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EFL TEACHERS' EMOTIONS ABOUT USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGIES IN UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies become increasingly integrated into education, teachers encounter new opportunities and challenges that influence their professional practices and provoke a wide range of emotional responses. Employing the Control-Value Theory (CVT) and in-depth interviews, this study explores the emotional experiences of 10 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers of a public university in Vietnam who use AI technologies in their teaching. The participants expressed excitement about AI's potential support for teaching and research but showed doubts about its limitations and concerns regarding the impacts on students, classroom interactions and academic integrity. They also experienced frustration with the lack of institutional support but conveyed a boosted sense of confidence in their irreplaceable human expertise. These mixed findings largely align with previous studies on the integration of AI-powered tools in education, support the applicability of CVT for investigating teacher emotions and extend the discussion on the affective dimension of AI-assisted EFL instruction. Although limited by the small sample size, this study contributes to advancing knowledge about the complexity of teacher emotions and calls for more comprehensive support systems to facilitate teachers in managing the pedagogical and emotional demands of AI integration.

Keywords: AI technologies, teacher emotion, control value theory.

1. Introduction

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed education, particularly in foreign language teaching and learning. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the growing use of generative AI tools and chatbots has given rise to an extensive body of research on the benefits and drawbacks of AI technologies in EFL contexts. For example, regarding the use of ChatGPT, a review of 70 articles in English language education has found that ChatGPT can assist in diverse writing tasks, improve student outcomes and motivation, and support teacher assessment practices, while also being constrained by inaccuracy and technical limitations [1]. Similarly, studies conducted in Vietnamese contexts have indicated that while students and teachers perceive benefits such as improved vocabulary, translation, writing feedback, personalisation, engagement, and skill development, they also report significant concerns regarding accuracy, reliability, cultural alignment, ethical and privacy issues, over-reliance on AI and the continued need for teacher guidance [2]-[8].

While there is substantial evidence regarding the advantages and disadvantages of AI in EFL education, the emotional dimension of this interaction remains underexplored in current

scholarship [9]-[10]. Existing studies have largely focused on perceptions, effectiveness, or ethical concerns, with limited attention to how teachers emotionally appraise and manage AI integration over time. From the teachers' perspectives, although research is still scarce, a small number of studies have begun to address this gap, drawing on Control-Value Theory (CVT) [11] to examine the wide range of positive and negative emotions of EFL teachers who incorporated AI-powered tools in their professional practices, for instance, in China [12] and in Iran [13]. In the Vietnamese EFL context, however, comparable studies have yet to be undertaken. To fill this void, the present study investigates the following research question:

What are the emotional experiences of Vietnamese EFL teachers when integrating AI technologies into their teaching practice?

Taking a qualitative approach, with CVT as the analytical framework, the research offers insights into the emotions of Vietnamese EFL teachers as they navigated the integration of AI technologies in language education. In this way, it seeks to contribute a nuanced, context-specific understanding of teacher emotions, extending both local and international discussions on the affective implications of AI-mediated language learning and teaching for not only educators but also policy-makers.

2. Content

2.1. Theoretical background

2.1.1. Teacher emotions

The understanding of emotions differs across theoretical perspectives, including psychological, social constructionist, and interactionist views [14]. In contrast to the psychological viewpoint, which considers emotion to be an internal and individual experience, the social constructionist and interactionist perspectives emphasise the importance of social relationships and contextual factors along with the embodied and performative nature of emotion. From an integrated perspective, emotion is conceptualised as part of a broader social-cognitive development process that is interwoven with thoughts and actions and influenced by sociocultural contexts [15]. Teacher emotions are thus defined as "not internalised sensations that remain inert within the confines of their bodies but are integral to the ways in which they relate to and interact with their students, colleagues and parents" (p. 491) [16].

Within educational settings, emotions are therefore not incidental but constitutive of teachers' professional practice and identity. Emotions lie at the core of teaching [17], "intimately involved in virtually every aspect of the teaching and learning process" (p. 67) [18]. Not only do teacher emotions shape teachers' professional beliefs, motivation, engagement, well-being and overall effectiveness, but they are also central to teaching practices, influencing the selection and application of teaching methods, classroom management styles and instructional strategies. The impact extends also to students, affecting their behaviour, motivation and engagement, well-being and emotions along with the learning processes and learning outcomes [15]. Given their highly contextual nature and substantial role in teaching and learning, teacher emotions represent a critical area for continued research, particularly in today's educational landscape transformed by advancing technology and AI.

2.1.2. AI technologies in language education

Recent studies have highlighted AI's growing significance in education, especially its ability to personalise learning and offer adaptive feedback [19]. For foreign language education, AI-powered tools are highly valued for the provision of level-appropriate materials, automated feedback, expanded practice opportunities, and data-driven insights [20].

A frequent theme in these investigations is the use of ChatGPT, a Generative AI chatbot, and its benefits and drawbacks in foreign language instruction. Specifically, for the teaching and

learning of English writing skills, existing studies have shown that ChatGPT offers extensive support for idea generation, organisation and structure, spelling, grammar and vocabulary [1]. It can also help with summarising, paraphrasing, translating and adjusting style and tone [21], assisting learners across multiple stages of the writing process, from topic selection and brainstorming to outlining, drafting, revising, and final proofreading [22]. ChatGPT's potential usefulness also extends to teachers, reducing the heavy workload of grading assignments, giving feedback and creating teaching materials, which allows them to dedicate more time to preparing higher-quality lessons [23]-[24].

Despite these substantial benefits, significant concerns persist regarding the reliability of AI-generated responses, which might include vague, inaccurate or fabricated information [25]. Another major concern relates to threats to academic integrity, especially when it comes to writing assignments at the higher education level [26]. Instead of writing their own essays, students might turn to ChatGPT for an effortless response, contributing to the democratisation of plagiarism [23]. This form of high-tech cheating poses significant challenges for assessment because of the inconsistent performance of AI detection tools and the specialised training and regulations that are required for teachers [27]. Moreover, excessive dependence on ChatGPT and AI-powered tools entails the risks to students' development, not only in terms of language proficiency but also creativity and critical thinking skills [28]-[30].

Vietnamese studies on AI in foreign language education show similar findings. From the student perspective, ChatGPT reportedly helps improve English writing skills [8], but poses challenges about the over-reliance, inaccuracy, limits on creativity and ethical issues [4]. The AI-based assistance for vocabulary, translation, grammar and rephrasing are acknowledged, but teacher guidance remains necessary [2]. The tool's responsiveness and potentials for language skill development are positively viewed, along with concerns about reliability and negative impacts on critical thinking [6]. From the teacher perspective, advantages like personalised learning and enhanced engagement are highlighted, but there are also uncertainties about students' heavy dependence, ethical issues, data privacy [7], cultural alignment and integration difficulties [3]. Additional challenges include the teachers' need for professional training, greater awareness of AI's limitations, and clearer guidance for responsible classroom use [5].

Despite the extensive discussion on the potentials and limitations of AI-assisted language education, little attention has been paid to the affective dimensions [9]-[10], particularly the emotional experiences of teachers navigating the rapidly shifting landscape of EFL teaching and learning. While existing studies focus primarily on perceptions, performance, or ethical concerns, they rarely examine teachers' emotional appraisals during sustained AI use. To address this gap, the present study focuses on Vietnamese teachers' emotional experiences with AI in EFL classrooms, contributing context-specific evidence to a largely overlooked area of research.

2.1.3. Control-Value Theory (CVT) and teacher emotions in technology use

The Control-Value Theory (CVT) is a theoretical framework explaining how achievement-related emotions arise from an individual's assessment of task control and value [11]. It focuses on two main appraisals: control - the extent to which a person feels they can influence an outcome and value - how important or meaningful a task is to the user. In the case of teachers and technology use, this means that the emotions a teacher experiences are not entirely determined by the technology itself, but by their cognitive judgments about whether they can effectively use the technology and whether they find it beneficial or important [31].

According to CVT, emotions can be broadly categorised into positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions tend to reinforce and sustain technology use whereas negative emotions, which stem from low perceived control, can be divided into activating emotions and deactivating emotions. These emotions are not fixed but change over time, often shifting between activating and deactivating forms, with limited differentiation [32]. The emphasis on the dynamic nature of

emotions in technology use makes CVT particularly relevant for this study, following previous studies which examine the emotional experiences of teachers in different AI-integrated EFL settings [12]-[13].

2.2. Research design

To explore the emotional experiences of Vietnamese teachers with the integration of AI-powered tools in EFL teaching and learning, this study took a qualitative approach, our team gathered data through semi-structured interviews for an in-depth understanding of the participants. The process is followed by a thematic analysis to uncover key themes and recurring patterns in the interview data.

2.2.1. Data collection

The participants of this study were recruited by convenience sampling, which resulted in a group of ten female Vietnamese EFL teachers, working at a public higher education institution, focusing on language education and related social sciences and humanities. They all have attained a Master's degree, and their teaching experience varied from 8 to over 15 years.

Table 1. Details of participant profile

Participants (pseudonyms)	Years of teaching experience	Qualifications	AI-powered tools used in teaching practices
1. Han	17 years	MA	ChatGPT, Copilot
2. Hien	More than 15 years	MA	ChatGPT, ElsaSpeak
3. Hang	More than 15 years	MA	ChatGPT, Copilot, Notion AI
4. Minh	More than 15 years	MA	ChatGPT
5. Hoa	12 years	MA	ChatGPT
6. Lan	8 years	MA	ChatGPT, Canva, Copilot
7. Thi	13 years	MA	ChatGPT, Quillbot
8.Thuy	13 years	MA	ChatGPT, Quillbot, Grammarly
9. Vi	14 years	MA	ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity
10. Nguyen	17 years	MA	ChatGPT

Interviews for the study were conducted one-on-one, via Zoom and in Vietnamese, allowing flexibility for participants to express their views and experiences. Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and recorded with the consent of the participants. The participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, given a set of guiding questions before the interview and encouraged to only talk about what they felt comfortable with and stop the interview whenever they wanted. The interviews were transcribed and translated by both authors, and pseudonyms were given to each participant to protect their confidentiality.

2.2.2. Data analysis

The collaborative and multi-stage process of data analysis began with the authors independently coding the interview transcripts. They then met to merge their codes and develop a shared interpretation. This involved grouping initial codes into tentative themes, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure they aligned with the study's objectives. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, the participants' own interpretation and feedback were invited for triangulation. In the following section, the finalised themes will be elaborated on with direct interview excerpts for support.

2.3. Findings and discussions

The thematic analysis revealed four key themes, which will be presented and discussed below, accompanied by relevant participant responses.

2.3.1. Excitement about AI's pedagogical and research potentials

In their interviews, all of the participants shared their initial excitement when exploring AI applications in their teaching. For instance, Lan underscored her positive experience with ChatGPT for developing instructional content, stating, "AI technologies bring numerous advantages to different stages [of teaching], from preparing lesson plans, gamifying activities, to creating lively and purpose-driven visual aids." Nguyen also used AI-generative tools to convert ideas into videos and slides, which, as she admitted, saved her considerable time and efforts. This aligns with existing literature showing that AI-powered tools can support teachers by automating routine tasks and reducing their workload [23]-[24].

There was also a shared satisfaction among the majority of teachers when using AI-generated websites to refine language in writing materials for their students, which corroborates previous studies about the use of AI tools in teaching Writing [1], [21]-[22]. While Thuy claimed Quillbot's rate of "ready-to-use" answers was 50-60%, Lan and other teachers believed AI-generated suggestions provided more authentic elements to their writings. For Vi, ChatGPT and other similar apps proved to be "significant time-savers" for the process of designing tests.

The support of AI technologies in doing research was another significant theme identified among the interviewed participants. Specifically, Vi, Thi, and Hoa reported utilising various AI-generative platforms for tasks such as summarising academic journals and identifying emergent research trends, which are also recognised advantages of AI technologies for language researchers [29]. Vi described her previous approach, which involved manually reviewing a minimum of 20 articles to generate novel ideas, as "exhausting, time-consuming, and lacking focus or direction." In contrast, AI applications have enabled a "less daunting process with practical ideas generated by AI apps," thereby streamlining her initial research phase. Besides, both Vi and Hoa found AI-related apps to be mentally supportive while doing research, highlighting a nuanced affective dimension that has not been widely documented. Vi found herself less hesitant in starting a new research project with the help of technology, and Hoa considered ChatGPT her own source of emotional support, particularly "when ChatGPT provides answers and comments that align with my thoughts, kind of agreeing with me, I feel a great sense of relief."

These findings align with insights from CVT, which suggests that positive emotions, such as excitement, satisfaction, and relief, emerge when individuals perceive high task value and sufficient control over the task [11]. The teachers' excitement in using AI, showed high perceived value and high sense of control over these tools, shared by the teacher participants in other EFL contexts [12]-[13]. Such appraisals give rise to positive activating emotions that foster greater engagement and openness to technological integration.

2.3.2. Skepticism and caution regarding AI's limitations

Although most participants expressed a certain level of satisfaction in using AI technologies in their teaching, several reported its downsides in their experiences, including the possibility of inaccurate information, the deficiency in constructing and assessing high-level academic writing. For example, Thuy showed her disappointment with ChatGPT's failure to "see the connection in the original text" which resulted in the loss of the original meaning.

The awareness of the AI tools' limitations contributed to the teachers' growing concern about students' use. There was a shared sense of distress that students were becoming increasingly passive, relying on AI tools even for the most basic tasks, which has also been found in previous studies [4], [7], [28]-[30]. Lan, for example, noticed that her students not only used AI to complete their homework but also to respond to her questions during face-to-face class discussions. Thi also expressed her apprehension about students' lack of critical thinking skills and the involved risks:

> *They don't even think about verifying it. […] If this use goes undetected, they will not learn anything, unable to gain any intellectual growth or even end up with an inflated sense of competence.*

Academic integrity emerged as another major concern, echoing existing research on AI-integrated education [1], [23], [26], [29]. Han was the one that showed the most resolute stance on the ethical implications of AI-generated assignments. Academic honesty for her was a matter of principle, in order to preserve fairness and meaningful learning, which explained her determination to draw the line*:* "If it's a graded assignment, and I know the student submitted a product generated by AI, I give it a zero."

Beyond academic skills and integrity, several participants raised concerns in the changing nature of teacher-student relationships in AI-mediated classrooms, which have also been discussed in previous studies [7], [23], [29]. In particular, Han reflected on how AI contributed to a feeling of disconnection: "It's not that AI directly causes harm, but it does make the teacher-student relationship colder." For other teachers, AI introduced conflict and emotional tension as they perceived the act of submitting AI-generated work without acknowledgement as a form of disrespect. Hien, for instance, admitted to feeling offended when students assumed she would not recognise AI-written work, "as if I were too stupid to tell the difference".

In contrast, a few participants offered a more accepting and nuanced perspective on students' use of AI. Teaching non-English majors, Hoa saw the students' use of AI as "putting in effort and showing care" about the course and learning materials which would otherwise be rather overwhelming for them.

Through the lens of CVT [11], the teachers' disappointment, frustration, and concern about students' passive use of AI indicate a perceived loss of control over the learning process and pedagogical outcomes. When teachers believe that students rely excessively on AI and the involvement of AI tools undermines meaningful student-teacher interaction, such emotions may prompt stricter regulation or intervention, such as frustration, anger, and anxiety, consistant with prior findings [12]-[13]. In contrast, more positive perspectives shared by teachers like Hoa suggest a more balanced appraisal of control and value, where AI is viewed as an assistive tool rather than a threat. These more adaptive appraisals are likely to be associated with positive emotions such as empathy and understanding, which foster openness and promote student engagement.

2.3.3. Confidence in human expertise

Despite the challenges posed by AI, all of the participants were not dissuaded by the fear of getting replaced by AI. For them, the presence of AI was not simply a threat to traditional teaching values, but a catalyst for professional development. Hien described how, rather than resisting AI, she had come to see it as an opportunity: "I'll need to take on the role of guiding them, like showing how to filter ChatGPT outputs, what not to use, or pointing out some issues AI often has". Her response reflected a shift from frustration to a proactive effort to shape how students interact with the technology. Thi also pointed to the continued necessity of the teacher's presence, particularly for learners with limited prior experience or lower levels. This sense of empowerment was echoed by Hien, who framed AI as a tool that could relieve teachers of repetitive, uninspiring tasks and make teaching more fulfilling and student-centered. It also aligns with previous studies emphasising on the irreplaceable role of the teachers in AI-integrated education [1]-[2], which are "changing but not being eliminated" (p. 14) [27].

Other participants spoke with a clear sense of confidence in the human capacities that distinguish educators from machines. This confidence exceeds that described in prior research, where teachers felt assured mainly because of their own AI proficiency or their students' effective use of the AI-powered tools [12]-[13]. In this study, the most compelling reason why AI could not replace teachers is its inability to replicate the emotional, motivational, and interpersonal

aspects of teaching. Han firmly stated that it was not the lesson content that made someone a teacher, but rather "how I deliver them, how I respond to students, how I explain and engage."

A similar emotional security was shown in Hoa's response. For her, AI was not a threat, but a mirror: by seeing what it lacked, she could reaffirm what only she could offer.

> *I don't feel threatened by AI because anything related to emotion, mentality, or motivation, AI just can't do that. What matters is that we find the parts that AI can't do, or can't do as well as humans.*

These affirming attitudes toward AI's role in education can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of CVT [11]. The teachers' confidence, adaptability, and redefined sense of purpose suggest high perceived control over their evolving roles and a strong value placed on the relational and ethical dimensions of teaching. Their proactive stance, such as mentoring students in responsible AI use, demonstrates the presence of positive activating emotions like interest, hope, and pride. This reflects a dynamic reappraisal process where control is regained through pedagogical reinvention, and value is reaffirmed through a renewed focus on what makes teaching human.

2.3.4. Frustration over the lack of institutional support

Despite the strong confidence in the irreplaceable role of human expertise, the participants voiced a deep concern about the institutional gaps that undermine their ability to uphold this role effectively in the age of AI. First, when it comes to precisely identifying the use of AI tools in students' submissions, Minh expressed frustration over the unreliable nature of current AI-detection tools, a constraint also noted in prior studies [1], [21], [27]. She further added that "even if highly effective detectors exist, I wouldn't be able to afford," which highlights one of the pragmatic issues in implementing such technologies. This lack of institutional investment left many teachers relying on "gut feeling and experience," as Thi noted.

The absence of formal policies and practical mechanisms added to the challenges. For Hang, since no instructions were officially provided, she could not assign a failing grade even when she suspected misuse of AI. "My only option is to prevent it, but that takes much more effort." Vi echoed this concern, admitting that "banning AI completely is impossible," but the ambiguity was not only frustrating but also structurally disempowering.

Some teachers therefore directly called for stronger institutional support, emphasising on the need for systematic solutions that could restore the consistency of the classroom decisions. Hang advocated for a top-down approach with formal guidelines instead of the teachers' individual judgements. However, she added that applying university-level policies to each specific course would pose major challenges, hinting at the complexity of developing workable, context-sensitive regulations.

Other participants looked forward to a reform in teacher training and curriculum to meet the realities of AI-enhanced learning, which is congruent with previous studies highlighting the need of training educators in AI applications [5], [27]. Hien and Han proposed courses on teaching techniques involving AI, including instruction on both technical and ethical aspects, for both working and pre-service teachers.

From the perspective of CVT [11], the frustration and confusion expressed by these teachers reflect experiences of low perceived control within a value-laden context. While the participants clearly valued ethical teaching and student development, the lack of institutional clarity and resources diminished their ability to act in ways that aligned with these values, which produce negative activating emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or even anger. Despite these emotional pressures, the teachers' calls for structured training and policy reform indicate a persistent sense of value. Their willingness to navigate uncharted ethical terrain and request professional development shows a latent hope and constructive engagement.

3. Conclusions

This study, through the lens of CVT, sheds light on the complex and nuanced emotions experienced by a group of EFL teachers as they integrated AI-powered tools into their professional practices at a public university in Vietnam. Their emotional experiences ranged from initial excitement about the support these tools offered to skepticism about their limitations and concerns about the impacts on students, classroom dynamics and academic integrity. Amid these mixed emotions, a notable finding is the strong confidence these university lecturers expressed in their irreplaceable human expertise, stemming not only from their technological adaptability but also from their heightened awareness of the unique value of emotional connection and ethical guidance - the core of teaching that AI cannot replicate. The study also brings forward the teachers' frustration with the lack of resources and regulations, including unreliable AI detection tools, financial constraints, and an absence of clear policies and training.

These findings contribute to deepening understanding of the affective dimension of AI-integrated education and carry important implications for both individual teachers and educational institutions. Insights into prevalent emotional responses enable educators to better negotiate and prepare for the dynamic shifts that are occurring in AI-supported EFL teaching and learning. At the institutional level, the findings underscore an urgent need for comprehensive support systems, including access to dependable AI-detection tools, specific guidelines, transparent policy frameworks and regular professional training, which enables teachers to incorporate AI more confidently, ethically, and effectively.

The present study, however, is not without limitations, such as the small sample size and exclusively qualitative design, which points to several directions for further research. Future studies could include larger samples, incorporate quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, examine additional dimensions such as emotion regulation strategies, and explore the influence of culture, teaching experience, and academic discipline on emotional experiences with AI in language classrooms.

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