

Artificial Intelligence as a Reflective Catalyst: EFL Lecturers' Transformative Learning and Identity Negotiation in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

EFL lecturers face a critical challenge: AI tools are reshaping classroom authority and professional identity faster than institutions can support teacher adaptation. This study examines how AI tools function as reflective catalysts that trigger transformative learning among EFL lecturers in Indonesian higher education. Using narrative inquiry, ten EFL lecturers from five universities in North Sumatra participated in a sixteen-week study during 2024. Data were gathered through three rounds of semi-structured interviews, weekly reflective journals, and classroom observations. Participants, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 18 years, regularly used ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate. Unlike prior studies that position teachers as mere implementers of technology, this study foregrounds teacher identity and agency as central to AI integration outcomes. The findings reveal four patterns: AI consistently disrupted routine practices, most visibly in assessment and feedback, reducing average teacher talk time from 65% to 40% and prompting seven lecturers to shift toward inquiry-based learning. Reflective episodes emerged most sharply when AI feedback contradicted teacher judgments, producing three identity responses: empowerment, vulnerability, and identity reconstruction. These findings extend Mezirow's transformative learning theory into real-time, technology-mediated classroom practice and demonstrate that successful AI integration requires institutional support for teacher identity negotiation, rather than solely technical training.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Reflectivity; Teacher Identity; Transformativity; Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence tools have entered English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms not as neutral additions but as disruptive forces that simultaneously support and unsettle the teachers who use them. Platforms such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate can automate the error-correction and feedback routines that have long defined language teaching, offering lecturers relief from repetitive marking while exposing a deeper professional tension. These tools perform — quickly and at scale — tasks that teachers have spent careers mastering. That displacement is not merely logistical. It strikes at the core of how language teachers understand their professional value and classroom authority. The result is a paradox: AI functions simultaneously as a pedagogical ally and a professional unsettler, reducing workload while destabilizing identity. This tension sits at the center of the present study, making the Indonesian university context — where teacher authority carries particular cultural weight — an especially revealing site of inquiry.

Globally, AI adoption in higher education has accelerated across diverse educational contexts. In Western higher education, [Southworth et al. \(2023\)](#) document how AI literacy is reshaping curriculum design across US universities, while [McInnis-Dominguez \(2023\)](#) demonstrates how ChatGPT is transforming course delivery in American literature classrooms. In European settings, [Ferk Savec and Jedrinović \(2024\)](#) show that AI integration in Slovenian higher education is redefining teacher roles and learning outcomes. In the Middle East, [Attia and Elsaywy \(2024\)](#) reveal that university lecturers in Oman navigate significant tensions between AI affordances and institutional expectations of teacher authority.

The scale of this disruption is not uniform. Teachers respond differently depending on their professional history, institutional culture, and personal relationship with authority. For some, AI represents a long-awaited partner in reducing administrative load. For others, it arrives as an uninvited evaluator—one that students may trust more readily than the lecturer standing in front of them. What makes this moment analytically significant is precisely that divergence: AI does not simply change what teachers do, it changes how they understand what they are for.

In Indonesia, this global trend intersects with deeply embedded cultural hierarchies in which teacher authority is structurally central and largely unquestioned ([Artini et al., 2025](#); [Kasih et al., 2024](#); [Rahma & Fithriani, 2024](#)). [Malik et al. \(2023\)](#) estimate that 75% of Indonesian university students already use AI tools for language improvement, while [Marzuki et al. \(2023\)](#) confirm that teachers acknowledge AI's positive impact on student writing. When AI systems generate feedback that contradicts a lecturer's corrections—and students notice—the resulting friction is more than a pedagogical inconvenience. It disrupts a cultural contract that has organized the classroom for generations. North Sumatran universities embody this tension

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vividly: some lecturers welcome AI's capacity to automate drudgery and free time for mentoring ([Lee et al., 2025](#)), while others experience these same tools as a threat to the professional relevance they have spent careers building ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#); [Damaiyanti & Mulyati, 2025](#)).

Existing theoretical frameworks, however, leave important gaps when applied to AI-mediated teaching contexts. [Mezirow's \(1991\)](#) transformative learning theory was developed primarily around human-to-human interactions — workshop facilitation, adult education settings, and peer dialogue — where disorienting dilemmas arise from social encounters and life events. It does not account for technology as an autonomous trigger of transformative reflection, nor does it address how real-time, algorithmic feedback can generate disorientation within the flow of instruction rather than retrospectively. The theory also assumes that disorienting dilemmas are episodic — bounded events that initiate a reflective arc — whereas AI feedback is continuous, recurrent, and embedded in every lesson cycle. Each class session becomes a potential site of dissonance, compressing what Mezirow imagined as a gradual, transformative process into repeated, real-time confrontations. Similarly, [Schön's \(1983\)](#) reflection-in-action framework assumes a human practitioner deliberating within a professional situation, without anticipating that an external technological agent might simultaneously perform and evaluate the same professional task. When AI generates feedback faster and at greater scale than a lecturer can, the practitioner is no longer the sole reflective agent in the room — a condition Schön's model has no vocabulary to address.

[Beijaard et al.'s \(2004\)](#) professional identity framework, while dynamic and context-sensitive, was constructed before AI became a classroom presence and therefore does not address how non-human actors reshape the communities of practice through which identity is negotiated. The professional identity framework, while dynamic and context-sensitive, was constructed before AI became a presence in the classroom and therefore does not address how non-human actors reshape the communities of practice through which identity is negotiated. The framework understands identity as something teachers build through sustained participation in human relational networks—among students, colleagues, and institutional structures. It assumes that the significant others who challenge or affirm a teacher's sense of self are always human. AI unsettles that assumption fundamentally. When a student defers to an algorithm's correction over a lecturer's, the disruption does not fit neatly into Beijaard's relational model — there is no human interlocutor to negotiate with, no shared professional norm to appeal to. The challenge comes entirely from outside the community of practice.

This study addresses that gap by extending and synthesizing these frameworks in two directions. First, it repositions AI as a structural — rather than incidental — trigger of disorienting dilemmas, arguing that algorithmic feedback creates a qualitatively distinct form of reflection that operates in real time, is repeatable, and is culturally inflected in ways that human-centered

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models do not capture. Second, it contributes an empirically grounded account of how teacher identity is reconstructed not merely through peer interaction or institutional participation, but through ongoing negotiation with non-human technological agents embedded in the classroom. Together, these extensions offer a more adequate theoretical vocabulary for understanding teacher experience in AI-rich educational environments — one that is particularly necessary in high-power-distance contexts where the stakes of authority disruption are both pedagogical and cultural.

This study contributes on two levels. Conceptually, it reframes AI not as an instructional tool to be evaluated for its learning outcomes but as a reflective catalyst that shapes teacher identity and decision-making in culturally specific ways. Empirically, it foregrounds the voices of North Sumatran EFL lecturers — practitioners largely absent from global-North-dominated AI-in-education research — through a sixteen-week narrative inquiry that captures how these educators negotiate AI's opportunities and anxieties within their specific sociocultural context. Earlier research has documented that Indonesian EFL teachers view AI tools favorably for lesson preparation and ideation ([Afreilyanti & Kuswandono, 2024](#); [Rosmiaty et al., 2023](#)), yet individual responses vary dramatically. This heterogeneity, we argue, is not random: it reflects deeper structural tensions between pressures to modernize and ingrained expectations of classroom hierarchy. Understanding that tension is a prerequisite for designing AI integration strategies that are both pedagogically effective and culturally responsive.

Three research questions guide this study. The first asks how AI tools influence EFL lecturers' reflective practices. The second examines what pedagogical shifts emerge from AI integration in language classrooms. The third investigates how AI integration reshapes teacher identity in AI-rich environments. These questions are pursued through three corresponding objectives. The study first aims to examine how AI tools serve as catalysts for reflective practice among EFL lecturers in North Sumatra. It then seeks to evaluate pedagogical transformations prompted by AI integration, particularly in classroom interaction, assessment, and feedback practices. Finally, it analyses how AI adoption reshapes teacher identity and professional agency within the specific sociocultural dynamics of Indonesian higher education. Together, these questions and objectives position the study at the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and professional identity — foregrounding teacher experience as the primary lens through which AI integration is understood and evaluated.

METHOD

We adopted narrative inquiry as our primary research design, following [Clandinin and Connelly's \(2000\)](#) argument that stories are the fundamental unit of human experience and that understanding professional practice requires attending to how individuals construct meaning across time. This

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approach was chosen because the research questions demanded more than a snapshot of attitudes toward AI: they required a longitudinal account of how teachers' relationships with AI technologies evolved, how they interpreted moments of dissonance, and how those interpretations folded back into their sense of professional self. Narrative inquiry's attention to temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, 2000). We focus on connecting individual adoption stories to broader patterns of pedagogical change and identity formation.

The study was conducted across five public and private universities in North Sumatra during the odd semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. North Sumatra was selected for substantive, not merely logistical, reasons, as a region where traditional pedagogical hierarchies remain strong (Perdana et al., 2025^s; Syahfitri et al., 2025). Although AI tool availability has expanded rapidly through free-access platforms, this represents a resource-constrained, authority-conscious context that is underrepresented in AI-in-education research, which is dominated by Global North settings. Institutional variety — spanning state universities, private denominational universities, and polytechnics — allowed us to surface differences attributable to institutional culture rather than geography alone.

Ten EFL lecturers were recruited through purposive sampling based on two criteria: active integration of at least one AI tool in teaching practice during the study period and willingness to sustain documentation for sixteen weeks. We do not claim statistical representativeness; in narrative inquiry, the goal is analytic depth rather than population generalisability (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, 1985). The ten participants provide sufficient narrative richness to develop and test the theoretical framework of AI as a reflective catalyst while remaining analytically manageable.

Participants ranged in teaching experience from 5 to 18 years, with a mean of 11 years. All taught undergraduate courses in English departments or university language centers. AI tool use varied across the group: seven regularly used ChatGPT for lesson planning and feedback generation; eight integrated Grammarly into writing instruction; five used Google Translate for vocabulary work; three experimented with voice-recognition applications for pronunciation training. This variation in tool adoption was analytically productive, enabling us to examine whether different tools generated different catalytic effects. Pseudonyms refer to participants throughout. Demographic details have been slightly abstracted to protect anonymity within the small North Sumatran EFL lecturer community.

Data collection occurred over sixteen weeks of the 2024 odd semester through three complementary methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Initial interviews explored participants' teaching philosophies, prior AI experiences, and expectations. [Mid-semester interviews](#) focused on emerging changes in practice and reflection. Final interviews examined overall impacts and future intentions regarding AI integration.

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Second, participants maintained weekly reflective journals documenting their teaching experiences, with particular attention to moments involving AI tools. Rather than providing rigid prompts, participants received general guidance to record incidents where AI influenced their pedagogical thinking, classroom decisions, or professional identity. This approach honored reflective practice's personal and contextual nature while focusing on AI-related experiences.

Third, classroom observations were conducted twice per participant during different phases of the semester. These [observations](#) captured interactions between teachers, students, and AI tools, providing behavioral data to complement self-reported experiences. Observations focused on moments when AI tools were introduced, how teachers mediated AI-generated content, and student responses to AI-integrated instruction.

All five members of the research team are practicing EFL lecturers employed at universities across North Sumatra — the same institutional landscape as our participants. This insider positioning carries both epistemological advantages and methodological risks that we are obliged to make explicit. On the one hand, our shared professional world gave us credibility with participants, enabled nuanced interpretation of classroom dynamics, and allowed participants to speak without having to explain basic contextual assumptions. On the other hand, insider status creates conditions for what [Merriam et al. \(2001\)](#) call "tunnel vision"—the risk of normalizing rather than interrogating practices that seem routine to us but are analytically significant.

To manage this, we took several steps. First, we maintained individual reflexive memos throughout data collection, recording our own assumptions before and after each interview and observation. Second, we deliberately recruited participants from universities other than our primary workplaces, ensuring that no researcher observed or interviewed colleagues with whom they had a direct supervisory or collegial relationship. Third, [all emerging interpretations](#) were peer-debriefed across the team in fortnightly meetings, with one team member assigned the role of "devil's advocate" to challenge dominant readings of the data. Fourth, we sought member checks: draft summaries of each participant's narrative were shared with them at the end of the semester, and four of the ten participants provided substantive feedback that refined our interpretations.

Analysis followed [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis framework, adapted for narrative data. Initial coding identified recurring themes across individual stories while preserving each participant's temporal structure. Codes emerged inductively from the data and deductively from the theoretical framework of AI as a reflective catalyst. Three analytical phases guided the process ([Creswell, 2012, 2014](#)). Familiarization involved repeated reading of transcripts and journals to understand individual narratives holistically. Initial coding identified specific instances of AI-prompted reflection, pedagogical changes, and identity shifts. Theme development

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clustered codes into broader patterns while maintaining a connection to individual stories.

Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies. [Data triangulation](#) compared interviews, journals, and observations to verify emerging themes. [Peer debriefing](#) with experienced qualitative researchers provided an external perspective on interpretation. Thick description preserves contextual richness, enabling the reader to assess transferability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of reflective journals, interview transcripts, and classroom observations revealed four interconnected patterns in how EFL lecturers experienced AI integration over the sixteen-week study period: AI as a reflective trigger, shifts in pedagogical practice, professional vulnerability, and identity reconstruction. Rather than treating these as discrete outcomes, this discussion interprets each pattern through the lens of transformative learning theory and reflective practice scholarship, anchoring theoretical claims directly in the empirical data.

Table 1:
Reflective Themes Identified in Journal Entries (N = 160)

No	Reflective Focus	Frequency	Percentage
1	AI-enhanced assessment reflection	48	30%
2	Learner autonomy and engagement	36	22.5%
3	Pedagogical strategy reconsideration	28	17.5%
4	Teacher identity and role evolution	20	12.5%
5	Ethical/technological limitations	28	17.5%
Total		160	100%

The five themes form a cumulative progression rather than independent categories, with each theme generating the conditions for the next. AI-enhanced assessment reflection dominated at 30%, which is analytically significant because assessment is the professional activity most central to teacher authority in Indonesian higher education. When ChatGPT or Grammarly assigned error priorities different from the lecturer's, participants were forced to examine whether their correction hierarchies were pedagogically justified or merely habitual. "When ChatGPT suggested different error priorities than mine, I realized I had been focusing on surface mistakes while ignoring coherence issues" captures this precisely — a technical disagreement that became a challenge to long-held professional assumptions, producing what [Mezirow \(1991\)](#) identifies as a disorienting dilemma.

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This assessment disruption directly activated learner autonomy and engagement (22.5%). Once teachers questioned their feedback priorities, they became more attentive to what students were accomplishing independently. Participants observed that students produced stronger drafts with Grammarly than their in-class performance suggested, revealing a gap between the assumed and actual student capabilities. "It made me question how much scaffolding I was providing versus controlling" — a realization that reframed scaffolding from a pedagogical virtue into a potential constraint on learner agency.

Recognizing learner autonomy, in turn, prompted reconsideration of pedagogical strategies (17.5%). Having seen students operate more independently than assumed, participants began interrogating broader lesson architecture — the balance of lecture and discussion, the role of error correction, and whether class time was organised around teacher performance or student inquiry. That this theme appeared with equal frequency to ethical and technological limitations (also 17.5%) is significant: strategic reconsideration and ethical questioning emerged as parallel rather than sequential responses. Participants were simultaneously rethinking what they did and whether AI feedback was always reliable or appropriate for their learners—a reflexive stance that itself constitutes sophisticated professional reflection, consistent with [Schön's \(1983\)](#) reflection-in-action.

Teacher identity and role evolution recorded the lowest frequency at 12.5%, yet its analytical significance is disproportionate to its count. Identity reflection is harder to articulate than reflections on specific incidents — participants were more likely to record a feedback disagreement than to write explicitly about professional selfhood. Its presence nonetheless signals that the accumulated weight of the preceding four themes eventually surfaced a more existential question: what kind of teacher do I want to be in an AI-rich classroom? Nine of ten participants confirmed during interviews that this question emerged most sharply when AI contradicted established routines or when students demonstrated unexpected competencies — confirming that identity reflection was the endpoint of a cumulative process, not an isolated response ([Anindita, 2024](#); [Setiawan et al., 2025](#)).

Observable changes in classroom practice emerged across multiple dimensions throughout the semester, as summarised in Table 2.

Dimension	Descriptions	N	%
A. AI Tool Integration			
ChatGPT — lesson planning	Used for preparing materials and activities	10	100%
ChatGPT — student-facing	Incorporated into classroom activities	7	70%
Grammarly — writing instruction	Integrated into writing feedback cycle	8	80%

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Google Translate — vocabulary	Used for vocabulary expansion exercises	6	60%
Voice recognition — pronunciation	Experimented with for pronunciation training	3	30%
ChatGPT — lesson planning	Used for preparing materials and activities	10	100%
ChatGPT — student-facing	Incorporated into classroom activities	7	70%
Grammarly — writing instruction	Integrated into writing feedback cycle	8	80%
B. Instructional Approach			
Adopted flipped classroom model	AI used for pre-class materials; in-class time for discussion	7	70%
Reduced lecture-heavy instruction	Shifted toward inquiry-based activities	8	80%
C. Classroom Talk Time			
Teacher talk time — pre-integration	Average across all observed participants	65%	(avg.)
Teacher talk time — post-integration	Average across all observed participants	40%	(↓ 25 pp)
D. Assessment Practice			
Modified feedback approach	Changed practices after observing AI-generated corrections	6	60%
Focus shifted to higher-order concerns	Prioritised argument development and coherence over grammar	6	60%
Delegated mechanical errors to AI	Used AI tools to handle surface-level corrections	6	60%

The four dimensions form a chain of pedagogical consequence: tool adoption shaped instructional approach, which restructured classroom time, which ultimately transformed assessment practice. All ten participants used ChatGPT for lesson planning, while Grammarly was integrated into writing instruction by eight, and Google Translate for vocabulary work by six. Seven participants adopted flipped classroom models, and eight reduced lecture-heavy delivery in favor of inquiry-based activities. Classroom talk time dropped from an average of 65% to 40%, and six participants ultimately shifted their assessment focus from surface-level correction to argument development and coherence — delegating mechanical feedback entirely to AI.

Within dimension A, the 100% adoption of ChatGPT for lesson planning — contrasted with only 70% for student-facing use — reveals asymmetric adoption driven by cultural prudence rather than technological hesitance. In a high-power-distance context ([Kasih et al., 2025](#); [Southworth et al., 2023](#)), introducing AI visibly into the classroom carries social risk that private use does not, and the 30-percentage-point gap reflects this. Grammarly's 80% adoption in writing instruction is comparatively higher among students because it augments an existing practice — error feedback

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— rather than introducing a new one, making it less threatening to established authority. Google Translate (60%) occupied a more ambiguous position, useful for vocabulary expansion but potentially undermining productive lexical struggle, while voice recognition (30%) saw limited uptake, reflecting both technical demands and its novelty in Indonesian EFL contexts.

These adoption patterns directly enabled the instructional shifts in dimension B. ChatGPT's capacity to generate pre-class materials made the flipped classroom model practically achievable for seven participants (70%) who had previously lacked the preparation resources to attempt it. Eight participants (80%) reduced lecture-heavy instruction in favor of inquiry-based approaches—a shift made possible by tool adoption and confirmed in dimension C's most concrete finding: a 25 percentage-point reduction in teacher talk time, from 65% to 40%. In an institutional context where teacher-centered instruction is both pedagogically normative and culturally reinforced (Perdana et al., 2025; Rahma & Fithriani, 2024), a reduction of this magnitude signals not a change in technique but a renegotiation of the teacher's role from an information source to a facilitator of AI-mediated learning.

Dimension D closes the analytical loop. All six participants who modified their feedback approach did so in the same direction—delegating mechanical error correction to AI and redirecting attention toward argument development and coherence. This unanimity is significant: once AI demonstrated reliable surface-level correction, the case for continuing to spend instructional time on grammar marking became difficult to sustain. "I stopped spending hours marking grammar and started having real conversations about ideas." Read against Table 1's dominant theme of assessment reflection, this finding confirms that the reflective disruption teachers recorded in their journals translated, over sixteen weeks, into measurable changes in actual practice — precisely what Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory predicts.

Interview analysis revealed complex identity negotiations as participants grappled with AI's impact on their professional roles. Coding analysis of 30 interviews identified three overarching themes — pedagogical empowerment, professional vulnerability, and identity reconstruction — which were neither mutually exclusive nor sequentially fixed. Many participants experienced empowerment and vulnerability simultaneously, with identity reconstruction emerging as a resolution strategy over time.

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Table 3:
Professional Identity Themes and Sub-themes from Coding Analysis (N = 30 interviews)

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (n=30 interviews)	Representative Quote
Pedagogical Empowerment	Enhanced focus on higher-order skills	18	I'm finally teaching thinking, not just grammar rules.
	Freed from routine correction tasks	15	AI handles the mechanical stuff so I can focus on meaning-making.
	Improved student relationship quality	12	Without grading pressure, I actually listen to their ideas now.
Professional Vulnerability	Concerns about professional redundancy	14	If AI gives better feedback than I, what's my purpose?
	Loss of expert authority	11	Sometimes, students trust AI corrections more than mine.
	Questioning pedagogical value- add	9	I wonder if I'm just a facilitator now, not really teaching.
Identity Reconstruction	Redefining teacher as curator/mentor	16	I'm becoming more of a learning guide than an information deliverer.
	Developing AI collaboration strategies	13	I'm learning to work with AI, not compete against it.
	Embracing uncertainty as growth	8	Not knowing everything feels uncomfortable but liberating.

Pedagogical empowerment registered the highest frequencies across all three sub-themes. Enhanced focus on higher-order skills (n=18) was observed across nearly all participants, suggesting that redirecting attention from mechanical correction toward critical thinking was a structural rather than an individual outcome. When AI absorbed routine error identification, participants consistently repurposed that freed space for substantive intellectual engagement. Freed from routine correction tasks (n=15) reinforced this shift at the practical level, while improved student relationship quality (n=12) revealed its relational dimension — without correction pressure, participants became more genuinely attentive to student thinking.

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Professional vulnerability emerged alongside empowerment rather than after it. Concerns about professional redundancy (n=14) reflected the most prevalent anxiety: not technical incompetence but existential uncertainty about professional purpose when AI performs core corrective functions. Loss of expert authority (n=11) captured a more immediate, classroom-level experience — in a high-power-distance context where teacher authority is culturally normative (Southworth et al., 2023) — students publicly preferring AI corrections represented a disruption of the social contract rather than mere pedagogical disagreement. Questioning pedagogical value-add (n=9), the least frequent sub-theme, nonetheless signals the deepest level of reflection: participants interrogating whether their remaining contributions were substantively distinct from what AI could provide.

Identity reconstruction represents the active resolution of this tension. Redefining the teacher as curator and mentor (n=16) was the most common reconstructive move—a deliberate repositioning around relational and intellectual capabilities that AI cannot replicate —consistent with Beijaard et al.'s (2004) framework of identity as purposefully reconstructed. Developing AI collaboration strategies (n=13) translated this reframing into practice, connecting directly to the pedagogical shifts documented in Table 2. Embracing uncertainty as growth (n=8), though least frequent, marks the most significant psychological shift — the point at which a disorienting dilemma is experienced as possibility rather than threat, which Mezirow (1991) identifies as the affective hallmark of transformative learning. That empowerment and reconstruction frequencies collectively outweigh vulnerability suggests most lecturers moved toward adaptive rather than defensive responses — though the co-occurrence of all three themes across individuals confirms that AI integration produced negotiation, not resolution.

Across the three tables, a coherent narrative emerges about how AI integration reshapes EFL teaching from the inside out. The reflective disruptions documented in Table 1 — beginning with assessment and cascading through learner autonomy, pedagogical strategy, identity, and ethics — did not remain confined to journals. They translated into the concrete classroom transformations recorded in Table 2: restructured lesson formats, redistributed talk time, and fundamentally reconceived feedback practices. Reflection, in other words, was not an end in itself but the mechanism through which pedagogical change became possible. The 25 percentage-point reduction in teacher talk time and the unanimous shift toward higher-order assessment among six participants are not incidental outcomes — they are the observable traces of the reflective process that preceded them.

Table 3 adds the human dimension that Tables 1 and 2 cannot fully capture. Behind every pedagogical shift was a professional negotiating questions of purpose, authority, and relevance in real time. The co-occurrence of empowerment and vulnerability across the same participants — rather than their appearance as distinct responses in distinct individuals

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— reveals that AI integration is fundamentally an identity event, not merely a pedagogical adjustment. That most participants ultimately moved toward reconstruction rather than retreat suggests that reflective engagement with AI, however uncomfortable, carries generative potential. Taken together, the three tables confirm this study's central argument: AI functions not simply as a teaching tool but as a structural catalyst for transformative learning, operating simultaneously at the levels of practice, identity, and professional culture.

One finding that warrants closer attention is the role of institutional silence. Across all ten participants, AI integration was largely self-initiated and self-managed. No participant described formal institutional guidance on how to use AI tools pedagogically, nor did any receive structured support for navigating the identity disruptions that followed. This absence is not incidental. It means that the reflective and reconstructive work documented in this study was carried out individually, often in the margins of already full teaching schedules. The weight of adaptation fell entirely on the lecturer.

This has direct implications for how institutions understand the cost of AI integration. Technical access — providing tools and ensuring connectivity — is the most visible form of support and the easiest to deliver. But the findings here suggest that the more consequential need is affective and professional: spaces where lecturers can interrogate their changing roles without penalty, share disorienting experiences without embarrassment, and reconstruct their professional identities with collegial support. Communities of practice, peer mentoring structures, and reflective workshops are not peripheral additions to an AI integration strategy. In high-power-distance contexts such as North Sumatra, where professional vulnerability is rarely surfaced publicly, they may be the most critical component of all.

A further implication concerns the timeline of change. Sixteen weeks produced measurable shifts in practice and visible movements in identity — but identity reconstruction is not complete at the end of a semester. The participants who most clearly moved toward a reconstructed sense of professional self were those who had sustained the longest engagement with AI tools and had reflected most consistently across the study period. This suggests that transformative learning in AI-mediated contexts is cumulative and slow, unfolding across semesters rather than within them. Longitudinal support structures, rather than one-off training sessions, are therefore more likely to produce durable pedagogical change.

CONCLUSION

AI tools disrupted teaching routines and triggered critical reflection among North Sumatran EFL educators. Teachers cut lecture time, expanded inquiry-based activities, and focused more on higher-order thinking. However, responses diverged sharply—some felt empowered by automated mechanical tasks, others questioned their classroom authority. These findings extend

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Mezirow's concept of disorienting dilemmas to real-time decisions in teaching. Traditional reflective practice emphasizes retrospective analysis, but AI integration creates immediate uncertainty, demanding adaptive responses. External technological prompts reshape reflection-in-action by challenging established practices in real time. Cultural context shaped adoption patterns significantly. Indonesian teacher authority norms created both opportunities for innovation and resistance to change. Responses ranged from identity reconstruction to fears of professional redundancy, highlighting the limitations of universal implementation strategies. This research shows how digital tools catalyze pedagogical change and contribute to reflective practice theory. Successful AI integration requires culturally responsive support that addresses identity negotiation alongside technical skills. Teacher education programs must help educators preserve agency while leveraging technological capabilities. Future research should examine the long-term effects of AI-mediated reflection and the optimal support mechanisms across cultural contexts. The aim is to enhance human judgment through strategic collaboration, not to replace it with technology.

CRediT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Dolli Rotua Sinaga: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software. **Emma Martina Pakpahan:** Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **F. Ari Anggraini Sebayang:** Visualization, Investigation, Supervision. **Semaria Eva Elita Girsang:** Writing- Reviewing and Editing. **Marhaeni K.D Matondang:** Validation

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