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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing AI Awareness through Professional Development: A Qualitative Case Study of a Moroccan EFL Teacher

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| ABSTRACT
The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational contexts has significantly transformed discussions surrounding teaching practices and teacher professional development. While existing research frequently focuses on technological implementation and institutional innovation, teachers' lived experiences of engaging with AI remain underexplored, particularly within language education. This qualitative case study investigates one language teacher's journey toward AI awareness and integration within professional development practices. Using purposeful sampling, the study focuses on a teacher who actively engages with AI-informed professional learning. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a reflective narrative, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the participant's perceptions, experiences, and meaning-making processes related to AI. Thematic analysis revealed that the participant's engagement with AI evolved from initial curiosity about technological functionality to a more reflective and pedagogically informed understanding of AI as a supportive professional resource. The findings further indicate that the participant viewed AI as a tool for enhancing creativity, lesson preparation, and pedagogical flexibility while simultaneously maintaining critical awareness regarding authenticity, ethical responsibility, and teacher autonomy. The study highlights the importance of positioning AI within reflective and human-centered approaches to teacher professional development rather than viewing it solely as a technical innovation. By foregrounding a teacher's voice, this research contributes to current discussions on AI, teacher agency, and ethical professional learning in contemporary educational contexts.

| KEYWORDS
Artificial intelligence; professional development; teacher agency; AI awareness; qualitative case study

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly influential within educational environments, shaping contemporary discussions related to teaching, learning, and professional development. Educational institutions worldwide continue to integrate AI-driven technologies into instructional and professional practices, encouraging teachers to engage with emerging digital tools as part of their ongoing professional learning (Luckin et al., 2016). Within this evolving context, teachers are expected not only to adapt to technological innovation but also to critically evaluate how these technologies influence pedagogy, creativity, and professional identity.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the growing role of AI in supporting lesson planning, instructional organization, content generation, and personalized learning (Holmes et al., 2019). However, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on

technological implementation and institutional perspectives, often overlooking teachers' lived experiences and reflective engagement with AI in professional development contexts. Selwyn (2019) argues that educational technologies should not merely be examined through their technical functions but also through their ethical, pedagogical, and social implications.

Within language education, professional development requires continuous creativity, flexibility, and adaptation to learners' diverse linguistic and cultural needs. AI tools increasingly offer opportunities to support language teachers in designing activities, generating examples, and exploring innovative instructional approaches (Kohnke et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the integration of AI also raises important concerns related to teacher autonomy, authenticity, pedagogical judgment, and ethical responsibility (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Teacher professional development is increasingly understood as a reflective and transformative process rather than a series of isolated training activities (Avalos, 2011). From this perspective, teachers' engagement with AI cannot be reduced to technical competence alone. Instead, it involves processes of reflection, meaning-making, and negotiation between innovation and pedagogical values.

This study therefore explores one language teacher's journey toward AI awareness within professional development. Rather than examining AI solely as a technological phenomenon, the study focuses on how a teacher experiences, interprets, and critically integrates AI into her professional learning practices. By foregrounding the teacher's voice, this research contributes to a more human-centered understanding of AI integration in contemporary teacher professional development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence in Education: Emerging Opportunities and Critical Concerns

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most transformative developments in contemporary education, influencing teaching, learning, assessment, and professional practice. However, scholarly discussions reveal both optimism and caution regarding its educational integration.

A foundational study by **Zawacki-Richter, Marín, Bond, and Gouverneur (2019)** titled *"Systematic Review of Research on Artificial Intelligence Applications in Higher Education: Where Are the Educators?"* examined 146 empirical studies on AI in education published between 2007 and 2018. Using a **systematic review methodology**, the researchers aimed to identify dominant research trends and gaps in AI-related educational scholarship. Their findings revealed that most studies focused on technological systems such as adaptive learning, intelligent tutoring, and profiling, while educators' experiences and perspectives were significantly underrepresented. The authors explicitly called for more research focusing on teachers' roles, perceptions, and engagement with AI.

Similarly, **Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019)** in *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Promises and Implications for Teaching and Learning* provided a conceptual analysis of AI's educational possibilities. Their work aimed to explore how AI could transform teaching and learning processes. The report concluded that AI has the potential to support personalization, automate repetitive tasks, and expand access to learning resources. However, the authors warned that educational innovation should remain pedagogically meaningful rather than technologically driven.

More critically, **Selwyn (2019)** in *Should Robots Replace Teachers? AI and the Future of Education* examined the sociopolitical implications of AI in education through a critical theoretical lens. Rather than presenting AI as neutral innovation, Selwyn argued that AI technologies must be understood within broader educational power structures, emphasizing concerns related to automation, surveillance, inequality, and the reduction of human educational agency.

Together, these studies establish that while AI offers substantial opportunities, research has disproportionately emphasized systems and institutional innovation rather than educators' lived experiences.

2.2 AI and Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development has increasingly been reconceptualized as a continuous, reflective, and context-sensitive process rather than isolated training events (Avalos, 2011). Within this evolving understanding, AI has emerged as a potential resource for supporting teachers' professional learning.

A recent empirical study by **Trust, Whalen, and Mouza (2023)** titled *"Educators' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Teaching and Learning"* explored educators' views on emerging generative AI technologies. Using a **survey-based exploratory design**, the researchers investigated teachers' perceptions of the opportunities and risks associated with generative

AI. Their findings indicated that educators viewed AI as potentially useful for brainstorming, lesson planning, and instructional support, while simultaneously expressing concerns regarding accuracy, ethics, and overdependence.

In language education specifically, **Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou (2023)** in their study *"ChatGPT for Language Teaching and Learning"* examined the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT in language education through a **conceptual pedagogical analysis**. Their study aimed to explore possible applications of generative AI for language teaching. The authors found that ChatGPT could support language educators in material generation, communicative practice, and instructional creativity. However, they strongly emphasized the necessity of teacher mediation, critical use, and pedagogical judgment.

These studies suggest that AI may enrich teacher professional development by supporting creativity and efficiency. However, they primarily focus on functionality and general educator perceptions rather than the lived experiences of individual teachers navigating AI integration.

2.3 Teacher Agency, Professional Identity, and Technology Integration

Understanding teachers' engagement with AI requires attention to teacher agency and professional identity. Teachers do not simply adopt technological tools passively; rather, they actively interpret, negotiate, and adapt innovation according to their pedagogical beliefs and professional contexts.

Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) in *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach* developed a theoretical framework explaining how teacher agency emerges through interactions between individual capacities, contextual conditions, and professional judgment. Although not focused specifically on AI, this work remains highly relevant because it emphasizes teachers as active agents rather than passive recipients of educational change.

Similarly, **Beauchamp and Thomas (2009)** in *"Understanding Teacher Identity: An Overview of Issues in the Literature and Implications for Teacher Education"* conducted a conceptual review examining teacher identity formation. Their analysis demonstrated that professional identity is dynamic, continuously shaped by beliefs, experiences, and contextual influences. This perspective helps explain why teachers' engagement with AI may vary according to their pedagogical values and professional self-understanding.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that AI integration should be examined not merely as technological adoption but as a reflective process involving identity negotiation and professional decision-making.

2.4 Ethical Dimensions of AI Integration in Education

Ethical concerns surrounding AI have become increasingly prominent in educational scholarship. Questions of authenticity, intellectual responsibility, bias, and human agency remain central to discussions about responsible AI integration.

A significant policy-oriented study by **Holmes et al. (2022)** titled *Artificial Intelligence and Education: A Critical View Through the Lens of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law* critically examined AI in education through ethical and human rights frameworks. The report argued that while AI can support innovation, its integration must be guided by transparency, fairness, accountability, and protection of human agency.

Likewise, **UNESCO (2021)** in *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* emphasized the need for ethical governance of AI technologies, highlighting issues such as human oversight, inclusivity, privacy, and social responsibility. Although broader than education alone, these principles strongly inform responsible educational AI use. These ethical perspectives are especially relevant for teachers, whose work depends on empathy, contextual sensitivity, and authentic human interaction.

The reviewed literature demonstrates growing scholarly interest in AI in education. However, three important gaps remain.

First, much of the research prioritizes technological systems and institutional implementation over teachers' lived experiences.

Second, studies exploring AI in teacher professional development often focus on general perceptions or conceptual possibilities rather than in-depth qualitative accounts.

Third, limited research specifically examines how individual language teachers experience AI awareness as part of their professional learning journey.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a qualitative case study of one language teacher's reflective engagement with AI in professional development, foregrounding teacher voice, agency, and ethical meaning-making.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore one language teacher's experiences and reflections regarding AI in professional development. Purposeful sampling was used to select a participant who actively engages with AI tools within her professional learning practices. The participant is a language teacher with experience teaching Arabic and English in multicultural educational environments.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a reflective narrative. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow flexibility while enabling in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview focused on the participant's experiences with AI, motivations for engaging with AI tools, pedagogical reflections, ethical concerns, and perceptions of professional identity.

In addition to the interview, the participant produced a reflective narrative describing her journey toward AI awareness and integration in professional development. Reflective narratives are valuable in qualitative research because they provide insight into participants' personal reflections, evolving perspectives, and lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative focused on the participant's encounters with AI, classroom experiences, reflections on creativity and authenticity, and perceptions regarding the future role of AI in teaching.

3.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The interview transcript and reflective narrative were read multiple times in order to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and interpretive meanings related to AI awareness and professional development.

Initial codes were generated from significant statements and recurring concepts emerging from the data. These codes were then grouped into broader themes reflecting the participant's experiences, reflections, and perceptions regarding AI integration. The final analysis resulted in four major themes: AI as a supportive professional resource, critical and reflective AI integration, preserving teacher creativity and authenticity, and AI, professional identity, and teacher agency.

Thematic analysis was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to identify patterns of meaning across qualitative data while maintaining sensitivity to participants' subjective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Findings

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview and reflective narrative generated four interrelated themes that illuminate the participant's experiences of engaging with artificial intelligence in professional development. These themes reflect the participant's perception of AI as a pedagogical support tool, her critically mediated engagement with technological resources, her concerns regarding the preservation of creativity and authenticity in teaching, and the ways in which AI awareness intersects with professional identity and teacher agency.

4.1 AI as a Supportive Professional Resource

A prominent theme emerging from the data was the participant's perception of artificial intelligence as a supportive professional resource that enhances pedagogical preparation and instructional creativity. Across both the interview and reflective narrative, the participant consistently described AI as a tool that facilitates lesson planning, generates instructional ideas, and supports the organization of teaching materials.

Rather than viewing AI as a substitute for professional expertise, the participant positioned it as an auxiliary pedagogical resource that assists in reducing repetitive preparatory tasks while allowing greater focus on adapting instruction to students' needs. This practical orientation was particularly evident in her reflections on lesson design.

As she explained:

"AI tools could assist in generating illustrative examples, suggesting activity ideas, and helping structure lesson plans more efficiently."

This perception suggests that AI was primarily valued for its capacity to support efficiency and pedagogical experimentation. The participant described using AI to explore alternative explanations for linguistic concepts, generate discussion prompts, and organize instructional materials in more effective ways.

A particularly meaningful example emerged from her account of preparing a lesson centered on descriptive language and literary imagination. She explained that AI assisted her in generating descriptive examples that enhanced classroom engagement:

"I wanted students to develop vocabulary related to visual description and emotional expression. AI helped me generate example sentences and short descriptive passages that could help students visualize meanings more clearly."

This experience demonstrates that AI functioned not merely as an organizational tool, but also as a source of pedagogical inspiration that enriched creative lesson design.

Overall, the data suggest that the participant perceived AI as a supportive professional companion capable of expanding instructional possibilities while preserving teacher control over pedagogical decisions.

4.2 Critical and Reflective AI Integration

Although the participant expressed openness toward AI, her engagement with technology was not characterized by passive acceptance. Instead, the data revealed a consistently reflective and critically mediated approach to AI integration.

A recurring concern involved the reliability and pedagogical appropriateness of AI-generated content. The participant emphasized that technological outputs require careful evaluation before classroom use, particularly in language teaching contexts where accuracy, contextual sensitivity, and learner appropriateness are essential.

As she noted:

"One challenge was learning how to evaluate the accuracy and pedagogical relevance of AI-generated suggestions."

This statement reflects a conscious awareness that AI-generated resources are not inherently trustworthy or pedagogically appropriate. Rather than accepting AI outputs uncritically, the participant described a process of active filtering, adaptation, and professional judgment.

The participant also distinguished clearly between domains where AI could be useful and areas where human pedagogical expertise remained indispensable. AI was considered valuable during lesson preparation and idea generation, but inappropriate for tasks involving interpretive judgment, student evaluation, or classroom relational decision-making.

As she explained:

"When reflecting on my teaching experiences, evaluating student progress, or making pedagogical decisions about classroom interaction, I prefer to rely on my own professional judgment and experience."

This selective engagement suggests that the participant approached AI as a bounded support mechanism rather than a comprehensive educational solution.

Her reflections indicate that meaningful AI integration was grounded not in technological enthusiasm, but in continuous pedagogical scrutiny and reflective decision-making.

4.3 Preserving Teacher Creativity and Authenticity

A particularly significant theme concerned the preservation of creativity and authenticity in teaching. While the participant acknowledged the practical benefits of AI, she repeatedly emphasized that meaningful teaching remains fundamentally human, relational, and deeply shaped by personal pedagogical style.

The participant expressed concern that excessive dependence on AI might gradually weaken the creative and interpretive dimensions of teaching practice.

As she reflected:

"At times I have wondered whether using AI too frequently might reduce the personal creativity that is central to teaching."

This concern reveals an important tension between efficiency and originality. Although AI can support content generation and idea development, the participant perceived creativity as something emerging from human interpretation, imagination, and lived teaching experience.

This perspective was even more clearly articulated in her broader understanding of teaching:

"Teaching is not simply about delivering information; it is about understanding students, responding to their needs, and creating a supportive learning environment."

This quotation highlights the participant's conception of teaching as a relational and context-sensitive practice rather than a purely technical act of content transmission.

The issue of authenticity also emerged strongly in the reflective narrative. The participant emphasized that teachers develop highly individualized ways of explaining concepts, telling stories, and engaging learners.

As she observed:

"Teachers often develop their own styles of explanation, storytelling, and classroom interaction. These elements are deeply personal and shaped by experience."

Consequently, AI-generated materials were not viewed as ready-made instructional products, but as provisional resources requiring adaptation to align with the teacher's pedagogical identity and classroom realities.

This theme suggests that the legitimacy of AI in professional practice depends on its ability to support, rather than erode, teacher creativity and authenticity.

4.4 AI, Professional Identity, and Teacher Agency

The final theme concerned the relationship between AI engagement, professional identity, and teacher agency. The participant's reflections suggest that engaging with AI was not merely a technical adjustment, but part of a broader process of professional evolution and self-positioning within contemporary educational change.

The participant described AI awareness as a marker of professional adaptability, suggesting that contemporary teaching increasingly involves openness to emerging technological tools.

As she stated:

"Engaging with AI has encouraged me to see teaching as a profession that continues to evolve with technological change."

This perspective reflects an understanding of professional development as dynamic and responsive to educational transformation.

However, openness to innovation did not imply diminished autonomy. On the contrary, the participant strongly framed AI integration as something that depends on teacher agency and independent professional judgment.

As she explained:

"Autonomy depends on the teacher's ability to evaluate and adapt these resources rather than relying on them passively."

This quotation reveals a clear conception of agency as active, evaluative, and professionally grounded. AI was not perceived as directing teaching practice; rather, its educational value depended entirely on the teacher's capacity to interpret and contextualize its outputs.

The participant's future-oriented reflections reinforced this view. Although she anticipated broader AI integration in education, she remained convinced that the most meaningful dimensions of professional development would continue to emerge through classroom experience, reflective practice, and interaction with learners.

As she concluded:

"AI represents an additional resource within a broader professional learning journey."

Taken together, this theme illustrates that AI engagement can coexist with strong professional identity and teacher autonomy when mediated through reflective and critical pedagogical agency.

5. Discussion

This study explored one language teacher's journey toward artificial intelligence (AI) awareness within professional development, focusing on how AI was perceived, critically integrated, and positioned in relation to professional identity and pedagogical values. The findings suggest that the participant's engagement with AI was neither purely instrumental nor

technologically deterministic; rather, it reflected a nuanced negotiation between innovation, pedagogical responsibility, creativity, and teacher autonomy.

One of the central findings was the participant's perception of AI as a supportive professional resource that enhances lesson preparation, instructional organization, and idea generation. This aligns with recent research suggesting that generative AI can support teachers in brainstorming, content development, and instructional planning (Trust et al., 2023). Similarly, Kohnke et al. (2023) argue that AI tools such as ChatGPT can offer practical pedagogical assistance in language teaching contexts by facilitating content generation and communicative task design. In the present study, however, AI was not framed merely as an efficiency tool; rather, the participant's accounts suggest that AI also functioned as a catalyst for pedagogical creativity and instructional experimentation. This finding extends existing discussions by highlighting AI's role not only in reducing workload but also in stimulating imaginative teaching practices.

A second important finding concerned the participant's critically reflective approach to AI integration. Rather than accepting AI-generated outputs uncritically, the participant emphasized the importance of evaluating informational accuracy, pedagogical appropriateness, and contextual relevance. This finding supports Holmes et al.'s (2022) argument that ethical AI integration in education requires critical human oversight and pedagogical accountability. It also resonates with Selwyn's (2019) critique of technological determinism, which warns against viewing educational technologies as inherently beneficial or pedagogically neutral. The participant's selective use of AI demonstrates that meaningful integration depends less on access to technology itself and more on teachers' capacity for reflective judgment.

The findings also revealed significant concerns regarding creativity and authenticity in teaching. The participant viewed teaching as an inherently human and relational practice grounded in empathy, contextual responsiveness, and personal pedagogical style. Her concern that excessive AI use might diminish teacher creativity reflects broader debates about the potential dehumanization of education through automation (Holmes et al., 2022). This perspective suggests that while AI may support efficiency, teachers remain attentive to preserving the interpretive and affective dimensions of professional practice. Such findings reinforce arguments that AI should complement rather than displace the human dimensions of teaching.

Another important insight relates to teacher agency and professional identity. The participant's reflections suggest that engaging with AI contributed to an evolving understanding of professional competence in technologically changing educational contexts. However, this evolution did not imply surrendering pedagogical autonomy. Instead, the participant framed agency as the ability to critically interpret, adapt, and selectively integrate AI resources according to professional judgment. This finding aligns strongly with Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological understanding of teacher agency, which conceptualizes teachers as active decision-makers navigating structural and contextual influences. Similarly, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) emphasize that professional identity is continuously shaped through interaction with changing educational realities. The present findings suggest that AI awareness may become part of contemporary teacher identity, provided that agency remains intact.

Collectively, the findings indicate that AI integration in teacher professional development should not be conceptualized solely as a technical competence. Rather, it should be understood as a reflective, ethical, and identity-related process involving professional negotiation and pedagogical meaning-making. This is particularly relevant in language education, where communication, creativity, cultural interpretation, and relational interaction remain central to effective teaching.

Importantly, this study addresses a notable gap in the literature. While prior research has examined AI applications, educator perceptions, and technological affordances, relatively limited attention has been given to in-depth qualitative accounts of individual teachers' lived experiences with AI in professional development. By foregrounding one teacher's reflective narrative, this study contributes a human-centered perspective that enriches broader discussions on AI and educational transformation.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative case study explored one language teacher's journey toward artificial intelligence (AI) awareness within professional development, with particular attention to how AI was perceived, critically integrated, and negotiated in relation to pedagogical values, professional identity, and teacher agency. The findings demonstrate that the participant's engagement with AI was not characterized by passive technological adoption, but rather by a reflective and professionally mediated process of experimentation, evaluation, and adaptation.

The study revealed that AI was perceived as a supportive pedagogical resource capable of enhancing lesson preparation, generating instructional ideas, and stimulating creative teaching practices. At the same time, the participant maintained clear professional boundaries regarding AI use, emphasizing the importance of human judgment, contextual sensitivity, and pedagogical authenticity. These findings suggest that meaningful AI integration in professional development depends not merely on access to technological tools, but on teachers' capacity for critical reflection, ethical decision-making, and professional agency.

This study contributes to the growing literature on artificial intelligence in education by foregrounding the lived experience of a teacher rather than focusing exclusively on technological systems or generalized perceptions. By offering an in-depth qualitative perspective, the research highlights the human dimensions of AI engagement and reinforces the importance of viewing professional development as a reflective and identity-related process.

However, this study is not without limitations. As a single-participant qualitative case study, the findings are not intended to be generalized across broader teaching populations. Instead, the value of the study lies in its depth of insight into one teacher's experience. Future research may build on this work by exploring the experiences of multiple teachers across different educational contexts, disciplines, and institutional environments. Comparative qualitative studies may further illuminate how teachers with varying levels of technological familiarity negotiate AI integration in professional development.

As artificial intelligence continues to reshape educational landscapes, the findings suggest that the future of teacher professional development should prioritize not only technological competence, but also critical awareness, ethical responsibility, and the preservation of the deeply human dimensions of teaching.

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