

Reimagining English Language Teaching in the Digital Age: A Conceptual Framework for AI-Integrated, Learner-Centric and Competency-Based ELT

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Abstract:

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, adaptive learning systems and digital learning environments is transforming English Language Teaching (ELT). Traditional approaches that emphasise teacher-led instruction and standardised language outcomes increasingly need to accommodate personalised learning, learner agency, digital literacy and AI-supported communication. However, existing research often examines artificial intelligence, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based language education as separate domains. This paper addresses this conceptual gap by developing an integrated framework that connects AI integration, learner-centred learning and competency-based ELT. The paper adopts a conceptual research design based on a structured review of established literature on technology-enhanced language learning, artificial intelligence in education, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based education. The proposed framework conceptualises AI-integrated ELT as a process in which AI-enabled learning resources support personalised learning and learner agency, while competency-based pedagogies provide the outcome orientation required for meaningful language development. The framework identifies AI integration as an enabling mechanism rather than a substitute for teachers. It proposes that effective ELT in the digital age should develop linguistic, communicative, digital, critical and AI-related competencies. The paper contributes a theoretically grounded framework that can guide future empirical research and support teachers, institutions and curriculum designers in designing more responsive ELT environments.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, English Language Teaching, learner-centred learning, competency-based education, generative AI, digital learning, language education.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed the context in which English Language Teaching (ELT) is designed and delivered. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), intelligent tutoring systems, conversational agents and generative AI has expanded the possibilities for language practice, feedback and personalised learning. Unlike earlier forms of educational technology that primarily provided access to digital content, contemporary AI systems can interact with learners, generate language,

respond to prompts and provide immediate feedback. This development is particularly significant for English language education because language learning depends on repeated opportunities for communication, practice, feedback and reflection. Recent empirical evidence indicates that AI-supported English language learning can produce meaningful improvements in learning achievement. A meta-analysis of 40 empirical studies involving 3,290 participants across ten countries reported a substantial positive effect of AI on English language learning achievement ($g = 0.812$), although the magnitude of the effect varied across educational and instructional conditions (Zhang et al., 2024).

The growing importance of AI in ELT is also evident in the rapid expansion of research on conversational AI and generative AI. Du and Daniel (2024), in a systematic review of AI-powered chatbots for English speaking practice, found evidence of positive contributions to speaking outcomes, confidence, engagement and motivation. Their review also demonstrated that research on AI-supported speaking remains relatively underdeveloped compared with other areas of language learning. Importantly, their review searched both Scopus and Web of Science, strengthening the reliability of the evidence base used to examine the development of AI-supported English-speaking research.

The emergence of generative AI has further intensified this transformation. Large language model-based systems such as ChatGPT can generate explanations, examples, written responses and conversational exchanges in response to learner prompts. Research published following the introduction of ChatGPT has therefore expanded rapidly. Li et al. (2024) systematically reviewed the first year of research on ChatGPT in language education and identified its applications in self-directed language learning, content generation and teacher-related activities. At the same time, the authors identified important gaps concerning feedback quality, stakeholder perspectives and longitudinal evidence. Their review searched major databases including Web of Science and Scopus, indicating that the emerging evidence base is increasingly becoming systematic rather than consisting only of exploratory discussions.

The increasing effectiveness of AI in language education, however, does not imply that technology alone can produce effective learning. The pedagogical conditions under which AI is used remain critical. AI-supported learning requires learners to formulate goals, interact with digital resources, evaluate generated responses and regulate their learning activities. Chang and Sun (2024) demonstrate the importance of this dimension in their systematic review of AI and self-regulated language learning. Their findings indicate that AI can function as a supportive tool for personalised learning and self-regulation, particularly when learners engage actively in the learning process. The study also emphasises that the educational value of AI depends on how it is integrated into learning processes rather than merely on the presence of the technology.

This observation is important for the development of learner-centred ELT. A technology-centred approach may focus primarily on the availability and functionality of AI tools, whereas a learner-centred approach places emphasis on learner agency, active participation and responsibility for learning. AI can potentially strengthen these dimensions by providing learners with opportunities for individualised practice and immediate interaction. A recent systematic review by Mohebbi (2024) similarly identifies AI as a potential facilitator of learner independence and self-regulated learning, while emphasising the continuing importance of critical thinking and creativity in AI-supported language education.

The changing technological environment also requires a reconsideration of what constitutes competence in English language learning. Traditional ELT has commonly emphasised linguistic knowledge and the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. These competencies remain fundamental.

However, learners operating in AI-mediated digital environments increasingly need additional capabilities. They need to evaluate digital information, critically examine AI-generated responses, communicate effectively through digital platforms and use AI responsibly. Thus, contemporary English competence increasingly involves the ability to use language effectively while also navigating technology-mediated communication environments.

This issue creates an important conceptual challenge for ELT. If AI is incorporated without reconsidering learning objectives, it may simply automate existing teaching practices. Conversely, if AI is integrated within a learner-centred pedagogical model and connected to clearly defined competencies, it can potentially support more personalised and flexible forms of language learning. The distinction is important because the educational value of AI depends not simply on what the technology can produce but on what learners are able to learn, demonstrate and critically evaluate through its use.

Recent reviews also suggest that the research field is still developing. Li et al. (2024) found that research on ChatGPT in language education has expanded rapidly but remains concentrated in particular educational contexts and research areas. Similarly, recent evidence indicates that empirical research on generative AI has grown considerably, while longitudinal research and research across diverse educational levels remain comparatively limited. This suggests that the next stage of ELT research should move beyond asking whether AI works and examine how AI should be pedagogically integrated to develop broader learner competencies.

Against this background, the present study proposes a conceptual framework that brings together three dimensions of contemporary ELT: AI integration, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based learning. AI integration represents the technological dimension of the framework. Learner-centred pedagogy represents the process through which learners actively engage with AI-supported learning opportunities. Competency-based learning represents the outcome dimension, focusing on what learners should be able to demonstrate through the use of English in digital and non-digital contexts.

The central argument of this paper is that AI should not be conceptualised as a replacement for teachers or as an educational outcome in itself. Instead, AI can function as an enabling mechanism within a learner-centred pedagogical environment. Such an approach can support the development of linguistic and communicative competence while also strengthening digital, critical and AI-related capabilities. The paper therefore develops a conceptual framework explaining how these three dimensions can be integrated within contemporary ELT.

Accordingly, the specific objective of this study is: To develop a conceptual framework explaining how AI integration can support learner-centred and competency-based English Language Teaching in the digital age. The framework is intended to contribute to ELT scholarship by connecting technological integration with pedagogical design and competency development. It also provides a basis for future empirical research examining the relationships among AI use, learner agency, self-regulated learning and English language competencies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Transformation of English Language Teaching

Technology has been integrated into language teaching for several decades, moving from computer-assisted language learning towards interactive, mobile and intelligent learning environments. Early scholarship established that the educational value of technology depends on the relationship between

technological affordances, language-learning tasks and pedagogical objectives rather than on technology itself (Chapelle, 2001). Network-based language teaching subsequently expanded the role of technology from individual practice towards communication, collaboration and socially situated language use (Kern & Warschauer, 2000). Mobile technologies further extended language learning beyond the classroom by supporting flexible access to language resources and communication opportunities (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

The development of mobile-assisted language learning demonstrated that technology can provide learners with greater control over when and where language learning occurs (Stockwell, 2010). Emerging technologies subsequently introduced possibilities for learner analytics, adaptive learning and intelligent language tutoring (Godwin-Jones, 2018). These developments indicate a gradual transition from technology as a delivery mechanism towards technology as an interactive component of the learning process.

The evidence also suggests that technology can produce positive language-learning outcomes when it is appropriately integrated into pedagogy. Research on automated writing evaluation, for example, indicates that technology-supported feedback can contribute to improvements in second-language writing under appropriate instructional conditions (Ngo et al., 2022). Similarly, research synthesis shows that automated writing evaluation influences both writing practices and learner engagement with feedback (Zhang & Hyland, 2024).

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching

Artificial intelligence represents a significant development beyond conventional digital learning technologies. AI-enabled systems can analyse learner input, generate responses, provide feedback and adapt learning activities. Intelligent computer-assisted language learning has particularly emphasised automated feedback, intelligent tutoring and personalised learning (Heil et al., 2023).

Recent evidence indicates that AI can contribute positively to English language learning. A meta-analysis of 40 empirical studies involving 3,290 participants found a significant positive effect of AI on English language learning achievement (Zhang et al., 2024). More recent meta-analytic evidence based on experimental and quasi-experimental studies also reports positive effects of AI-supported interventions on writing accuracy, speaking fluency and learner motivation (Ekizer, 2025).

AI applications are particularly visible in speaking and writing. A systematic review of AI-powered chatbots identified growing use of conversational AI for English speaking practice and reported evidence concerning speaking development, learner confidence and engagement (Du & Daniel, 2024). Automated writing evaluation has similarly become an important area of AI-supported language learning because it can provide learners with immediate feedback on written production (Ngo et al., 2022).

The wider evidence base, however, remains uneven. Qiao et al. (2025) reviewed empirical research on AI in language learning and found that most studies focused on English as a second or foreign language, with speaking and writing being the most frequently examined language domains. Their review also found that AI applications have been concentrated on intelligent tutoring, assessment and feedback, while fewer studies have developed theoretically grounded approaches to adaptive learning and peer interaction.

Recent evidence confirms the rapid expansion of AI research in EFL. Uygun and Demir (2026) reviewed studies published between 2023 and 2025 using Scopus and Web of Science and found that AI applications were increasingly associated with personalised learning, adaptive learning, language proficiency and AI-

supported feedback. However, teacher preparation, ethical issues, privacy and unequal access remain important challenges.

2.3 Generative AI and English Language Learning

Generative AI has introduced a new dimension to AI-supported language education. Unlike earlier systems that primarily provided predefined exercises or automated feedback, generative AI can produce context-sensitive text and participate in open-ended interaction. The emergence of ChatGPT has therefore generated considerable interest in language education.

Li et al. (2024) reviewed 36 studies published during the first year of research on ChatGPT and language education. Their findings indicate that ChatGPT has been used for self-directed language learning, content generation and teacher-related activities. However, the review also identified gaps concerning feedback quality, longitudinal research and stakeholder perspectives.

A broader scoping review of generative AI in language teaching and learning similarly identified substantial opportunities for personalised learning, language practice and content creation while highlighting the need for further empirical research (Yan et al., 2024). Al-khresheh (2024) also reported that ChatGPT provides opportunities for interactive and personalised ELT but raises concerns regarding accuracy, dependence, academic integrity and responsible use.

The literature therefore suggests that generative AI should not be treated simply as another instructional technology. Its ability to generate language creates new questions concerning authorship, assessment, learner dependence and the development of independent language competence. These issues make pedagogical design particularly important.

2.4 Learner-Centred Learning and Learner Autonomy

Learner-centred pedagogy places the learner's participation, agency and responsibility at the centre of the educational process. In language education, learner autonomy refers to learners' capacity to take responsibility for aspects of their learning (Little, 2007). Autonomy is closely connected with language proficiency because learners need opportunities to make decisions about learning while simultaneously developing their target-language abilities.

Benson (2011) argues that learner autonomy involves control over important dimensions of learning and should be understood as a central element of contemporary language education. Technology can support this process by increasing learners' access to resources, opportunities for practice and control over learning activities.

The relationship between technology and learner autonomy has become increasingly important as digital learning environments provide learners with opportunities for self-directed practice. A systematic review of autonomous learning and ICT in language education found that technology-supported approaches are frequently associated with independent learning and learner participation (Ye et al., 2024).

AI strengthens this possibility by providing learners with opportunities for individualised interaction. Mohebbi (2024), through a systematic review of AI and language learning, found that AI can support learner independence and self-regulation, although effective implementation requires learners to engage critically with AI-supported learning resources.

Chang and Sun (2024) similarly highlight the relationship between AI and self-regulated language learning. Their systematic review conceptualises AI as a tool that can support strategic learning and metacognitive processes, suggesting that learners can increasingly interact with AI as a learning partner rather than simply use it as a source of information.

This evidence supports the learner-centred dimension of the proposed framework. AI can provide learning opportunities, but learners must actively formulate goals, evaluate feedback, monitor progress and make decisions about their learning.

2.5 Competency-Based English Language Teaching

The increasing use of AI also requires reconsideration of the competencies that English language education should develop. Traditional ELT has focused strongly on linguistic knowledge and the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Contemporary digital environments require a broader conceptualisation of language competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages conceptualises language proficiency through communicative language activities and competences rather than linguistic knowledge alone (Council of Europe, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant to AI-supported ELT because learners need to demonstrate what they can do with English in authentic communicative situations.

Digital environments additionally require learners to develop digital competence. Learners must be able to locate, interpret, evaluate and produce information through digital technologies. AI introduces a further requirement for critical evaluation because AI-generated language may contain factual, linguistic or contextual errors.

Recent research supports this expanded competency perspective. Qiao et al. (2025) found that AI research in language education has concentrated strongly on language outcomes while comparatively limited attention has been given to theoretically grounded designs and broader learning processes. Uygun and Demir (2026) similarly identify the importance of pedagogically guided AI implementation rather than technology adoption alone.

The competency perspective therefore suggests that AI-integrated ELT should develop not only linguistic competence but also digital competence, critical thinking, learner autonomy and AI literacy.

2.6 Integration of AI, Learner-Centred Learning and Competency Development

The existing literature provides evidence for each dimension separately, but relatively limited research has integrated them into a single conceptual model. AI research predominantly examines technological applications and learning outcomes, while learner autonomy research focuses on learner control and self-regulation. Competency-based approaches primarily focus on demonstrable learning outcomes.

This fragmentation represents an important conceptual gap. The effectiveness of AI cannot be understood only through technological functionality. Intelligent tutoring systems, for example, are most useful when their technological features are aligned with appropriate instructional principles (Heil et al., 2023). Similarly, research on AI-supported speaking indicates that conversational tools can create additional opportunities for practice, but pedagogical implementation remains important (Du & Daniel, 2024).

The same principle applies to writing. Automated writing evaluation can improve aspects of writing performance, but research also indicates that learners' engagement with automated feedback is complex and influenced by contextual and individual factors (Zhang & Hyland, 2024).

Recent research further demonstrates that AI-supported learning outcomes vary across contexts, learner characteristics and technological applications (Ekizer, 2025). This variation suggests that AI should not be conceptualised as having a uniform effect on language learning. Its contribution depends on how it is embedded within instructional and learner-centred processes.

The literature therefore supports the need for an integrated framework in which AI integration represents the technological dimension, learner-centred pedagogy represents the learning process, and competency development represents the intended outcome. Such integration can move ELT research beyond the question of whether AI improves language learning towards the more important question of how AI can be pedagogically designed to develop meaningful and transferable competencies.

2.7 Research Gap

The literature reveals four important gaps.

First, existing AI research is strongly concentrated on individual tools and specific language skills (Qiao et al., 2025).

Second, many studies focus on short-term outcomes, creating a need for longitudinal investigation of AI-supported learning (Li et al., 2024).

Third, AI research has not sufficiently connected technological integration with learner autonomy and self-regulated learning, despite the importance of these processes in digital environments (Chang & Sun, 2024).

Fourth, recent systematic evidence indicates that ethical concerns, teacher preparedness, privacy and equitable access remain significant barriers to effective AI integration (Uygun & Demir, 2026).

Therefore, a conceptual framework that integrates AI-enabled learning, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based outcomes can address an identifiable gap in the current ELT literature.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design to develop an integrated framework for AI-integrated, learner-centred and competency-based English Language Teaching (ELT). The study is based on a structured review and conceptual synthesis of peer-reviewed literature on artificial intelligence in language education, generative AI, technology-enhanced language learning, learner-centred pedagogy, learner autonomy, self-regulated learning and competency-based language education. Relevant literature was identified primarily from Scopus and Web of Science indexed publications, with emphasis on systematic reviews, meta-analyses and established theoretical studies. The literature was examined thematically to identify recurring concepts, relationships and gaps concerning AI-supported learning, learner agency and competency development. The identified themes were then conceptually integrated to establish the relationships among AI integration, personalised learning, learner agency and competency development, while recognising teacher mediation as an important pedagogical condition. Since the study is conceptual, no primary data were collected and no statistical hypothesis testing was conducted. The resulting framework provides a theoretically grounded basis for future empirical investigation of AI-supported ELT.

4. Findings

The conceptual synthesis of the literature identified three core dimensions for reimagining English Language Teaching in the digital age: AI integration, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based

learning. The findings indicate that these dimensions are interdependent rather than independent components of ELT. AI provides technological opportunities for personalised practice, immediate feedback and interactive language learning, while learner-centred pedagogy determines how these opportunities are converted into meaningful learning experiences. Competency-based learning then defines the capabilities that learners are expected to demonstrate. Based on this synthesis, the proposed framework positions AI integration as an enabling mechanism, learner-centred learning as the pedagogical process, and competency development as the principal outcome.

4.1 AI Integration as an Enabling Mechanism

The literature indicates that AI can support several aspects of English language learning, particularly personalised practice, writing assistance, conversational interaction, feedback and learning-resource generation. Evidence from recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses suggests that AI-supported interventions can positively influence English language learning outcomes (Du & Daniel, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Ekizer, 2025). However, the findings also indicate that AI should not be treated as an autonomous teaching replacement. Its effectiveness depends on instructional design, learner engagement and appropriate teacher guidance (Heil et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). The framework therefore identifies

AI integration as the first component:

AI integration → personalised learning opportunities → increased opportunities for language practice

4.2 Learner-Centred Learning as the Pedagogical Mechanism

The second finding is that AI-supported ELT requires active learner participation. Learners need to formulate learning goals, interact with AI tools, evaluate feedback and reflect on their progress. Research on AI-supported self-regulated learning indicates that AI can facilitate learner independence when learners actively manage their learning processes (Chang & Sun, 2024; Mohebbi, 2024). Thus, the framework positions learner agency and self-regulated learning between AI integration and competency development.

AI-supported learning → learner agency → self-regulated learning → competency development

This relationship suggests that simply providing learners with access to AI is insufficient. Pedagogical activities must encourage learners to make decisions and critically evaluate AI-generated content.

4.3 Competency-Based Learning as the Outcome Dimension

The third finding concerns the outcomes of AI-integrated ELT. The literature suggests that contemporary language education should move beyond narrow measures of grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Learners increasingly need to demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively while operating within digital and AI-mediated environments. The proposed framework therefore identifies six competency domains:

Competency	Expected outcome
Linguistic competence	Accurate and appropriate use of English

Communicative competence	Effective communication in different contexts
Digital competence	Effective use of digital learning environments
Critical competence	Evaluation of information and AI-generated content
Intercultural competence	Appropriate communication across cultural contexts
AI literacy	Responsible and critical use of AI

This broader conceptualisation is consistent with contemporary approaches to communicative language competence and emerging research on AI-supported language education (Council of Europe, 2020; Qiao et al., 2025).

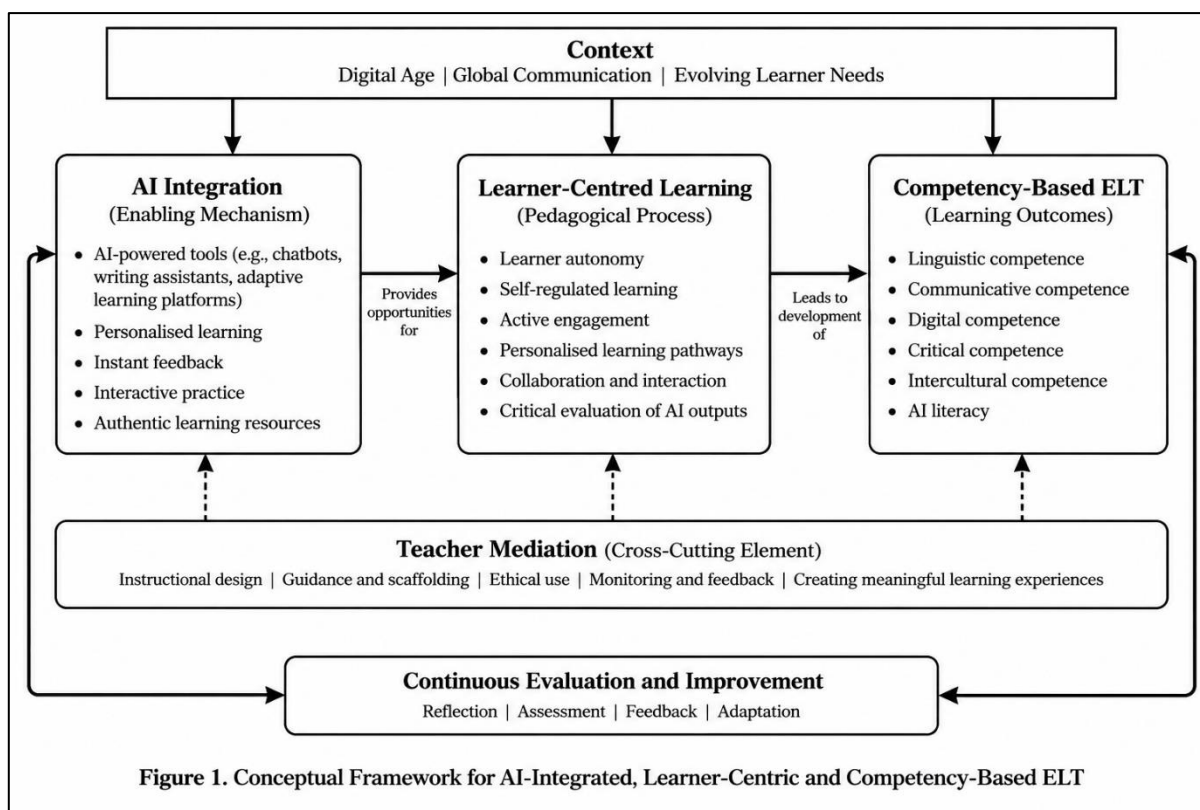
4.4 Teacher Mediation as a Cross-Cutting Element

A further finding is that teacher mediation should operate across the entire framework. AI can generate content and feedback, but teachers remain important for selecting appropriate learning tasks, interpreting AI outputs, providing contextual guidance and ensuring ethical use. Research on AI in education similarly highlights the continuing importance of educators in designing and supervising AI-supported learning environments (Heil et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). The framework therefore does not conceptualise AI as replacing teachers. Instead:

Teacher mediation + AI integration → learner-centred learning → competency development

4.5 Proposed Conceptual Framework

The findings lead to the following conceptual structure:



Source: Authors own Work

The central finding is therefore that AI becomes educationally meaningful when it is embedded within learner-centred pedagogy and directed towards clearly defined competencies. This provides the conceptual foundation for reimagining ELT as a system in which technology supports learning rather than determines it.

5. Discussion

The conceptual findings indicate that the future of English Language Teaching should be understood as a shift from technology-supported instruction towards AI-enabled, learner-centred and competency-oriented learning. The proposed framework connects three dimensions that have often been examined separately in previous research. AI provides new opportunities for interaction, personalised practice and feedback, learner-centred pedagogy determines how learners engage with these opportunities, and competency-based learning establishes the capabilities that learners are expected to demonstrate. This interpretation is consistent with evidence showing positive effects of AI-supported interventions on English language learning outcomes (Zhang et al., 2024; Ekizer, 2025).

The first important implication concerns the role of AI integration. Previous research demonstrates that AI-powered tools can support English speaking, writing and self-directed learning (Du & Daniel, 2024; Li et al., 2024). However, the findings of the present conceptual study suggest that AI should not be treated as an independent pedagogical solution. Its value depends on how it is incorporated into learning activities. Intelligent computer-assisted language learning research similarly indicates that instructional design remains central to the effectiveness of intelligent technologies (Heil et al., 2023). Therefore, the proposed framework places AI in an enabling rather than dominant position.

The second issue concerns learner agency. AI provides learners with greater access to language practice and immediate interaction. However, greater technological access does not automatically produce autonomous learning. Learners need to establish goals, select appropriate activities, evaluate AI-generated responses and reflect on their performance. This interpretation is supported by research linking AI with self-regulated language learning (Chang & Sun, 2024). Mohebbi (2024) similarly suggests that AI can facilitate learner independence when learners actively participate in managing their learning. Consequently, learner agency represents an important mechanism connecting AI use with meaningful learning outcomes.

The third contribution relates to competency-based ELT. Existing AI research frequently evaluates outcomes through specific language skills or achievement measures. While these outcomes remain important, the digital transformation of language learning requires a broader conceptualisation of competence. Learners increasingly need to communicate effectively through digital environments, evaluate information and critically assess AI-generated content. The proposed framework consequently extends conventional linguistic competence towards a combination of linguistic, communicative, digital, critical, intercultural and AI competencies. This orientation is compatible with the competency-based approach to language proficiency established within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020).

The findings also reinforce the continuing importance of the teacher's role. The increasing capabilities of generative AI could create the perception that teachers may become less central to language education. The present framework suggests the opposite. Teachers remain important in designing learning activities, selecting appropriate AI applications, evaluating AI-generated material and supporting learners in responsible technology use. Research on ChatGPT and language education also identifies teacher-related activities and pedagogical guidance as important areas of AI integration (Li et al., 2024). The teacher's role therefore shifts from primarily transmitting language knowledge towards facilitating, designing and evaluating learning experiences.

Another important issue is critical AI literacy. Generative AI can produce fluent language while still generating inaccurate or inappropriate information. Learners therefore require the ability to question and evaluate AI outputs. This represents a new dimension of language competence because effective digital communication increasingly involves interaction with AI-mediated information. The proposed framework consequently treats AI literacy and critical competence as complementary outcomes rather than optional technological skills.

The framework also provides a different perspective on assessment. If AI is routinely available to learners, assessments based exclusively on producing conventional written responses may provide limited evidence of individual competence. Competency-based assessment should instead emphasise learners' ability to apply English, explain their decisions, evaluate AI outputs and demonstrate independent understanding. This direction is particularly relevant given the concerns surrounding generative AI, academic integrity and learner dependence identified in recent literature (Li et al., 2024; Al-khresheh, 2024).

Finally, the discussion highlights that the relationship between AI use and English learning is unlikely to be uniform. Research has identified variation according to learning context, AI application, learner characteristics and instructional design (Zhang et al., 2024; Ekizer, 2025). Therefore, future empirical research should test whether learner agency and teacher mediation explain or strengthen the relationship

between AI integration and competency development. The proposed framework offers a basis for examining these relationships through quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research.

6. Conclusion

This study developed a conceptual framework for AI-integrated, learner-centred and competency-based English Language Teaching (ELT) in the digital age. The conceptual synthesis indicates that AI has the potential to expand opportunities for personalised practice, interaction, feedback and self-directed learning. However, the educational value of AI depends on how it is integrated into pedagogical processes. AI should therefore be positioned as an enabling mechanism rather than a replacement for teachers or a substitute for learner engagement.

The proposed framework establishes a relationship between AI integration, learner agency and competency development. AI-supported learning can provide personalised learning opportunities, while learner-centred pedagogy encourages learners to establish goals, regulate their learning, evaluate feedback and participate actively in language activities. Competency-based ELT provides the outcome orientation by focusing on learners' ability to demonstrate linguistic and communicative competence alongside digital, critical, intercultural and AI-related competencies.

The framework also highlights the continuing importance of teachers. Teachers can guide AI use, design meaningful learning activities, evaluate AI-generated content and support responsible technology use. This suggests that the digital transformation of ELT should involve a change in the teacher's role rather than the removal of the teacher from the learning process.

The study contributes to ELT literature by bringing together three perspectives that are frequently examined separately: AI-enabled learning, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based education. The framework provides a foundation for future empirical research to examine relationships among AI integration, learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, teacher mediation and language competencies. Future validation of the framework across different educational contexts can further establish how AI can be used responsibly and effectively to support the development of competent, autonomous and digitally capable English language learners.

7. Implications

The proposed framework has theoretical, pedagogical, institutional and assessment implications for contemporary English Language Teaching.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to ELT scholarship by integrating AI integration, learner-centred pedagogy and competency-based learning within a single conceptual framework. Existing research has examined AI applications, learner autonomy and language competencies through largely separate perspectives. The proposed framework connects these dimensions by positioning AI as an enabling mechanism, learner agency as a central learning process and competency development as the intended outcome. This provides a basis for future empirical studies examining the relationships among AI use, learner autonomy, self-regulated learning and English language competence.

7.2 Pedagogical Implications

For ELT practitioners, the framework suggests that AI should be integrated into purposeful learning activities rather than used simply because it is available. Teachers can use AI to support personalised language practice, conversational activities, writing feedback and vocabulary development. At the same time, learners should be encouraged to question AI-generated responses, identify errors and reflect on their learning. This approach can strengthen learner agency while reducing passive dependence on AI. The teacher consequently becomes a facilitator who designs and supervises AI-supported learning experiences.

7.3 Curriculum Implications

The framework suggests that ELT curricula should expand beyond traditional linguistic outcomes. Curriculum designers should incorporate linguistic, communicative, digital, critical, intercultural and AI competencies. Learning activities should provide opportunities for learners to use English in authentic digital contexts while developing the ability to evaluate and use AI responsibly. This can make ELT more responsive to the communication requirements of contemporary workplaces and academic environments.

7.4 Assessment Implications

The growing availability of generative AI creates a need to reconsider conventional assessment practices. Assessments based primarily on the production of written answers may provide limited evidence of independent competence when learners have unrestricted access to AI. Competency-based assessment can instead emphasise application, communication, reflection, problem-solving and critical evaluation. Assessment tasks can also require learners to explain how they evaluated or improved AI-generated content.

7.5 Institutional Implications

Educational institutions need to establish clear policies for responsible AI use in ELT. Institutions should provide professional development that enables teachers to understand AI capabilities, limitations and ethical considerations. Institutional support is also required for access to appropriate digital infrastructure and for reducing inequalities in students' access to AI-enabled learning opportunities.

7.6 Implications for Learners

The framework places greater responsibility on learners to become active and critical users of AI. Learners should develop the ability to formulate effective prompts, evaluate AI-generated language, verify information and use AI without compromising independent learning. AI literacy should therefore be considered an important component of contemporary English language competence.

8. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual in nature and does not involve primary data collection or statistical testing. Therefore, the relationships proposed between AI integration, learner-centred learning and competency development have not been empirically validated. Second, the framework is based on existing literature, which means that its conceptual boundaries are influenced by the availability and scope of previous research. Third, AI technologies are developing rapidly, and changes

in generative AI capabilities may affect the relevance of specific applications discussed in the literature. Fourth, existing research is concentrated in particular educational and linguistic contexts, with considerable attention given to English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Consequently, the applicability of the framework across different countries, educational levels and institutional settings requires further examination. Fifth, the framework identifies several competency domains, but their measurement and operationalisation require further development. Finally, the study does not empirically examine potential negative outcomes of AI use, such as learner overdependence, reduced independent language production, inaccurate AI-generated feedback, academic integrity concerns and unequal access to AI technologies.

9. Future Research Directions

Future research should empirically validate the proposed framework using quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method approaches. Quantitative studies can develop and validate scales for AI integration, learner agency, self-regulated learning, teacher mediation and AI literacy. Structural equation modelling can subsequently be used to examine the proposed relationships among these constructs. Experimental studies can compare conventional ELT with AI-integrated learner-centred approaches to determine their relative effects on speaking, writing, reading and overall language proficiency. Longitudinal research is also required to establish whether the benefits of AI-supported learning are sustained over time rather than being limited to short-term improvements. Future studies should examine teacher mediation as a potential moderator of the relationship between AI integration and competency development. Research should also investigate how learners' AI literacy influences their ability to evaluate and use AI-generated language effectively. Cross-cultural research can examine whether the proposed framework operates differently across EFL and ESL contexts, educational levels and institutional environments. Further research is also needed to develop reliable measures of digital competence, critical AI competence and intercultural competence within ELT. Finally, future studies should investigate assessment models that maintain academic integrity while recognising the increasing presence of generative AI in language learning. Such research would provide empirical evidence for refining and validating the proposed framework.

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