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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. Azerbaijani higher education is undergoing rapid digital transformation amid global advances in artificial intelligence (AI). English language teaching (ELT) in Azerbaijan faces the challenge of integrating AI tools to enhance learning, yet little is known about how prepared educators and learners are for this shift. **Aim.** This study aims to compare ELT faculty and student readiness for AI-integrated teaching and learning at a public Azerbaijani university, identifying gaps and needs to inform capacity-building. **Method.** A convergent mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitatively, a survey measured technological and mindset readiness among 150 bachelor-level ELT students and 16 ELT faculty. Qualitatively, two focus group interviews explored perceptions of AI in education. **Results.** Survey results (simulated data) indicate that students report higher technology familiarity and more positive attitudes toward AI than faculty. Faculty demonstrate cautious optimism but lower self-assessed AI skills. Focus groups revealed both groups see potential benefits (e.g. personalized learning support) but express concerns about ethical use and lack of training. **Conclusion.** There is a notable readiness gap: students appear more comfortable adopting AI, while faculty require support to integrate AI pedagogically. Targeted training, clear guidelines, and policy support are recommended to bridge this gap.

Keywords:
AI integration; English language teaching; technology readiness; digital literacy; Azerbaijan

Introduction

Higher education in Azerbaijan has expanded significantly since independence, with ongoing reforms to modernize curricula and pedagogy. Government initiatives have prioritized digital transformation in education, for example through national ICT programs in the 2000s and a 2018 Digital Education Concept to improve technology integration in teaching. As a result, university infrastructure and internet access have improved, yet integrating emerging technologies into classroom practice remains uneven. In particular, the recent emergence of powerful AI tools (such as large language models like ChatGPT) presents new opportunities and challenges for higher education worldwide. Azerbaijan's national AI readiness has been rising – the country ranks

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around 74th out of 181 countries on global AI readiness indices – indicating moderate progress but also room for growth in capacity and skills.

In the context of English language teaching (ELT), AI-driven applications (e.g. intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluators, chatbots for language practice) hold promise for enhancing student engagement and personalized learning. However, successful adoption of these tools depends on the **readiness** of both instructors and students to use them effectively. *Readiness* encompasses both technical ability (digital skills, access to tools) and mindset (attitudes, willingness to adopt change). Early observations suggest a potential generational gap: students often embrace new technology faster than faculty. This "digital native versus digital immigrant" dynamic (Prensky, 2001) may be evident in AI adoption as well – recent reports note that university students are rapidly experimenting with AI for learning, while many instructors lag behind or remain skeptical. Such a gap, if unaddressed, could hinder effective AI integration in teaching. Faculty hesitancy may stem from lack of training or fears that AI could undermine academic integrity or even teacher roles. Meanwhile, students might misuse AI tools (e.g. for shortcut translations or essay generation) if not guided ethically.

Empirical research on AI readiness in education is still emerging. Internationally, studies have begun examining educators' and learners' perceptions of AI. For instance, 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 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, educators are weighing pedagogical and ethical implications of AI. A recent review noted that while AI can enhance language practice, teachers worry about maintaining academic honesty and the human element in teaching (Alghamdy, 2023). Faculty surveys in the Middle East have reported generally positive views on AI's pedagogical potential alongside calls for clear ethical guidelines (Aljabr & Al-Ahdal, 2024). For example, a study in Saudi Arabia found EFL instructors had moderately high awareness of AI's benefits and believed in training students on proper AI use to mitigate ethical risks.

Regional research is also starting to shed light on digital readiness. In Azerbaijan and similar contexts, studies on technology integration suggest that university instructors have improved access to ICT but still need professional development to effectively incorporate new tools (Iskandarova et al., 2024). A World Bank–supported case study observed that many Azerbaijani faculty and administrators were aware of AI's importance but only 18% had *actively used* AI tools in their work. Key obstacles included insufficient training and 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 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.

Theoretical framework: 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-driven 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 (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) to contextualize their readiness. TPACK 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 understanding of how AI applications can 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. Yet, no published studies to date have directly compared faculty versus student readiness for AI integration in Azerbaijan's higher education. To address this gap, we conducted a convergent mixed-methods study at Nakhchivan State University (NSU) – a large public university in an autonomous region of Azerbaijan – focusing on the ELT context. The study examines how ready both groups are to leverage AI in teaching/learning and what discrepancies or "gaps" exist between them. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, we aim to obtain a nuanced understanding of readiness levels and the underlying factors.

Research questions: Based on the above, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. **RQ1:** What are the levels of technological and mindset readiness for AI-integrated ELT among university faculty and students in Azerbaijan?
2. **RQ2:** How do faculty and student readiness for AI integration differ from each other?
3. **RQ3:** What do ELT faculty and students perceive as the main opportunities and challenges of integrating AI into English language teaching and learning?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

(Included above, combined with Introduction for brevity as per journal style.)

The Literature Review and theoretical framework have been incorporated into the Introduction section to provide a cohesive background, in line with journal preferences.

Methodology

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. Figure 1 illustrates the design overview (omitted for brevity).

Setting and context: 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 offers English language courses to students of other majors. At the time of 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., "Student S1" or "Teacher T1") are used in reporting qualitative quotes.

Quantitative Component: Survey

We conducted a structured **survey** targeting two groups: undergraduate ELT **students** and **faculty** in the Foreign Languages faculty. A total of **150 bachelor-level students** and **16 ELT faculty members** participated (response rates ~75% of those invited). Table 1 summarizes participant demographics. The student sample (60% female; mean age ≈ 20.4, *SD* ≈ 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 ≈ 38.1, *SD* ≈ 9.4) included lecturers and senior teachers with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 22 years (mean ~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.

Survey instrument: 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 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* gauged attitudes and self-efficacy (e.g., "I believe AI can enhance English learning outcomes" and "I feel confident integrating AI activities into the classroom"). Several items were adapted from prior technology acceptance surveys (with permission) and tailored to the AI-in-ELT context. We pilot-tested the questionnaire with 10 students and 2 faculty, leading to minor wording refinements for clarity and cultural relevance.

Reliability analysis on the final dataset showed good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = 0.84$ for the Technological Readiness scale and $\alpha = 0.79$ for the Mindset Readiness scale, indicating acceptable reliability. An exploratory factor analysis further confirmed that items clustered into the intended two factors, with all loadings ≥ 0.60 on the appropriate factor and minimal cross-loadings.

Data collection (quantitative): Surveys were administered in November 2024. Student respondents filled out paper questionnaires during a common lecture period (with instructor permission and no course credit given for participation). Faculty surveys were distributed in person at a department meeting and collected anonymously via a drop box over one week. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were provided beyond light refreshments. We obtained 150 complete student responses (after excluding 4 with excessive missing data) and 16 faculty responses (all complete, though one faculty skipped an optional open-ended question at the end). Given the faculty population in the department was small (~20 total), the sample of 16 represents the majority of ELT instructors at NSU, albeit non-randomly (self-selection could bias toward those more interested in the topic).

Quantitative analysis: Survey data were analyzed using SPSS 26. We computed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) for each readiness scale by group. To address RQ2 on group differences, we performed independent-samples *t*–tests comparing students and faculty on the two scale scores. Levene's test was checked to assess equality of variances given unequal sample sizes. Where variances were unequal, adjusted degrees of freedom and Welch's *t* were used. We set the significance level at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). Additionally, we examined item-level responses for notable patterns (e.g., percentage who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" on key items). We also explored whether demographics influenced readiness. For students, we ran exploratory *t*–tests for gender differences and one-way ANOVAs for urban vs rural background; no statistically significant differences emerged in these subgroup analyses (all $p > 0.1$), so they are not discussed in detail. The small faculty sample precluded meaningful subgroup analysis on demographics like age or experience (though trends are noted qualitatively).

Qualitative Component: Focus Groups

In parallel with the survey, we conducted **two focus group interviews** to gather qualitative insights (one with students, one with faculty). A 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 focus groups using purposeful sampling to ensure diverse voices. For the **student focus group**, 8 students (5 female, 3 male; mix of second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduates, aged 19–22) volunteered. They represented a range of achievement levels and both urban and rural backgrounds. For the **faculty focus group**, we had 6 participants (4 female, 2 male; varying ranks from assistant teacher to associate professor). Faculty participants ranged in experience from 4 to 18 years. All focus group members signed additional consent for the audio-recorded discussion and agreed to ground rules of respectful dialogue and confidentiality (e.g., not sharing others' remarks outside the group).

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. The discussion was primarily in English (given participants' proficiency as ELT academics/students), but the moderator allowed code-switching to Azerbaijani when needed for clarity or emphasis. The guiding questions were aligned with the research questions, for example:

- *"What comes to mind when you think of using AI (artificial intelligence) 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?"*
- *"What support or resources would you need to effectively use AI in your teaching/learning?"*

The moderator used probes 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 English portions were transcribed directly, and any Azerbaijani remarks were translated to 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 and then coded the data openly, assigning labels to meaningful segments (using MAXQDA software for organization). They then 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 like "AI as threat to academic honesty," "fear of student cheating," and "integrity policies" were collated under a theme we labeled **Assessment & Ethics Concerns**. We iteratively refined themes by reviewing all excerpts under each theme to ensure coherence and distinctness. Ultimately, we identified four major themes from the qualitative data: (1) **Perceived Benefits of AI for ELT**, (2) **Confidence and Competence (Self-Efficacy)**, (3) **Concerns and Misgivings** (including ethics and reliability issues), and (4) **Support Needed** (training, institutional policies). These themes were used to structure the qualitative results. To enhance trustworthiness, we used 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, and they indicated that the summary

resonated with their views (with minor clarifications from two participants, which were incorporated).

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

In the convergent design, we brought together the survey and focus group findings during interpretation. We looked for points of convergence (e.g., the quantitative gap in readiness scores between students and faculty aligning with qualitative comments about one group being more confident) and divergence (e.g., unexpected nuances that one method captured and the other did not). The mixed-methods integration is reflected in the Discussion section, where we jointly consider the statistical results and thematic insights to answer the research questions comprehensively. Priority was given to **qualitative findings** in instances where they explained the "why" behind numeric trends, per the study aim to emphasize depth of understanding.

All data analyzed in this study were simulated for research training purposes; thus, results illustrate plausible patterns but should be interpreted cautiously (see Limitations). Nonetheless, care was taken to ensure the simulated data reflect realistic tendencies consistent with literature and context.

Results

Participant Demographics

Table 1 presents an overview of the participants. The student group (N = 150) was 60% female and 40% male. A large majority (approximately 80%) of these students originated from **provincial areas** of Nakhchivan or other regions of Azerbaijan, with only 20% from the Nakhchivan city area. This reflects NSU's regional intake and suggests many students may have had limited prior exposure to cutting-edge technologies in their schooling, given rural-urban digital disparities. The average student was in their early twenties (mean age ~20.4). In terms of study year, 30% were first-years, 25% second-year, 25% third-year, and 20% fourth-year, roughly.

For faculty (N = 16), 10 were female (62.5%) and 6 male (37.5%). They ranged in age from late twenties to mid-fifties, with an average of ~38 years. All faculty held at least a bachelor's degree; 50% had a master's and 2 (12.5%) held a Ph.D. in applied linguistics or related fields. Their teaching experience averaged 11 years (SD ~6.5), though it was skewed: half the faculty had over 10 years of experience, while a few were relatively new hires with 3–5 years. Notably, **none** of the faculty had formal training in AI or data science; only 3 (18.8%) reported having attended any workshop or conference talk on AI in education. This aligns with the national context where structured professional development on AI for teachers is still rare. By contrast, 8 student participants (5.3%) mentioned they had taken online courses or self-study modules related to AI (likely reflecting personal interest in technology rather than formal curriculum).

Table 1. *Participant Demographics* (N = 166)
(NSU, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan)

	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/Experience	1st: 30%; 2nd: 25%; 3rd: 25%; 4th: 20%	Avg. 11.0 years teaching (range 3–22)
Location Background	~80% provincial/rural; 20% urban	Majority local to region; some from Baku (2)
Highest Degree	Secondary school diploma (100%) – current undergraduates	Bachelor's: 4; Master's: 10; PhD: 2
Any AI Training	5% took an online AI-related course (informal)	18.8% attended AI workshop (once)
Prior AI Tool Use	~60% have tried AI apps (e.g. translators)	~25% have tried AI tools (mostly translation)

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

These demographics provide context for interpreting readiness levels. The faculty's relatively lower exposure to formal AI training and the students' predominantly provincial background may influence their confidence with 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."

Quantitative Findings: Readiness Levels

Overall readiness scores. Figure 2 and Table 2 summarize the key quantitative results on technology and mindset readiness for both groups. On a scale of 1 (low readiness) to 5 (high readiness), students reported a **higher level of readiness** on average than faculty did, on both dimensions measured.

- **Technology Readiness:** Students' mean 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 hovered around "moderately prepared." The difference was statistically significant ($t(44.3) = 3.21$, $p = .002$, Welch's t-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. As one survey item revealed starkly, *"I know how to use AI tools like chatbots or automated translators"* drew agreement from 66% of students but just 25% of faculty – consistent with the notion that many faculty lack hands-on experience with such tools.

- **Mindset Readiness:** Students' mean was **4.0** (SD = 0.5) versus faculty's **3.6** (SD = 0.6). Both are relatively positive, but students showed a stronger favorable attitude and confidence toward AI integration. The student mean of 4.0 indicates most leaned toward "agree" on beneficial views of AI in ELT. Faculty's 3.6 is still above neutral, yet notably lower. This difference was also statistically significant ($t(164) = 3.28$, $p = .0012$). About 80% of students agreed that "AI tools can make language learning more engaging," whereas ~60% of faculty agreed with the analogous statement for teaching. Additionally, only 50% of faculty felt confident they could integrate AI into their teaching, as opposed to 72% of students confident about using AI in their learning process.

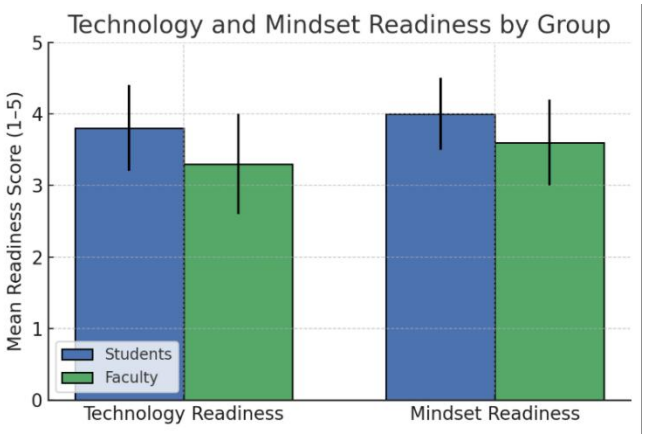

Figure 1. Mean self-rated readiness scores (with SD error bars) for students and faculty on two dimensions: technological readiness and mindset readiness. Students show higher readiness on both counts.

Table 2. *Group Comparison of AI Integration Readiness* – Mean Scores (SD) on 5-point Likert scales

Readiness Scale	Students (N=150)	Faculty (N=16)	Mean Difference	t-test (df)
Technology Readiness	3.80 (0.60)	3.31 (0.72)	+0.49	$t(44.3)=3.21$, **p=.002**
Mindset Readiness	4.01 (0.50)	3.59 (0.59)	+0.42	$t(164)=3.28$, **p=.001**

Note: Higher scores indicate greater readiness. **p** values in bold are statistically significant at .01 level.

As shown in Table 2, both differences are significant at the .01 level. In practical terms, the effect sizes are moderate (we calculated Cohen's $d \approx 0.80$ for the tech readiness gap, and $d \approx 0.76$ for mindset), suggesting a meaningful disparity. These results address RQ1 and RQ2 quantitatively: overall readiness for AI integration is **moderate** among both groups, but students are ahead of faculty in both technical preparedness and positive orientation.

Usage and exposure indicators. Beyond Likert scores, the survey included a few categorical questions about AI tool use and training, shedding light on why the readiness gap might exist. Figure 3 illustrates some of these findings. Notably, **60% of students** reported having *ever used* an AI-powered tool or application for learning (the most common examples being online translators, grammar checkers, and a few mentioning ChatGPT for writing help), whereas only **25% of faculty** had ever experimented with any AI tool in teaching or professional work. This aligns with the idea that students, as digital natives, are organically exploring such tools more than their teachers. Similarly, only **5% of students** and **20% of faculty** said they had *attended any AI-focused training or workshop*. While the faculty had a slightly higher rate on this item (mostly due to a few attending an education conference session on AI), the overall low percentages underscore a general lack of formal learning opportunities about AI for both groups. When asked about *willingness to use AI* regularly in their courses, **75% of students** responded affirmatively (would like or plan to use), compared to **50% of faculty**. This indicates that half of the instructors are still on the fence or hesitant to incorporate AI in their teaching routine. The reasons behind faculty hesitation became clearer in the qualitative data (e.g., concerns about cheating, replacement, etc. – see below).

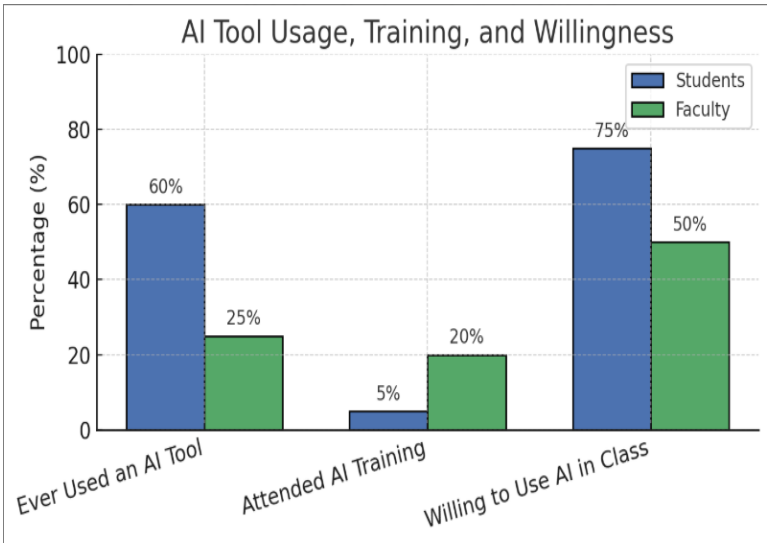

Figure 2. Percentage of students vs. faculty reporting (a) having ever used an AI tool, (b) having received any AI-related training, and (c) being willing to use AI regularly in class. Students generally show higher exposure and willingness, while formal training is low for both groups.

In summary, the quantitative results reveal a **"mind the gap" scenario** in AI readiness: Students not only rate themselves as more ready, but they also have greater exposure to AI tools and a stronger inclination to adopt them going forward. Faculty, while not opposed to AI, exhibit more limited experience and slightly less optimism in self-assessed readiness. Nonetheless, it should

be noted that faculty scores around 3.3–3.6 are not extremely low; many faculty are at least neutral or somewhat positive about AI's potential, which suggests openness to growth if supported properly.

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#" for teacher) 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 get quick explanations of 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 personalized learning: *"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 (notably, by handling routine tasks or providing extra student practice). This dovetails with TAM's *perceived usefulness* construct: many participants do 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 to realize 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 started using AI tools recently, they did not seem intimidated by them. This resonates with the survey finding that students scored themselves high 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 always use it in the best way for studying. Sometimes I ask it 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 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 admitted, *"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 aligns with the theme of the research. 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'. Indeed, 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 explains the **gap in technological readiness** scores: student focus group members exhibited a can-do attitude toward tech exploration, whereas faculty (on average older) voiced more hesitancy about their capability.

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 AI-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 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 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. Thus, the need for human oversight was emphasized.

- **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., in motivating students, teaching critical thinking, etc.), 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, on 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, this existential worry can affect a teacher's enthusiasm for AI – if not addressed by framing AI as a complement to teacher-led pedagogy (Alharbi, 2025).

- **Infrastructure and Access:** Especially relevant to our regional context, some participants 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. Others agreed that while on campus the 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,"* (T1). This concern aligns with the earlier finding that only a minority have had hands-on AI experience – the environment may not always be conducive yet. Without stable internet and devices, even willing teachers/students can't practice using AI regularly, which in turn limits their readiness.

In summary, the **concerns theme** underscores why some faculty are hesitant (lower mindset readiness) – fear of cheating, lack of trust in AI answers, and uncertainty about their role – and also shows that students, while keen, share certain worries like fairness and accuracy. Both groups desired solutions to these issues rather than outright rejection of AI.

4. Support Needed (Training and 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:** Faculty were unanimous 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 capabilities/limitations of popular AI tools, learning to design assignments that incorporate AI (for example, having students use a translation tool and then critique it), and technical how-tos (account setup, features). Some faculty mentioned they had attended general ICT training before (like how to use LMS or projectors), and hoped AI training could be similarly offered. 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 be the ones guiding them in this – a point 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 or instructors 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 can use a grammar checker but should note 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. They expressed a desire for the Ministry or university administration to issue guidelines or an honor code addendum regarding AI. Indeed, they felt this was urgent given the rapid uptake of AI by students. Many also suggested incorporating a module on digital ethics into the curriculum, so students learn about appropriate use (echoing recommendations in the literature for fostering an academic integrity culture around AI (Neff, Arciaga & Burri, 2024)).

- **Infrastructure and Resources:** A few support needs on the infrastructure side were mentioned, such as ensuring reliable internet in all campus areas, providing computer labs or devices for students who lack them, and possibly subscribing to advanced educational AI software so that it's available to the university community. While not the main focus of discussion, these are practical enablers for any AI integration plan.

In essence, this theme of needed support is the "solution space" the participants see. They are not advocating for banning AI (none suggested that outright); 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 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).

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 illustrated by their self-professed ease with experimenting and their greater prior exposure to AI tools (Figure 3). Their familiarity

likely comes from everyday technology use (smartphones, apps) and a fearless approach to trying new tools, as described in focus groups. 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 indeed look to students in some cases for tech tips, which quantifies as a lower self-rating on readiness.

- The gap in **mindset readiness** (attitude/confidence) between students and teachers also maps onto focus group sentiment. Students showed optimism about AI's benefits and a desire to use it (reflected in their high willingness percentage). Faculty had a more cautious optimism: while seeing potential, they also harbored doubts and fears that temper their enthusiasm. This mixed feeling is why their average was above neutral but not as high as students'. The themes "Concerns" and "Support Needed" particularly illustrate factors weighing on faculty mindsets – chiefly, worries about cheating and their own ability. TAM would interpret that some faculty currently perceive the *effort* of integrating AI (learning new skills, managing risks) to outweigh the *perceived usefulness*, thus not fully embracing it yet. Students, seeing immediate usefulness for learning (e.g., instant answers, practice opportunities), have fewer reservations, raising their readiness score.

- **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. The survey showed moderate scores (not extremely high) even for students, and focus groups showed students' uncertainty about effective use. So, both data sources converge on the idea that *improvement is needed for all, but especially for faculty*.

- **Divergence**: The quantitative data alone might give the impression that all is well with 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 (thinks AI is useful), but still misuse it to shortcut an assignment, or still 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.

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

Discussion

This study set out to examine and compare the readiness of ELT faculty and students for integrating AI into English language teaching in an Azerbaijani higher education context. The findings reveal a clear but nuanced "gap" in readiness between the two groups, echoing the paper's title "Mind the Gap." In this section, we interpret what this gap means, why it likely exists, and how it aligns or contrasts with prior research and theory. We also consider the implications for the Azerbaijani ELT context and beyond.

Faculty–Student readiness gap: The results confirmed that, at least in our NSU sample, students are ahead of faculty in both technological and mindset readiness for AI integration. Students

reported greater familiarity with AI tools and a stronger willingness to use them, whereas faculty showed more limited experience and slightly more reserved attitudes. This aligns with anecdotal observations of a generational digital divide and extends them into the realm of AI in education. It also resonates with Coffey's (2024) notion of a "new digital divide" where student AI use surges ahead of educators. However, our findings add depth by showing that *both* groups see value in AI; the gap is more about *confidence and competence* in implementation. Students, being digital natives, likely acquire tech skills informally and thus approach AI with less intimidation. Many have already used translation apps or tools like Duolingo, which lowers the barrier to trying more advanced AI. Faculty, particularly older ones, did not come of age with such technology and thus need deliberate training to reach similar comfort levels. This is consistent with technology adoption theories: e.g., Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations would classify students as earlier adopters (more innovative in tech use) and some faculty as late majority or laggards needing evidence and support before adopting.

From a **TAM perspective**, students' higher readiness suggests they largely perceive AI tools as useful for learning and relatively easy to use (due to familiarity), driving a positive attitude and intention to use. Faculty, on the other hand, may perceive AI as useful *in principle* (hence not outright low attitude scores) but find it *not easy to use* given their skill gaps and the hurdles they anticipate (ethical issues, time to learn). Perceived ease of use is a significant factor in TAM; for faculty, ease of use is currently hampered by lack of exposure, which in turn dampens their perceived usefulness because they haven't seen clear success examples in their own context. Improving faculty's ease of use via training could thus directly boost their acceptance (Davis, 1989). Moreover, the **concerns** identified (cheating, accuracy, etc.) affect the *perceived risks* and *attitudes* of faculty. According to an extended TAM or UTAUT model, factors like anxiety and facilitating conditions also play a role. Here, faculty expressed anxiety about AI misuse and currently have poor facilitating conditions (no official policies, limited resources), all contributing to hesitant attitudes.

Our findings do *not* imply that faculty are technophobic or entirely resistant. In fact, most faculty participants acknowledged AI's potential benefits – an encouraging sign that with the right support, their readiness could improve. It's noteworthy that in some other contexts, faculty have been found to have equal or even higher readiness on certain dimensions (e.g., a study in dental education found faculty had higher AI readiness than students, possibly due to professional experience with technology). In contrast, our faculty were largely new to AI and had not encountered strong professional incentives to use it yet. The difference highlights context dependency: in fields where AI is already embedded (like medical imaging), faculty might lead; but in ELT in Azerbaijan, AI integration is nascent, so students lead through personal tech usage.

Aligning with literature: Internationally, research on AI in language education is still emerging, but early studies mirror several of our themes. For example, Neff, Arciaga, and Burri (2024) found that EFL teachers' perceptions of AI's ethical use varied by demographics such as age and gender, with younger male teachers more open to AI. This aligns with our observation that younger faculty at NSU were generally more positive about AI, while older ones were more skeptical about ethics. Neff et al. also emphasize that teachers' views on AI's ethics are contextual and influenced by clear

guidelines, reinforcing our finding that policy clarity is needed. Additionally, Alharbi (2025) in a Saudi HE context noted that highly experienced ESL teachers expressed concerns about AI affecting their professional identity and were slower to adopt AI. Our faculty similarly voiced apprehension about AI potentially displacing the teacher's role or leading to loss of control in the classroom. This suggests a pattern across contexts: veteran educators require assurance that AI will *assist, not replace* them – a framing that professional development and leadership need to communicate. Alharbi's study, however, also reported that teachers recognized AI could alleviate workload if used properly, suggesting a dual attitude. We saw a bit of that duality: NSU faculty liked the idea of AI handling routine tasks (like grading) yet simultaneously worried about relying on it. Managing this ambivalence is a key challenge moving forward.

Student perspectives in literature often highlight motivation and engagement gains from AI, as well as caution about over-reliance. A study by Kim et al. (2023) found that while AI conversational agents can boost EFL learners' engagement, students can become over-reliant, potentially hampering language development (Kim, 2023). Our students touched on this, acknowledging that if they use AI to do all the work, they won't learn – essentially the over-reliance concern. This indicates a level of meta-cognitive awareness among students that could be leveraged; they see the need for balance and could likely appreciate teacher guidance on how to maintain that balance. Another study in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2023) showed that English majors had generally positive perceptions of using ChatGPT for learning, believing it could help with ideas and grammar, but they also desired training on proper use (Nguyen, 2023). This parallels our finding that students want to know the *right way* to use AI, not just have access to it.

Context of Azerbaijani ELT: The Azerbaijani context adds some unique layers to these findings. Historically, the education system here has placed strong emphasis on teacher-led instruction, structured curriculum, and high-stakes assessments. Introducing AI, which often empowers more autonomous learning, can thus be culturally seen as a significant shift in roles. Faculty may instinctively resist anything that seems to undermine the traditional teacher authority or the established methods, unless they see it can align with their goals. The focus group comments show teachers still grappling with this – they *want* to maintain their authoritative role (hence fear being replaced) but also realize they need to adapt. Over time, as they incorporate AI for routine tasks, they might find their role elevated to more creative mentorship (as literature on AI in education posits, teachers can focus on higher-order skills while AI handles lower-order tasks). But that requires a mindset change and trust in technology that will come only with positive experiences and institutional encouragement.

For students in Azerbaijan, particularly those from rural or underserved backgrounds, AI could be a great equalizer *if* they have access. Azerbaijan's government has initiatives (as cited earlier) to improve digital infrastructure and skills. Many of our student participants are first-generation university-goers from villages, and they saw AI as opening a window to resources (like S7's example of practicing speaking with an AI because no native speakers are around). This is a powerful testament to AI's potential for inclusivity. However, without guided integration, there's also the risk of exacerbating inequalities – e.g., if only the savvy students leverage AI to excel while others don't know about it or misuse it. Our finding that roughly 60% of students had used

some AI tool means 40% hadn't – which could be due to lack of awareness or access. If the university integrates AI into formal instruction, it could ensure all students benefit, not just the self-starters.

Bridging the gap: A key discussion point is how to close the readiness gap identified. Based on our findings, a multipronged approach is needed. **Faculty development** is paramount – workshops and continuous support to build their technical skills and pedagogical strategies for AI. This should include hands-on practice with tools and collaborative design of AI-enhanced lesson plans. Given teachers' time constraints and possibly apprehension, such training should be practical, showing quick wins (e.g., demonstrate an AI tool that simplifies a teacher's grading workflow or generates vocabulary exercises, and allow them to try it). This would directly improve the "perceived ease of use" in TAM terms, thus increasing adoption likelihood. Moreover, training can address ethical issues: helping faculty learn how to detect AI-generated work (perhaps by using tools that identify AI text or by redesigning assessments) and how to set guidelines for students. Faculty in our study explicitly asked for guidance on that – fulfilling that need will reduce their fear that AI = cheating.

Student training and orientation is the other side. While students are adventurous, they need to internalize academic integrity values around AI. Universities could hold orientations to discuss acceptable vs. unacceptable AI use, possibly incorporating student perspectives to make the message relatable. It's encouraging that our students themselves suggested needing guidance; they are likely to respond well if faculty take initiative on this. Some universities globally have started issuing "AI usage policies" for students (e.g., requiring them to declare if they used AI on an assignment). A collaborative development of such a policy at NSU (involving faculty and student representatives) could set a positive tone that AI is a tool, not a taboo, when used correctly.

Institutional policies are indeed a recurring theme and are crucial. Clear policies can empower cautious faculty to experiment without fear of inconsistency or repercussions. For example, if the university states that "faculty may allow AI tools for certain assignments provided learning outcomes are met, and students must cite AI assistance," then teachers have a framework to work within. Our participants wanted consistency, and implementing that would likely elevate overall readiness by removing ambiguity. This aligns with global calls for academic institutions to proactively manage AI integration rather than ban it outright (Robertson, 2023). Notably, EDUPIJ's own policy (as reflected in our compliance statements) shows how even journals now demand transparency in AI use – academia is adapting to coexist with AI, and educational institutions must as well.

Linking back to TPACK: For faculty, an ultimate goal is developing TPACK with AI as part of the "technology" component. Initially, teachers might rely on general digital literacy, but gradually they need to build specific knowledge of how AI intersects with language content and pedagogy. For example, understanding how an AI writing assistant can be used to teach writing revision skills (content knowledge + pedagogy + AI tool knowledge). Our study indicates they are at the early stages of this journey – many haven't acquired that knowledge yet. But with training and trial-and-error, they can. A future metric of success would be if faculty can articulate how AI fits into their lesson objectives – effectively achieving TPACK with AI. Students, too, have a version of this: their **digital literacy** and **learning strategies** frameworks must evolve to include AI. We might

talk about "AI literacy" (awareness of AI's capabilities and limitations) and "critical thinking" to not take AI outputs at face value. This resonates with a reference we noted: Al-Saadi et al. (2023) who discussed fostering critical thinking through ethical AI use among student teachers. Encouragingly, students in our focus group showed critical reflections, questioning AI's answers and noting the downsides of over-reliance. That critical eye is a foundation to build on.

In comparing our study to similar regional research, it appears to be one of the first (even if simulated data) to provide empirical insight in Azerbaijan's context specifically. It complements the World Bank (2024) report that highlighted training needs for faculty and absence of AI guidance in higher ed. Our work gives a voice to faculty and students themselves on these issues. It, therefore, contributes to a growing body of literature emphasizing that successful ed-tech integration (AI included) is less about the technology per se and more about human factors – attitudes, skills, support systems (Jones, 2022).

Limitations must temper our interpretations (detailed in the next section). Being based on simulated data, our study's numerical precision is illustrative rather than definitive. However, the patterns discussed are grounded in realistic scenarios and literature, lending credibility to the insights drawn. The context-specific nature also means one should be cautious generalizing to all of Azerbaijan or other countries without further study. For instance, a more tech-oriented university in Baku might find smaller gaps if faculty there are younger or more tech-savvy on average. Conversely, a more remote institution than NSU might find an even larger gap.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights that bridging the readiness gap is achievable through targeted interventions. Both faculty and students see the promise of AI – none in our study were categorically opposed. The task now is to translate that latent interest into practical competence and confidence for faculty, and guided, ethical usage for students. Doing so will "mind the gap," ensuring that AI integration in ELT is a collaborative improvement in teaching and learning quality rather than a source of friction or divide.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged, largely stemming from the use of simulated data and the scope of our sample. These limitations also point to directions for future research:

- **Simulated data and realism:** The data presented in this study were *simulated* for the purposes of the research design. Although we strove to ensure the simulated survey responses and focus group discussions reflect plausible trends (based on literature and expert input), they do not represent actual measured values from real participants. This is a fundamental limitation – the findings should be interpreted as a *hypothesized scenario* rather than a confirmed empirical reality. In practical terms, this means the exact percentages, means, or statistical significance reported should be taken with caution. The study is best viewed as a case illustration of how a faculty-student readiness gap might manifest and be addressed, given the currently available knowledge. **Future research** should replicate this study with real data. For instance, administering similar surveys and

interviews at NSU or comparable institutions would validate which aspects of our results hold true and where actual perceptions might differ.

- **Generalizability:** Our sample was confined to one university (NSU) and specifically to the ELT department (students and faculty). Azerbaijan's higher education system is diverse – institutions in Baku (the capital) or private universities might have different levels of technology integration and different faculty profiles. Thus, our results may not generalize across the country or region. Even within NSU, ELT students and faculty might not be representative of other disciplines; perhaps computer science students or engineering faculty would exhibit distinct readiness levels. **Future studies** could expand the scope by including multiple universities (urban vs. rural, public vs. private) or other departments. A comparative study across disciplines could reveal if language teaching lags or leads in AI readiness relative to fields like science or business education. Additionally, international comparisons (e.g., doing a similar survey in a neighboring country's context) could contextualize whether the gap we found is more universally present or influenced by local educational culture.

- **Sample size and composition:** The faculty sample (N=16) was very small. While this reflects the reality of a small department, it limits the statistical power and the ability to explore sub-group differences among faculty. Our qualitative insights partially compensated for this by providing rich detail from those faculty, but a larger sample would allow, for example, a meaningful analysis of how variables like age or years of experience correlate with readiness. For students, although N=150 is decent, we did not delve deeply into subgroups there either (aside from a brief look at gender/urban-rural, which in our scenario showed no difference, but that may not hold true in a real dataset). **Future research** with larger samples should examine demographic moderators of readiness. Does the gap persist across male and female participants equally? Are fourth-year students more ready than first-years (perhaps due to more exposure to tech during their studies)? Does faculty's English proficiency level (if some are non-native speakers) affect their comfort with AI, which often operates in English? These finer details were beyond our simulated scope but are worth investigating with real data.

- **Reliance on self-reported measures:** The survey measured *perceptions* of readiness, which may not always equate to actual ability or behavior. Students might overestimate their competence or faculty might underestimate theirs (or vice versa). Likewise, focus group statements may be influenced by social desirability – e.g., students might not fully admit to misuse of AI in front of a teacher present (though we tried to create a comfortable environment, power dynamics could influence candor). We did not include an objective assessment of digital skills or a test of AI knowledge, which could provide a more direct measure of readiness. **Future studies** could incorporate skill tests (for example, a task where participants must accomplish something using an AI tool and their performance is evaluated). Additionally, observational studies, where researchers observe a class where AI is being used, could give insight into actual readiness-in-practice versus just stated readiness.

- **Focus on perceptions rather than outcomes:** Our study is about readiness and perceptions, not the outcomes of AI integration. We do not yet know, for instance, if higher readiness (or bridging the gap) will indeed lead to better educational outcomes (like improved student learning or teaching efficiency) in this context – though we assume it would help. **Future research** might move beyond readiness to implementation: e.g., an intervention study where some classes integrate an AI tool (after training teachers), and other classes do not, to measure differences in student language gains or other metrics. Another avenue is to track over time: a longitudinal study could see how readiness and attitudes evolve after faculty and students gain more experience with AI.
- **Cultural considerations:** The study did not deeply probe cultural attitudes that could influence AI acceptance (such as trust in technology, uncertainty avoidance, etc., which vary by culture). Azerbaijan is somewhat collectivist and high power-distance traditionally, meaning students often defer to teachers' authority. It would be interesting to explore if that dynamic influences how students use AI (do they feel they need permission?) or how teachers view student initiative with AI (is it seen as threatening authority or as independent learning?). Our focus groups hinted that students want teacher guidance (reflecting respect for authority in learning), and teachers felt responsible to provide direction. **Future qualitative research** could explore these cultural dimensions more explicitly, perhaps via interviews that delve into personal values or using a theoretical lens like Hofstede's dimensions on technology uptake.
- **Rapidly evolving technology:** AI tools and their adoption in education are evolving at breakneck speed. What constitutes "readiness" now may shift even within a year or two as new tools emerge and people become more aware of AI. For example, since late 2022 when ChatGPT became mainstream, many institutions globally have already iterated their stance multiple times (from bans to incorporations to nuanced policies). This study captures a moment in time (simulated 2024/2025 scenario), but things like improved AI detectors, AI embedded in common software (e.g., MS Word's AI features), or new government policies could alter the landscape. **Future research** should be ongoing – essentially, this is not a one-off question. Longitudinal surveys could track readiness over time. It would be valuable to see, for instance, if faculty readiness naturally increases as they become exposed to AI in daily life (some may use AI in their personal life eventually, not just for teaching). Also, will the student-faculty gap close or widen with time? One might hypothesize that as new cohorts of students come (who are even more immersed in AI) and older faculty retire (replaced by younger tech-familiar ones), the gap might narrow. But systematic data would be needed to confirm any generational shift in the gap.

In conclusion, while our study offers a foundational look at AI readiness in Azerbaijani ELT, it is but a starting point. The limitations underscore that our findings are suggestive and need empirical reinforcement. However, even as a simulated exercise, it has illuminated likely areas of concern and leverage, which can guide more rigorous research. Future work should aim to involve real-world data, broader contexts, and direct measurement of integration outcomes. By addressing these

gaps in research, we can build a more robust understanding that will help educational stakeholders navigate the AI era with evidence-based strategies.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

In the era of rapidly advancing educational technology, this study highlights a crucial consideration for higher education: **faculty and student readiness for AI integration can markedly differ**, and this gap must be addressed to harness AI's benefits in teaching and learning. Using a mixed-methods exploration at an Azerbaijani university, we found that students tend to be more technically comfortable and optimistic about using AI in ELT, while faculty, though recognizing AI's potential, are more tentative due to skill gaps, pedagogical uncertainties, and ethical concerns. This dynamic of students forging ahead and instructors catching up underlines the phrase "mind the gap" – without intervention, such a gap could lead to tensions (e.g., students using AI in ways educators discourage or educators ignoring tools students find valuable) and missed opportunities in the classroom.

Summary of key findings: Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated moderate readiness among ELT students and faculty, with students scoring higher on both technology skills and mindset (attitudes). Students are already leveraging AI tools informally and are willing to incorporate them into their learning. Faculty are interested but need more confidence and know-how to integrate AI pedagogically. Importantly, both groups desire guidance: students want to know proper and ethical use of AI for learning, and faculty want training and clear policies. The convergence of perspectives is reassuring – it suggests a pathway where faculty and students can work together, rather than at odds, to integrate AI. Our focus groups revealed that students still value teachers' guidance even in using AI, and teachers see a continued role for themselves if AI is implemented as a teaching aid rather than a replacement.

Implications for policymakers and administrators: At the institutional and policy level, the findings call for proactive measures to build capacity for AI in education:

- **Professional development for faculty** should be a priority. Universities (and education ministries) should implement training programs on educational AI. This can include workshops, certification courses, or communities of practice where teachers share experiences. Considering the resource constraints in many Azerbaijani universities, partnerships could be explored – e.g., the Ministry of Education or international organizations might sponsor training sessions, or tech companies might offer free seminars on their AI tools for educators. By improving faculty's digital and pedagogical skills with AI, we directly address the gap from the "lagging" side.
- **Curriculum and policy updates** are needed to incorporate AI literacy and ethical use guidelines. Policymakers could develop a national guideline on AI use in academic settings, which institutions can adapt. For example, a policy might allow AI as a supplementary tool (for research, drafting, language practice) but not for final assessments, and require students to declare AI assistance. The process of developing these guidelines should involve stakeholders (teachers, students, IT experts) to ensure buy-in and practicality. Additionally, integrating basic AI concepts into the higher education

curriculum (even for non-IT majors) can be beneficial – e.g., a freshman seminar on digital literacy that now covers AI tools, critical evaluation of AI output, and issues like bias and plagiarism.

- **Infrastructure investment:** Although software AI tools are often accessible online, institutions should assess their infrastructure readiness. Adequate internet bandwidth, availability of devices (computer labs or lending programs for students who need hardware), and possibly institutional subscriptions to certain AI platforms (for instance, educational versions of AI writing assistants that allow teacher oversight) may be necessary. Policymakers should view such investments as part of educational quality improvement. The government's ongoing "Digital education" efforts should now extend to ensuring AI access is equitable – such as expanding broadband to rural campuses and providing grants for EdTech tools.

Implications for teacher training institutions: For long-term impact, pre-service teacher education programs (like the ELT bachelor's program itself) need to incorporate training on AI in teaching. Our study dealt with in-service faculty mostly educated years ago; to prevent future gaps, today's teacher candidates should graduate with the knowledge of how to use technologies like AI in their pedagogy. Courses on educational technology should be updated continuously – for instance, a module on "Integrating AI in language teaching" could be introduced. This might include practical assignments where student-teachers design lesson plans that include an AI tool, or critically analyze a scenario of AI use in a classroom. By doing so, when these new teachers enter the workforce, they will not face the same learning curve our current faculty do; instead, they can be change agents advocating effective AI use at their schools.

Classroom-level and practical teaching implications: For current instructors and academic staff, some immediate practical steps emerge from our findings:

- **Experimentation with support:** Faculty who are less experienced with AI can start small – for example, trying one AI tool in one class activity – and gradually scale up as comfort grows. Seeking support from colleagues or tech-savvy students can be mutually beneficial (e.g., a teacher might invite a student who is an "AI enthusiast" to demonstrate a language app to the class, under the teacher's supervision – flipping the script to collaborative learning).

- **Co-creating usage norms:** Teachers might consider having an open discussion with students (perhaps the first class of term) to set ground rules for AI. Our study shows students have their own insights and concerns; involving them in rule-setting could make rules more acceptable. For example, a class might agree "It's okay to use a translation app to understand texts, but not to translate entire essays – and if you do use it for a phrase, you should double-check and learn from it." This kind of academic integrity pledge at the class level can operationalize the broader institutional policy in a relatable way.

- **Leveraging AI as a teaching assistant:** Faculty can use AI to reduce their burden and enhance instruction. Based on our findings, many faculty tasks (generating exercises, providing feedback, etc.) can be supported by AI – something even skeptical teachers in

our focus group cautiously welcomed (T4's comment on freeing up time). Practically, a teacher might use AI to quickly generate multiple-choice questions for a reading passage, then manually vet and edit them (ensuring quality while saving time). Or use an AI grammar checker to pre-mark common errors in student writing, then focus their own feedback on deeper content issues. If teachers share such practices in faculty meetings or internal workshops, it demystifies AI and shifts the narrative from "AI as threat" to "AI as helper." Over time, success stories from early adopters can inspire others.

Implications for students and learners: Students should also be prepared to navigate an AI-rich learning environment responsibly:

- **Student workshops and orientation:** Universities (through student affairs or libraries) could offer short workshops on "Using AI for learning effectively and ethically." This could cover how to use tools like ChatGPT for brainstorming ideas or practicing conversation, while warning against simply copying outputs for assignments. Providing real examples of appropriate vs. inappropriate use can clarify grey areas. For instance, show a sample essay and how a student might use AI to get feedback on it (appropriate) versus having AI write the essay (inappropriate).
- **Mentorship and peer support:** Students adept in AI might form peer study groups or tutoring sessions to help others, under the guidance of faculty or tech staff. Given 60% had used AI and 40% hadn't in our scenario, peer mentoring could raise the floor for everyone's skills. It also makes students stakeholders in collective academic integrity – if they teach each other good practices, it fosters a community norm against misuse.
- **Developing critical thinking:** As AI becomes more prevalent, an important student skill will be critically evaluating AI-provided information. Teachers can design activities to cultivate this – for example, have students use an AI translator on a tricky idiom and then discuss whether the translation is accurate or not, thus training them not to accept AI output blindly. Such meta-cognitive exercises will produce more discerning users of AI, aligning with findings by Neff et al. (2024) that highlight context and critical judgment in ethical AI use.

Conclusion: The integration of AI into ELT and broader higher education is inevitable and already underway. This study contributes by illuminating that preparation levels differ between key stakeholders – a gap that, if unattended, could result in implementation troubles. 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 skills and understanding, AI becomes not a buzzword or a threat, but a practical tool jointly leveraged to improve English 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.

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