding.

4. Results

A total of 166 individuals (150 students and 16 faculty) participated in this study. The results are organized in terms of participant demographics, quantitative findings from the survey, and qualitative findings from the focus groups. Where relevant, we then integrate the quantitative and qualitative results to provide a comprehensive view.

Participant Demographics

The characteristics of the student and faculty samples are summarized in Table 1. The student group was 60% female and 40% male, with an average age of about 20.4 years. Roughly 80% of the students came from provincial or rural areas of Nakhchivan or other regions of Azerbaijan (only 20% were from the city of Nakhchivan), reflecting the university's regional intake. The students were fairly distributed across year levels (approximately 30% first-year, 25% second-year, 25% third-year, 20% fourth-year). All student participants were current undergraduates (having a secondary school diploma as their highest completed education).

For the faculty group, 62.5% were female and 37.5% were male, with ages ranging from the late twenties to the mid-fifties (mean $\approx$ 38.1 years). Their teaching experience averaged 11 years (SD $\approx$ 6.5), though the group was mixed: about half had over 10 years of experience, while a few were relatively new hires with under 5 years. In terms of qualifications, all faculty held at least a bachelor's degree; most (10 out of 16) had a master's degree, and 2 (12.5%) held a Ph.D. in applied linguistics or a related field. Notably, none of the faculty had any formal training in AI or data science; only three faculty members (19%) reported having ever attended a workshop or conference presentation on AI in education. By contrast, a small number of students (around 5%) mentioned they had taken an online course or self-study module related to AI, reflecting personal interest rather than formal curriculum. Approximately 60% of the students indicated they have tried AI-powered apps (such as translation tools), whereas about 25% of faculty had experimented with any AI tools. These differences in prior exposure may influence the groups' confidence in advanced technologies. At the same time, widespread smartphone use among youth in Azerbaijan means many students have at least casual familiarity with AI-powered apps (e.g., Google Translate), even if they don't label them as "AI." Faculty, on the other hand, have had fewer opportunities or incentives to use such tools, which is consistent with the lower reported AI experience in our sample.

Table 1. Participant Demographics of the Study Sample (N = 166).

	Students (N = 150)	Faculty (N = 16)
Gender	90 Female (60%); 60 Male (40%)	10 Female (62.5%); 6 Male (37.5%)
Mean Age (SD)	20.4 years (SD 1.2)	38.1 years (SD 9.4)
Year of Study / Experience	1st: 30%; 2nd: 25%; 3rd: 25%; 4th: 20%	11.0 years avg. teaching (range 3–22)
Location Background	~80% provincial/rural; 20% urban	The majority of the local region; 2 from Baku
Highest Degree	Secondary school diploma (current undergrads)	Bachelor's: 4; Master's: 10; PhD: 2
Any AI-Related Training	~5% took an online AI-related course (informal)	18.8% attended at least one AI workshop

	Students (N = 150)	Faculty (N = 16)
Prior AI Tool Use	~60% have tried AI apps (e.g., translators)	~25% have tried AI tools (mostly translation apps)

Note: “AI-related Training” refers to any formal or informal training related to artificial intelligence (e.g., a workshop or online course). “Prior AI Tool Use” was self-reported usage of AI-driven applications relevant to language learning or teaching.

4.1. Quantitative Findings: Readiness Levels

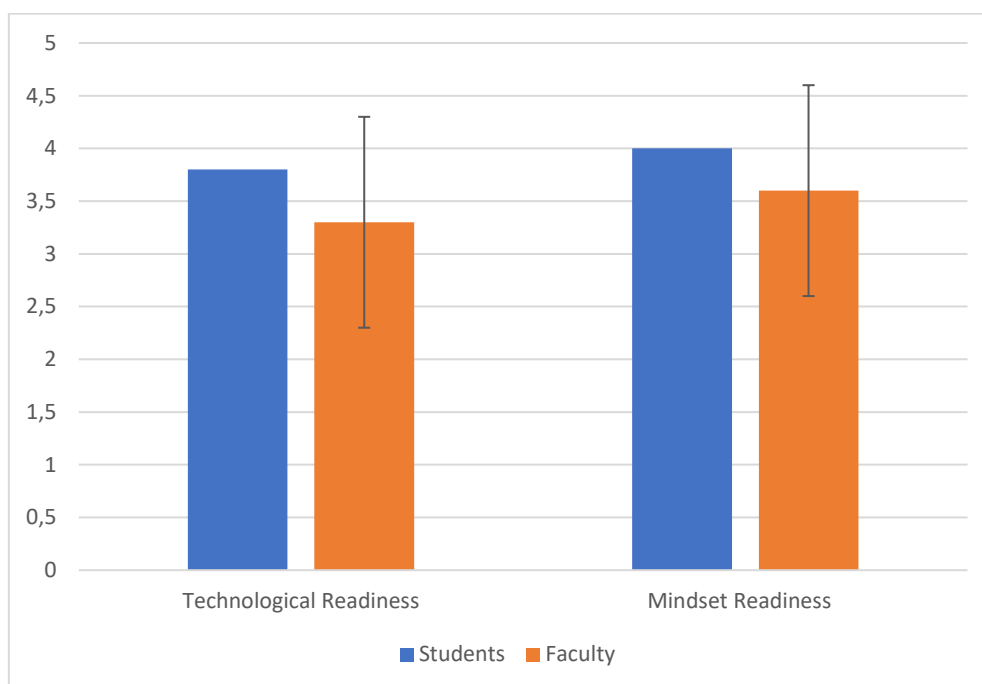


Figure 1. Mean Self-Rated AI Readiness Scores (1–5) for Students and Faculty on Two Dimensions: Technological Readiness and Mindset Readiness. Error Bars Represent ± 1 SD.

The survey results revealed a “mind the gap” pattern in AI readiness between students and faculty. As Figure 1 illustrates, students not only rated themselves as more ready overall, but they also had greater exposure to AI tools and a stronger inclination to adopt them going forward. On a scale of 1 (low readiness) to 5 (high readiness), students’ mean *Technological Readiness* score was 3.8 (SD = 0.6), compared to 3.3 (SD = 0.7) for faculty. This suggests that students generally felt between “moderately” and “highly” prepared in terms of technical skills and access, whereas faculty, on average, hovered around “moderately” prepared. The difference was statistically significant ($t \approx 3.21$, $p = .002$, Welch’s test accounting for unequal variances), indicating a real gap in perceived technical readiness. For context, over 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they are comfortable using new software or apps, while only about 40% of faculty said the same. One survey item revealed this starkly: “I know how to use AI tools like chatbots or automated translators” drew agreement from 66% of students but just 25% of faculty. This is consistent with the notion that many faculty lack hands-on experience with such tools, whereas students—having grown up with smartphones and apps—find them relatively intuitive.

On the *Mindset Readiness* dimension, students’ average was 4.0 (SD = 0.5), compared with faculty’s 3.6 (SD = 0.6). Both averages are relatively positive (above the neutral midpoint of 3), but students showed a stronger favorable attitude toward and greater confidence in AI integration. The student mean of 4.0 indicates that most leaned toward “agree” on statements about AI’s benefits in ELT. Faculty’s mean of 3.6, while still above neutral, was notably lower. This difference was also

statistically significant ($t \approx 3.28$, $p = .0012$). In practical terms, about 80% of students agreed that “AI tools can make language learning more engaging,” whereas roughly 60% of faculty agreed. Students also expressed a higher willingness to adopt AI: a large majority indicated they would use AI regularly as part of learning if given the chance, compared with about half of faculty who said they would incorporate AI into their teaching. Taken together, the quantitative data confirm the existence of a readiness gap: students feel more technically prepared and more optimistic about AI in education than their instructors do.

It is important to note that faculty were not entirely low on these measures — a 3.3/5 in technology readiness and 3.6/5 in mindset indicate *moderate* readiness and generally positive attitudes. Thus, the gap is one of degree. Both groups see potential value in AI, but students are further along in both practical familiarity and enthusiasm. In summary, the quantitative results show that students are ahead of faculty in both the skill-oriented and attitudinal aspects of AI readiness, echoing the generational digital divide discussed in the introduction. The statistical evidence of this gap ($p < .01$ for both comparisons) underscores the need for targeted interventions to raise faculty readiness, or risk a mismatch in how the two groups approach AI in the classroom.

4.2. Qualitative Findings: Themes from Focus Groups

The focus group discussions provided rich context and explanations for the patterns observed in the survey. Participants articulated both their enthusiasm and their worries about AI in ELT, often drawing from personal experiences. We organize the qualitative findings under four main themes, integrating student (“S#”) and faculty (“T#”) voices. Where relevant, we also note how these themes correspond to the quantitative results.

1. Perceived Benefits of AI for ELT: Both students and faculty identified multiple ways AI could enhance language education, reflecting a generally positive outlook on why integrating AI is worthwhile. Students were especially enthusiastic about AI as a learning aid. For example, one student said, “*ChatGPT is like having a tutor on demand – if I don’t understand something, I can ask it anytime*” (S3). Others mentioned using AI-based translation or dictionary apps to quickly look up unknown words, which they felt improved their independent learning. A female student from a rural area shared, “*In my village school, we had no native speakers to practice with, but now I can use an AI chatbot to practice my English speaking. It’s not perfect, but it’s better than nothing!*” (S7). This suggests AI tools can provide access to linguistic resources that were previously scarce, potentially democratizing learning opportunities for provincial students – a significant benefit in the Azerbaijani context. Faculty also acknowledged benefits: “*AI can automate some of the drudgery – like grading quizzes or checking grammar – which would free up my time to focus on more creative teaching tasks*” (T4). Several teachers were intrigued by AI-driven personalization: “*If an AI app could give each student exercises tailored to their level, that would help us manage mixed-ability classes*” (T2). These comments indicate that, conceptually, faculty see AI as a support tool that could augment their teaching by handling routine tasks or providing extra student practice. This dovetails with TAM’s perceived usefulness construct: many participants perceive AI as useful for improving engagement and efficiency, which likely contributed to the moderately high mindset readiness scores (though faculty may not yet feel fully confident in realizing these benefits themselves).

2. Confidence and Competence (Self-Efficacy): A prominent theme was differing levels of self-confidence in using AI. Students generally projected high self-efficacy with technology. They described themselves as “*quick learners*” with new apps. “*We grew up with technology. If there’s a new app or AI, I just play with it and figure it out,*” said one student (S2), and others around nodded in agreement. Even though many had only recently started using AI tools, they did not seem intimidated by them. This aligns with the survey finding that students rated themselves highly on tech readiness. However, a few students noted that knowing how to use AI effectively for learning was a

different matter: *"Sure, I can use Google or YouTube, and ChatGPT I tried for fun – but I'm not sure I'll always use it in the best way for studying. Sometimes I ask homework questions straight, which might be cheating,"* admitted one honest student (S6). This points to a nuance: students are confident operating the tools, but not always confident in the academic strategies for using them ethically and productively. In contrast, faculty expressed lower self-efficacy and a strong desire for training. *"I'm not very tech-savvy – I worry I will press the wrong button or something,"* one older teacher laughed (T5), implying a lack of confidence. Another confessed, *"My students probably know more about these things than I do. It's a bit embarrassing to say, but I would need a basic training on how these AI tools work"* (T1). This sentiment – that students are ahead in tech knowledge – came up repeatedly and indeed aligns with the very premise of our study. Younger faculty (those in their 20s or early 30s) were notably more confident; one said, *"I've played around with ChatGPT, and I can see how to use it for generating discussion questions or getting ideas"* (T3), reflecting a mindset closer to the students'. However, the older, more experienced instructors seemed least confident, mirroring a point noted in other research that veteran teachers can feel threatened by new tech. Overall, this theme helps explain the gap in technological readiness scores: student participants exhibited a can-do attitude toward tech exploration, whereas faculty (on average older) expressed greater hesitancy about their capabilities. Both groups recognized the need to improve competence – students wanted to learn how to use AI *properly* for their studies, and faculty wanted to learn the basics of AI tools, foreshadowing the "Support Needed" theme.

3. Concerns and Misgivings: Despite acknowledging benefits, participants raised significant concerns about AI integration, spanning ethical, pedagogical, and practical issues:

**Academic Integrity and Cheating:* This was the top concern for faculty. Every teacher in the focus group mentioned worries that students might use AI to cheat or bypass learning. *"I fear students will just use ChatGPT to write their essays and not learn to write themselves,"* said T2, echoing a widespread apprehension in academia since the advent of AI text generators. Some had already encountered suspiciously well-written assignments. *"Last term, I received two essays that were far beyond the students' level – I'm pretty sure they were AI-generated. It's hard to prove, though,"* shared T4. Faculty were concerned that existing plagiarism detectors were not yet fully capable of catching AI-generated text. Students in their focus group surprisingly shared some of these concerns: a few admitted they or peers had tried using AI to do homework. *"It can be tempting... I asked ChatGPT to draft a literature essay. It gave a decent essay, but I felt I didn't learn anything doing that,"* one student (S1) confessed. Other students agreed that relying on AI for answers could become a crutch: *"If we just copy, we won't improve our skills"* (S5). These discussions reveal an acute awareness of the ethical tightrope. Both groups want to maintain academic honesty, but they clearly see the risk of misuse. This likely contributes to some faculty holding back on embracing AI (hence lower mindset readiness for some). It also suggests that even students – despite their willingness to use AI – recognize the need for clear guidelines, which connects to the "Support Needed" theme (Theme 4).

**Accuracy and Trustworthiness of AI:* Several participants pointed out that AI tools are not infallible. *"Google Translate can be wrong; it can give weird translations that don't fit context,"* noted S8, illustrating that students know AI outputs can be flawed. Similarly, a teacher recounted, *"I tested ChatGPT with a grammar question, and it gave an incorrect explanation. Imagine if I hadn't known – I might have taught wrong information"* (T6). This concern about AI's reliability made some faculty cautious: if they can't trust the tool's content, they'd rather not use it in class without verification. Students also said they sometimes doubted if an AI's answer was correct, especially for nuanced language or culture-specific content. The phrase "AI hallucination" was not used by participants, but they described the phenomenon in lay terms. Thus, the need for human oversight was a common theme – participants felt AI should be a supplement rather than an authority.

**Pedagogical Role and Teacher Replacement Anxiety:* A few faculty voiced a deeper concern – whether AI might diminish the role of teachers. *“If everything is automated, what is left for the teacher to do? I worry about becoming obsolete,”* admitted T5, a veteran instructor. Others in the group responded by affirming the importance of the teacher’s role (e.g., motivating students, teaching critical thinking), but the underlying anxiety was evident. This relates to professional identity: experienced educators want to be sure that integrating AI will assist rather than replace their expertise. Students, for their part, generally did not want AI to replace teachers either. *“We still need our teachers to explain and to inspire us. AI is just a tool,”* said S4, which likely was reassuring to the faculty listeners. Nonetheless, the existential worry among teachers can affect their enthusiasm for AI – especially if they perceive (rightly or wrongly) that AI could encroach on their professional territory. Addressing this concern will require framing AI as a complement to teacher-led pedagogy (as noted in similar research by Alharbi, 2025) and providing teachers with examples of AI serving as an aide rather than a replacement.

**Infrastructure and Access:* Some participants – especially in our regional context – mentioned practical constraints. *“The internet in my home village is sometimes too weak to use these advanced apps,”* explained S7, noting that not all students have equal access to the required technology. Others agreed that while on campus, connectivity is decent, off campus many rely on mobile data or shared family computers. Faculty added that classroom infrastructure is still catching up: *“We don’t always have smart classrooms or enough computers for students to use AI tools in class,”* noted T1. This concern aligns with an earlier finding that only a minority of participants had hands-on AI experience; the environment may not yet be conducive. Without stable internet and adequate devices, even willing teachers or students can’t practice using AI regularly, which in turn limits their readiness. Thus, external factors like infrastructure play a role in the readiness gap: urban students or those with personal laptops may forge ahead, while others are left behind. Both groups recognized these inequalities and implied that institutional support is needed to ensure more equitable access to AI tools.

In summary, the Concerns theme underscores why some faculty are hesitant (contributing to lower mindset readiness) – fear of cheating, lack of trust in AI’s accuracy, and uncertainty about their role – and also shows that students, while keen, share certain concerns, such as fairness and reliability. Notably, both groups desired solutions to these issues rather than outright rejection of AI. This proactive stance (wanting *guidance* and *policies* to mitigate concerns) leads directly into the final theme.

4. Support Needed (Training & Policy): When asked what would help them feel more ready to use AI, participants converged on two main needs: training opportunities and clear institutional guidelines.

Training: The Faculty were unanimous in their belief that they would benefit from workshops or courses on using AI in ELT. *“Even a basic training on how to incorporate AI tools into lesson plans would boost my confidence a lot,”* said T2. They suggested topics like understanding the capabilities and limitations of popular AI tools, learning to design assignments that incorporate AI (for example, having students use a translation tool and then critique its output), and technical how-tos (account setup, feature demonstrations). Some faculty mentioned they had attended general ICT training before (e.g., how to use learning management systems or classroom projectors) and hoped that AI training could be offered similarly. Students likewise expressed interest in learning how to use AI responsibly. *“We need guidance on how to use AI for learning without just cheating – maybe a seminar or an orientation from teachers,”* said S1. Another student (S5) added that many peers don’t even know the range of AI tools available, so workshops or even student-led tech clubs could help share knowledge. This enthusiasm for learning the “right way” to use AI is encouraging. It resonates with recommendations from other studies that both instructors and learners require upskilling for AI

readiness. Notably, students seemed to want their teachers to guide them in this – a point that faculty in the focus group acknowledged. As T3 put it, *“I realized in this discussion that students actually expect us to take the lead on how to use these tools effectively. That means I better educate myself first.”* This comment exemplifies how the focus group itself raised awareness: bridging the readiness gap will require empowering faculty through professional development, which in turn benefits students.

Guidelines and Policies: Both groups called for clearer rules from the university (and even the Ministry of Education) on AI usage. Students said they were uncertain about what was considered acceptable use. *“Some teachers say no AI at all, some encourage it for certain tasks. It’s confusing. We need a consistent policy,”* argued S2. There was consensus that a policy should outline when using AI is permitted vs. prohibited, and perhaps require disclosure (for instance, a student might be allowed to use a grammar checker for drafting an essay, but should note that they did so). Faculty likewise wanted institutional backing: *“We need an official stance. Otherwise, if I allow AI in my class but others ban it, it sends mixed messages,”* said T6. In their view, the process of developing these guidelines should involve stakeholders (teachers, students, IT experts) to ensure buy-in and practicality. The faculty felt this was an urgent need given the rapid uptake of AI by students. Many also suggested incorporating a module on digital ethics into the curriculum to help students learn about the appropriate use of AI and academic integrity (echoing recommendations in the literature to foster an ethical AI culture in education (Neff, Arciaga, & Burri, 2024)). While participants did not advocate banning AI, they wanted a framework to manage it. Indeed, they viewed clear guidelines as empowering: with rules in place, teachers and students would feel more comfortable using AI as a legitimate tool rather than something clandestine.

Infrastructure and Resources: A few support needs on the infrastructure side were also mentioned. These included ensuring reliable internet access across all campus areas, providing computer labs or lending devices to students who lack their own, and possibly having the university subscribe to certain educational AI platforms so they are freely available to the academic community. While not the main focus of discussion, such practical enablers were noted as important. For instance, even the best AI policy or training will falter if a teacher cannot actually access AI tools in the classroom due to technical limitations. Thus, participants felt that administrators should assess and upgrade infrastructure alongside the soft measures, like training and policy.

In essence, this Support Needed theme represents the “solution space” as envisioned by the participants. They are not suggesting abandoning AI; instead, both faculty and students want to be educated and guided on using AI well. This proactive attitude bodes well for future initiatives. It also answers part of RQ3: readiness is not just an individual trait but a condition that can be developed through systematic training and policy frameworks. As one faculty member aptly summarized, *“If we get proper training and have clear rules of use, I think most of us would be quite open to bringing AI into our teaching. We just don’t want to jump in blindfolded.”* (T4)

4.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Bringing the strands together, the qualitative findings help explain the quantitative patterns observed. Students’ higher technology readiness score is reflected in their self-reported ease of experimenting and their greater prior exposure to AI tools (as noted in the focus groups). Their familiarity likely stems from everyday technology use (smartphones, apps) and a fearless approach to trying new tools, as the students described. In contrast, faculty’s lower tech readiness aligns with their admitted lack of AI experience and lower self-efficacy. Qualitative data revealed that many faculty are aware of their limitations and, in some cases, look to students for tech tips, which aligns with their lower self-ratings of readiness.

The gap in mindset readiness (attitude and confidence) between students and teachers also maps onto focus group sentiments. Students showed optimism about AI's benefits and a clear desire to use it (reflected in their high willingness to adopt AI). Faculty expressed a more cautious optimism: while they see potential benefits, they also harbor doubts and fears that temper their enthusiasm. This mixed feeling explains why the faculty average was above neutral but not as high as the students'. The themes of Concerns and Support Needed particularly illustrate factors weighing on faculty mindsets – chiefly, worries about cheating and about their own ability to manage AI. In TAM terms, some faculty currently perceive the effort of integrating AI (learning new skills, managing risks) as outweighing its perceived usefulness, so they are not yet fully embracing it. Students, seeing immediate usefulness for learning (e.g., instant answers, practice opportunities), have fewer reservations, which raises their readiness scores.

There were also points of convergence and divergence between the quantitative and qualitative findings. Convergence: Both methods concur that a gap exists, with students ahead in readiness. Both also indicate that neither group is at an ideal readiness level – there are unmet needs on both sides. The survey showed only moderate scores (not extremely high) among students, and the focus groups indicated that students themselves have uncertainties about effective use. So, both data sources agree that improvement is needed for all, but especially for faculty. Divergence: The quantitative data alone might give the impression that all is well with the students (since their scores are relatively high). However, the qualitative data nuances this by revealing student concerns and potential misuses. For example, a student might rate themselves 4/5 on mindset readiness (thinking AI is useful), but still misuse it to shortcut an assignment, or lack knowledge of how to properly harness it. Without the qualitative piece, we might overlook the depth of faculty's ethical concerns or students' calls for guidance. Thus, the qualitative results added crucial context to the numbers and highlighted areas (like ethical use training) that purely quantitative measures don't capture.

In the following section, we further interpret these findings and discuss them in light of the theoretical framework, existing literature, and the local context of Azerbaijani higher education.

5. Discussion

Summary of Key Findings: Our study revealed a clear yet nuanced readiness gap between ELT students and faculty regarding AI integration. In our sample, students demonstrated higher technological familiarity and more positive attitudes toward using AI tools, whereas faculty reported limited experience and greater hesitation. Both groups recognized AI's educational value, but students felt more confident adopting it, while faculty voiced more concerns (e.g., about cheating or accuracy). Notably, over 60% of students had tried an AI application (such as translation apps), compared with far fewer faculty. This gap, as our title suggests, is a “mind the gap” situation – students are ahead of faculty in AI readiness on both skill and mindset dimensions.

5.1. Interpreting the Readiness Gap

These findings align with observations of a generational digital divide, now extending into AI. In broader higher education, students are “running laps around faculty” in their use of generative AI. Surveys show that over half of college students use AI to improve their work, yet only a small fraction of faculty feel confident using AI in teaching. Our study echoes this: students (often digital natives) adopt new tech more readily, while faculty (especially older faculty) lag in confidence and hands-on skill. Importantly, our data suggest the gap is not due to faculty rejecting AI's value – in fact, most NSU instructors agreed AI could be useful – but stems from differences in exposure, confidence, and support. Students have grown up with technology (informally learning new apps and translation tools), so they approach AI with less intimidation. Many have already used AI-driven learning apps like Duolingo or Google Translate, lowering the barrier to trying more advanced AI. Faculty, on the

other hand, did not “come of age” with these tools and need deliberate training to gain similar comfort.

The readiness gap can be interpreted through technology adoption models. In Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations terms, many students would be “early adopters” of educational AI, whereas some faculty fall into the “late majority” or “laggard” category who wait for clear evidence and support before fully embracing innovation. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) offers further insight: Students’ higher readiness implies they find AI tools both useful for learning and easy to use, which drives their positive attitude and intention to use AI. Faculty might, in principle, believe AI could be useful (hence generally favorable attitudes in theory), but if they perceive it as difficult to use (due to a lack of experience or fear of technical complications), their actual adoption remains low. In our context, faculty’s *perceived ease of use* is low – many felt uncomfortable or untrained – and this dampens their *perceived usefulness*, because they have not yet seen successful examples of AI integration in their own classrooms. This dynamic is consistent with TAM’s notion that ease of use influences acceptance. It also aligns with the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which recognizes factors like anxiety and facilitating conditions. Our faculty expressed anxiety about AI misuse and noted poor facilitating conditions (no clear policies, limited resources for training), all of which likely contribute to their hesitant stance. In short, students’ familiarity breeds confidence, whereas faculty’s lack of exposure breeds caution. Improving faculty’s comfort (e.g. via training) should therefore directly enhance their willingness to use AI.

It is important to clarify that our results do not paint faculty as technophobic or unwilling to change. On the contrary, most instructors we surveyed acknowledged AI’s potential benefits – an encouraging sign that with the right support, their readiness can improve. Context also matters: In some fields where AI is already embedded in professional practice, faculty have shown equal or even higher readiness than students. For example, in certain medical education settings where AI tools (such as diagnostic imaging software) are routine, educators might lead in AI adoption. By contrast, in our ELT context in Azerbaijan – where AI use in teaching is nascent – it is the students’ personal tech use that leads adoption. This context-dependency highlights that the readiness gap is not universal; it depends on how integral AI already is to a given domain. Our faculty’s lower AI experience simply reflects that English teaching here has not yet integrated AI tools, whereas students are experimenting on their own.

5.2. Comparisons with Prior Research

Our findings resonate with emerging literature on AI in language education. A study by Neff, Arciaga, and Burri (2024) found EFL teachers’ views on the ethical use of AI varied by demographics – younger teachers and male teachers were slightly more accepting of AI than older or female teachers. We observed a similar pattern: at NSU, younger faculty tended to be more positive and curious about AI, while some veteran teachers were more skeptical, especially regarding ethics and academic honesty. Neff et al. conclude that institutions should consider such demographic differences when implementing AI guidelines. This supports our recommendation that clear policies and training are needed to reassure more hesitant educators (often older staff) that AI can be used responsibly. Indeed, a recent international survey noted that the vast majority of universities have not yet set formal AI policies, even though nearly 80% have begun offering faculty training workshops to address concerns. The lack of official guidance can leave faculty uncertain how to proceed; providing that structure (e.g., honor codes for AI use, curriculum integration plans) would likely ease anxieties.

Another relevant study from Saudi Arabia by Alharbi (2025) examined ESL instructors’ perceptions of AI in higher education. It reported that highly experienced teachers were among the slowest to adopt AI, largely because they feared AI might undermine their professional identity or

replace aspects of their teaching role. This mirrors comments from our senior faculty who worried that relying on ChatGPT could diminish the teacher's authority or lead students to bypass learning. Alharbi's work also highlighted a duality: those same teachers recognized that if used properly, AI could alleviate routine workload (grading, administrative tasks), potentially reducing burnout. We saw hints of this ambivalence at NSU – for example, one teacher liked the idea of an AI tool that could grade quizzes or draft lesson materials, yet in the next breath, they expressed concern about becoming too dependent on it. Such ambivalence is common in early stages of tech adoption. Alharbi's recommendation was to frame AI as a teaching assistant rather than a replacement, emphasizing that teacher-centric AI integration can preserve educators' autonomy while offloading tedious tasks. This approach – positioning AI as a tool that *supports* teachers – could be key to getting experienced faculty on board.

Students' perspectives in literature also align with our findings. Pham & Le (2024), who surveyed Vietnamese students using ChatGPT for language learning, found that learners viewed AI tools as engaging and useful for generating ideas or improving grammar. Importantly, they warned that over-reliance on AI can limit students' critical thinking and creativity, suggesting a balance between AI use and traditional learning. Our student focus groups echoed this: while students were enthusiastic about AI (some used it to practice speaking or to get feedback on writing), they themselves noted the danger of letting AI do all the work – “if we use it to do everything, we won't actually learn,” as one student put it. This shows a healthy awareness among students that matches concerns in research about maintaining authentic learning. Another study of English majors in Vietnam likewise reported very positive attitudes toward AI tools for learning, coupled with a desire for guidance on proper use to avoid pitfalls. The students in that study saw ChatGPT as a useful helper for writing and ideas, but felt that teachers should guide them on how and when to use it so that it remains a learning aid rather than a cheating shortcut. This directly parallels what our students requested – they want their instructors to teach them the “right way” to use AI for education. In sum, across contexts like Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and others, we see a common pattern: enthusiasm for AI's benefits, tempered by concerns about ethics and overuse, and a call for clear guidelines. Our study adds to this by providing evidence from Azerbaijan, a context not yet represented in the international literature.

5.3. Context and Unique Contribution

The Azerbaijani higher education context provides unique nuances to these findings. Traditionally, education in Azerbaijan (and the region) has emphasized teacher-led instruction, fixed curricula, and high-stakes exams. The introduction of AI, which enables more autonomous, student-driven learning, represents a significant cultural shift in classroom dynamics. This may explain why some faculty in our study were instinctively resistant: embracing AI might feel like ceding some control or departing from established methods. Our focus group discussions captured this tension: teachers wanted to maintain their authoritative role and ensure students still develop skills without “cheating,” yet they also realized that they must adapt to the changing digital landscape. Over time, if implemented well, AI could actually elevate the teacher's role to that of a mentor or creative guide (as routine tasks are handled by AI, teachers could focus on higher-order skills and personalized coaching). But reaching that point will require building trust in technology and supportive institutional policies so that teachers feel secure in integrating AI.

For students in Azerbaijan, especially those from rural or under-resourced areas, AI tools could be an equalizer. Many of our student participants come from villages where access to native English speakers or extra learning materials is limited. They saw AI as “*opening a window*” to resources and practice opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have – for example, one student used an AI chatbot to practice speaking in English because they had no one local to converse with. This highlights AI's potential to democratize learning opportunities. However, there is a flip side: without intentional integration, AI might also exacerbate inequalities. Tech-savvy students or those with better internet

access might leap ahead by leveraging AI, while others could be left behind if they lack awareness or guidance. About 40% of our student survey respondents had *not* used any AI tool at all – possibly due to lack of exposure or access. This suggests a need for universities to introduce AI in a structured way (e.g., through coursework or assignments that involve AI) so that all students gain experience under supervision, rather than only the self-selecting few. Our context underscores that AI adoption in education is not just about individual readiness, but also about infrastructure and policy at the institutional and national level. Azerbaijan is actively investing in digital education (e.g., government initiatives to improve connectivity and digital skills), and our study provides timely insight into how ready the key stakeholders (teachers and learners) are to embrace AI as part of that digital transformation.

Notably, to our knowledge, this is one of the first studies examining AI readiness in Azerbaijan’s higher education, and specifically in English language teaching. This gives our findings a unique contribution: we are providing empirical data and voices from a context that has been underrepresented in the global discussion on AI in education. Our results complement recent reports such as the World Bank’s assessment of higher education in Azerbaijan (2024), which highlighted the need for faculty training and the lack of clear strategies for technology integration in universities. By capturing both faculty and student perspectives, our study offers a more complete picture of the on-the-ground situation. In doing so, we contribute to the growing body of literature that argues successful ed-tech integration is not primarily about the technology itself, but about human factors – the attitudes, skills, fears, and support systems of the people expected to use that technology. Our findings strongly reinforce that view: even the most advanced AI tool will not be effective in the classroom if faculty are uneasy about it or students misuse it. Thus, our study’s value lies in illuminating those human dimensions in a specific cultural context, providing insights that can guide both local policy and inform international comparisons.

5.4. Bridging the Gap: Implications and Recommendations

A central question arising from this study is how to bridge the readiness gap between students and faculty. Our findings point to several actionable implications:

- **Faculty Professional Development:** The top priority is to offer training and continuous support for faculty to build both technical skills and pedagogical strategies for AI use. This training should be hands-on and practical. For example, workshops could introduce an AI tool (say, a writing assistant or automatic quiz generator) and walk teachers through using it to accomplish a relevant task (like creating a vocabulary quiz or giving feedback on essays). By demonstrating quick wins – how AI can save time or enhance learning in manageable ways – such training can increase faculty’s perceived ease of use and usefulness of AI. It’s important that training also address faculty concerns: sessions on academic integrity (how to detect AI-generated work and how to redesign assessments to discourage cheating) and ethics (discussing issues of bias, accuracy, and appropriate use) will help reduce anxiety. Our faculty explicitly requested guidance on handling scenarios like students turning in AI-written assignments. Providing them with strategies (and perhaps detection tools) will build confidence that AI can be managed, not just feared. Ultimately, well-trained teachers are more likely to become comfortable adopters, narrowing the confidence gap between them and their students.
- **Student Guidance and AI Literacy:** Students may be ahead in using AI, but they still need direction to use it effectively and ethically. Institutions should incorporate AI literacy into student orientation or freshman seminars – basically, teach students what acceptable use of AI in coursework is and how to leverage AI without undermining their own learning. Since our students indicated a willingness to learn proper use, faculty can take advantage of this by openly discussing AI in class (e.g., a teacher might assign a task in which students use an AI tool and then reflect on what it helped with and where the student still needed to think critically). Some universities have started requiring

students to disclose AI assistance on assignments or have created honor code extensions specific to AI. Developing a clear policy on AI use for students, ideally with student input, would set a transparent standard: for instance, a policy might state that AI is allowed for preliminary research or practice exercises but not for final exam answers, and any AI-generated content in assignments must be cited. This kind of clarity would guide students to use AI as a learning aid rather than a shortcut, and ensure that those less familiar with AI can catch up with their instructors' guidance. In short, students need to be taught "when and how" to use AI as part of becoming responsible, autonomous learners.

- **Institutional Policies and Support:** At the administrative level, having clear institutional policies on AI will empower both faculty and students. If the university establishes, for example, that "AI tools may be used to enhance learning outcomes, under these conditions..." then faculty won't fear that they are alone in deciding what's allowed. Consistency is key – our participants noted that without a policy, one teacher might ban AI outright while another encourages it, which confuses students. A coherent policy could cover: permissible uses of AI, requirements for disclosure, guidance on academic integrity, and a commitment to providing necessary resources (such as software or training). Additionally, institutions should invest in the infrastructure that supports AI integration: ensuring reliable internet access, providing licenses or access to recommended AI platforms, and maybe creating a support hub (an "AI integration team" or point person who can help faculty troubleshoot or brainstorm AI-enhanced teaching ideas). It's worth noting that the global academic community is moving towards adaptation rather than outright bans – for instance, some academic journals now ask authors to disclose AI use in writing rather than forbidding it, emphasizing transparency and ethical use. Universities can take a similar approach: embrace AI with guidelines rather than ignore or prohibit it. Our data strongly suggest that neither faculty nor students want a ban; they want leadership and guidance on how to harness AI appropriately.

Finally, a conceptual implication is the development of what we might call "AI-enhanced TPACK" for educators (TPACK refers to Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge). Right now, many of our faculty have solid pedagogical and content knowledge in ELT, but their technological knowledge, especially specific to AI, is lacking. The goal of professional development would be to help teachers blend these areas – to understand, for example, how an AI writing assistant or chatbot can be integrated into a language lesson in a pedagogically sound way. As teachers experiment and learn, they will start to see how AI tools align with their curriculum goals (e.g., using an AI grammar checker not just to correct students' writing but to generate insights into common errors that the teacher can address in class). Achieving this integration (true "AI TPACK") will take time, but our study identifies the starting point: a willingness among faculty to learn, and a *need* for formal support to do so. Students, on their side, should develop their own form of AI literacy – being aware of what AI can and cannot do, learning to critically evaluate AI outputs, and understanding ethical boundaries. Encouragingly, we saw some students already thinking this way (questioning the accuracy of AI answers and acknowledging that AI shouldn't replace practice). Educators can build on that by incorporating reflection exercises whenever AI is used (ask students, "How did the AI help you? Where did *your* own ideas come into play? Did the AI make any mistakes?"). In essence, bridging the gap will require upskilling faculty, educating students on proper use, and establishing a supportive framework so that AI becomes a beneficial part of the learning ecosystem rather than a point of division.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. It is important to recognize these limitations and how they suggest directions for future research:

- **Scope of Sample:** Our data come from a single university (NSU) and specifically one department (English Language Teaching) within that university. Thus, the findings may not be

generalizable to all of Azerbaijan's higher education or other disciplines. Universities in Baku or private institutions might have different levels of technology adoption. Even within NSU, say, the Computer Science department could have very different AI readiness than the ELT department. Future studies should expand to multiple universities – including urban vs. rural institutions, and diverse fields – to see if the student–faculty readiness gap holds broadly or if it varies by context. Cross-disciplinary comparisons (e.g., comparing AI readiness in language departments vs. science departments) would be especially enlightening.

- **Sample Size:** The faculty sample (N=16) was quite small. Although this reflected the size of the department, it limits our ability to draw strong statistical conclusions or examine subgroup differences among faculty. There could be important differences by age or years of experience that we simply couldn't analyze with such a small N. Similarly, while the student sample (N=150) was larger, we did not deeply analyze differences like year of study or prior tech experience. Future research with larger sample sizes should examine whether factors such as teacher age, teaching experience, or student year (freshman vs senior) moderate AI readiness. It would also be useful to investigate gender, since some studies (like Neff et al.) suggest gender may play a role in AI perceptions. Our initial look didn't show significant gender differences, but a larger study could explore this more thoroughly.

- **Self-Reported Data:** Our measures of readiness and attitude relied on self-report surveys and focus group discussions. Self-report can introduce biases – participants might overestimate or underestimate their skills, and in focus groups, they might give answers influenced by what they think researchers or peers expect. For instance, students might not have openly admitted to using AI in prohibited ways if a faculty member was present. We also did not include any objective test of AI proficiency or a demonstration task. Future studies could incorporate objective assessments or observations – for example, ask participants to perform a task using an AI tool and evaluate their actual ability, or observe a class session where AI is integrated to see how comfortable participants truly are. Such data would complement self-perceptions and give a more holistic picture of “readiness in action.”

- **Focus on Readiness vs. Outcomes:** Our study purposefully examined readiness (skills, attitudes, intentions) rather than the outcomes of AI usage. Thus, we cannot claim that higher readiness leads to better learning outcomes, or that integrating AI will improve language proficiency – those are hypotheses that remain to be tested. Future research should move into the implementation phase: for example, design an intervention where some classes use an AI tool in their coursework, and others do not, then compare outcomes like student learning gains or teacher workload. Longitudinal research would also be valuable – following the same faculty and students over time. It would be insightful to see, say, a year from now, whether faculty who received training have increased their AI usage and how their attitudes shifted, or how a new incoming cohort of students (who might have even more AI exposure in high school) changes the dynamic. Given how fast AI technology and its adoption in education are evolving (recall that ChatGPT went from novelty to widespread use in a matter of months), ongoing research is needed to keep the picture up to date. What we consider “ready” today might change as tools become more user-friendly or as norms around AI in academia solidify.

In conclusion, this study provides an initial evidence-based look at how ready ELT faculty and students are to integrate AI into teaching and learning in Azerbaijan, highlighting a gap that needs addressing. The findings underscore that successful integration will depend on human factors – ensuring that educators are supported and trained, and that students are guided in responsible use. We hope future research will build on these insights, exploring broader contexts and the impact of closing this readiness gap on educational practice and outcomes. Our work is a starting point for

conversation and action on bridging the divide between educators and learners in the AI-enhanced classrooms of tomorrow.

6. Conclusion

The integration of AI into ELT and broader higher education is inevitable and already underway. This study contributes by illuminating that preparation levels currently differ between key stakeholders – a gap that, if left unattended, could lead to challenges in implementation. However, our findings also carry an optimistic message: both faculty and students are, in their own ways, *ready to become more ready*. Students' enthusiasm and teachers' openness to support indicate that, with deliberate steps, the gap can be narrowed. By investing in training, establishing clear guidelines, and encouraging a culture of shared learning around AI, educational institutions in Azerbaijan (and similar contexts) can ensure that AI augments rather than disrupts the educational process.

For Azerbaijani higher education policymakers, the lesson is clear – mind the gap now, and bridge it – so that AI-integrated ELT (and education in general) can thrive. When faculty and students are on the same page, empowered with both the skills and understanding to use AI appropriately, AI becomes not a buzzword or threat, but a practical tool jointly leveraged to improve language education outcomes. This alignment ultimately supports the country's strategic goals of digital transformation and human capital development, positioning Azerbaijan's education system to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by AI while mitigating its risks.

7. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to different stakeholders in order to improve readiness for AI integration and bridge the faculty–student gap:

- Policymakers and Administrators:

Implement faculty development programs on AI: Universities (and the Ministry of Education) should provide ongoing professional development for instructors focused on educational AI. Workshops, hands-on training sessions, or certification courses can build faculty technical skills and confidence in using AI tools. Creating communities of practice where tech-savvy teachers share experiences can also help.

Update curriculum and policies to include AI literacy: Develop clear institutional or national guidelines on acceptable AI use in academia. For example, a policy might permit AI as a support tool for learning (idea generation, language practice) but not for completing graded assignments, and require students to disclose any AI assistance. Involving both teachers and students in crafting these guidelines will ensure buy-in. Additionally, incorporate AI-related topics (including ethics and digital citizenship) into the curriculum – for instance, add a module on AI tools and their responsible use in existing ICT or research skills courses.

Invest in infrastructure and resources: Assess and upgrade the technological infrastructure to support AI use. This could include ensuring high-speed internet access across campus (including dormitories), providing computer labs or device lending programs for students who need them, and obtaining institutional licenses for useful AI-powered educational software. Such investments will create the necessary conditions (“facilitating conditions” in UTAUT terms) for both faculty and students to actually use AI tools in practice.

- Teacher Training Programs (Pre-service Education): Pre-service teacher education programs (universities training future teachers) should integrate AI-related training into their curricula. Aspiring teachers need to learn *how* to incorporate AI in teaching before they enter the workforce. For

example, teacher education courses on educational technology should now include modules on AI in education – covering both the use of AI tools (like language learning apps, automated grading systems) and the pedagogical and ethical considerations. Assignments could have student-teachers design lesson plans that integrate an AI tool or critically evaluate a scenario of AI use in the classroom. By graduating new teachers who are already familiar with AI's educational applications, schools will gain faculty who can be change agents and help their colleagues adapt.

- Current Faculty (In-service Teachers):

Start small and seek support: Instructors who are less experienced with AI can begin by experimenting with one AI tool in a low-stakes setting. For instance, try using a translation app or a chatbot in a single class activity as a pilot. Starting small allows faculty to gradually build confidence. Teachers should also take advantage of peer support – e.g., ask colleagues who are more tech-savvy for tips or even invite a knowledgeable student to demonstrate an AI application to the class under the teacher's guidance. Such collaborative learning can demystify AI and reduce anxiety.

Co-create class rules for AI use: Teachers should openly discuss AI usage with their students and jointly establish ground rules at the start of a course. Our findings show both students and faculty have concerns about misuse; involving students in setting guidelines (for example, agreeing that *"Using Google Translate for single words is okay, but not for entire essays"* and that any AI use in assignments should be acknowledged) will make expectations clear. Co-creating these norms gives students a sense of responsibility and ensures everyone understands the ethical boundaries. This approach operationalizes academic integrity policies in a practical, classroom-specific way.

Leverage AI as a teaching assistant: Rather than viewing AI as a threat, faculty can use it to their advantage to save time and enhance instruction. For example, an instructor might use an AI tool to generate a first draft of quiz questions or grammar exercises, then refine them as needed – thereby speeding up lesson prep. AI writing assistants can quickly provide feedback on student drafts (grammar, coherence), which the teacher can then review, allowing the teacher to focus on higher-order feedback (ideas, argumentation). By incorporating AI for routine or preliminary tasks, teachers free up time to concentrate on more creative and interactive aspects of teaching. Sharing success stories of such use (e.g., in departmental meetings or teacher forums) can inspire other faculty and build a positive narrative of "AI as helper" among staff.

- Students and Learners:

Provide AI orientation and workshops: Universities (through student support services or libraries) should offer training sessions for students on how to use AI tools effectively *and* ethically for learning. These workshops can cover topics like using AI for language practice or research (for example, using ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas or get explanations), while warning against academically dishonest uses (such as submitting AI-generated work). Real examples can be used to show the difference between acceptable assistance and plagiarism. By educating students on best practices and potential pitfalls, institutions can cultivate more responsible AI users.

Encourage peer mentoring and knowledge sharing: Students who are adept with AI can be encouraged to help their peers. Universities might facilitate the formation of student-led tech clubs or interest groups where students can demonstrate new tools, discuss their experiences, and learn from each other. Peer mentorship programs could also be established – for instance, pairing students who have tech expertise with those who are less confident. Not only does this elevate overall student skill levels, but it also fosters a community norm of using AI as a learning aid rather than a cheating shortcut. When students themselves promote good practices, it can be a powerful influence on their classmates.

Develop critical thinking about AI outputs: Instructors should integrate activities that strengthen students' critical evaluation of information from AI. As our participants noted, AI tools can sometimes produce incorrect or misleading answers. Classroom exercises could include, for example, having students use an AI translator or writing tool for a task and then collectively analyzing any errors or inconsistencies in the AI's output. Such reflection helps students learn not to accept AI-generated information at face value. Developing this critical eye will make students more discerning, self-regulated learners. This recommendation aligns with recent literature emphasizing the need for critical digital literacy in the age of AI (Neff et al., 2024). By learning to question and verify AI outputs, students can use AI as a tool to enhance learning without becoming overly dependent on it.

Implementing the above suggestions can help create a more supportive ecosystem for AI integration in ELT. In summary, building capacity through training (for both faculty and students), establishing clear guidelines and policies, improving infrastructure, and fostering a collaborative culture around AI use are key steps. These measures, taken together, would help bridge the readiness gap identified in this study and ensure that both educators and learners in Azerbaijan are equipped to harness AI's potential in language education responsibly and effectively.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Hasan Alisoy conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, conducted data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Dana Amirbayeva contributed to data collection, statistical analysis, and visualization. Zarifa Sadigzade performed the literature review, assisted with data synthesis, and contributed to manuscript editing. Yasin Babazade contributed to survey design, data entry, and final proofreading.

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