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EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN COLLABORATING WITH AI TO PREPARE LESSONS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract

This study explores two main aspects: (1) the habits, opportunities, and challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers in using AI for lesson planning, and (2) their perceptions of AI's influence on decision-making during lesson preparation. A qualitative narrative inquiry methodology was employed to capture participants lived experiences. Three EFL pre-service teachers from the English Education Study Program at a university in West Java, who had completed their School Field Experience Program (PLP), participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and narrative frames. Findings revealed that AI has become integral to participants' lesson-planning practices, supporting brainstorming, material development, activity design, assessment preparation, and worksheet creation. AI provided opportunities by enhancing efficiency, enriching creativity, and offering diverse instructional resources. However, challenges emerged, including difficulties in crafting effective prompts, receiving overly general AI-generated responses, and concerns about overdependence on AI. Furthermore, AI influenced decision-making across several lesson-planning components, yet participants consistently maintained curriculum alignment and pedagogical autonomy. This balance highlights the importance of teachers' critical engagement with AI outputs. The study concludes that AI functions as a collaborative partner rather than a replacement for teachers. Effective integration requires critical thinking, digital literacy, and reflective pedagogical judgment.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), EFL Pre-Service Teachers, lesson planning, narrative inquiry, teacher-AI Collaboration*



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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most influential technological developments shaping contemporary society, including the field of education. The rapid advancement of AI has changed the ways information is accessed, knowledge is produced, and educational activities are designed and implemented. AI-based technologies are increasingly incorporated into educational contexts to assist teachers and learners in completing academic tasks, accessing information, generating learning materials, and supporting decision-making processes. According to Harry (2023), AI refers to the use of intelligent systems capable of imitating human cognitive processes, including learning, reasoning, and problem-solving, to support teaching and learning activities. In educational contexts, AI is no longer limited to performing automated technical tasks but has gradually developed into a technology capable of providing recommendations, generating instructional materials, adapting learning resources, and supporting personalized learning experiences. The growing presence of AI has consequently encouraged educators to reconsider conventional teaching practices and explore new forms of interaction

Alneyadi and Alshannag (2023) argue that the integration of AI into education has the potential to reshape instructional practices by providing personalized learning pathways, increasing efficiency, and supporting teachers in performing various pedagogical responsibilities. These developments indicate that the role of teachers is also changing. Teachers are increasingly expected not only to deliver knowledge but also to design meaningful learning experiences, select appropriate instructional strategies, facilitate students' participation, and make pedagogical decisions based on learners' characteristics and educational contexts. In this situation, AI can function as a supportive technology that complements teachers' professional capabilities rather than merely replacing conventional instructional practices.

Nguyen (2023) emphasizes that AI can assist teachers by reducing repetitive tasks and increasing instructional flexibility, allowing educators to devote more attention to pedagogical activities and interactions with students. Nevertheless, the increasing integration of AI into education also raises important questions regarding how teachers interact with AI technologies, how they evaluate AI-generated recommendations, and how

collaboration with AI influences their pedagogical practices and professional development. These questions become particularly significant in teacher education because future teachers are currently preparing to enter classrooms where digital technologies and AI-assisted educational practices are increasingly present.

One important area in which AI can support teachers is lesson planning. Lesson planning is a fundamental component of teaching because it requires teachers to transform curriculum objectives into organized instructional activities, select appropriate teaching materials and media, determine suitable teaching strategies, design assessments, and anticipate students' learning needs. Emiliyasi et al. (2019) explain that a lesson plan generally includes learning materials, instructional methods, time allocation, learning environments, and procedures for evaluating students' progress.

Noroozi et al. (2024) state that AI can support educators by providing media recommendations, generating creative instructional ideas, developing alternative assessments, and assisting teachers in analyzing learning outcomes. Through these functions, AI has the potential to reduce the time required for repetitive aspects of lesson preparation while expanding teachers' access to instructional resources and alternative pedagogical perspectives. More importantly, collaboration with AI can create opportunities for teachers to engage in iterative lesson planning processes in which they generate ideas, evaluate AI-produced suggestions, revise instructional activities, and make final pedagogical decisions based on their professional judgment. In this sense, AI can be conceptualized not merely as an automated tool but as a collaborative partner involved in the process of instructional design. Shukla et al. (2025) highlight that AI technologies are increasingly reshaping educational practices through innovations such as intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment tools, and adaptive learning platforms. However, the educational significance of AI collaboration depends on how teachers use, evaluate, modify, accept, or reject AI-generated suggestions.

Despite the potential benefits of AI-assisted lesson planning, the integration of AI into educational practices also presents considerable challenges, particularly for pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers are prospective educators who are still developing their pedagogical knowledge, instructional competence, classroom experience, and professional identity through teacher education programs, coursework, microteaching, and teaching practicum activities (Ajani, 2024). Unlike experienced teachers, who may have established instructional routines and accumulated practical knowledge from classroom experiences, pre-service teachers often encounter

difficulties when transforming educational theories into practical lesson designs.

Johnson, as cited in Taskin (2017), explains that the initial stages of lesson planning can be challenging for pre-service teachers because experienced teachers gradually internalize planning processes and develop more intuitive approaches, whereas novice teachers tend to rely on rigid and highly structured lesson plans because of their limited teaching experience. Consequently, pre-service teachers may experience difficulties in selecting appropriate instructional media, designing meaningful classroom activities, developing suitable assessments, anticipating classroom problems, and determining whether instructional decisions correspond to students' needs. AI technologies can provide significant assistance in addressing some of these difficulties by generating lesson ideas and offering alternative pedagogical recommendations.

However, the availability of AI-generated information does not automatically guarantee appropriate pedagogical decisions. Ding and Min Li (2025) argue that the integration of technology into education can create uncertainty and require teachers to adjust their professional practices, potentially generating concerns related to instructional autonomy and technological dependence. These concerns may become particularly important for pre-service teachers whose pedagogical judgment and professional confidence are still developing. Excessive dependence on AI-generated recommendations may limit opportunities for pre-service teachers to independently develop instructional reasoning, while uncritical acceptance of AI-generated materials may lead to lesson plans that do not correspond to specific learners, curriculum requirements, or classroom realities.

A growing body of research has examined the integration of AI technologies into education and teaching practices. Harry (2023) discusses the expanding role of AI in educational environments and emphasizes its capacity to support teaching and learning through intelligent systems that provide recommendations, generate learning resources, and adapt educational processes to learners' needs. Alneyadi and Alshannag (2023) further demonstrate that AI integration can reshape instructional practices by supporting personalized learning, increasing educational efficiency, and influencing teacher engagement.

Research concerning teachers' professional practices has also demonstrated that effective teaching involves complex behavioral and pedagogical dimensions. Dreer-Goethe (2026) highlights the importance of teachers' classroom management, interpersonal relationships, and selection of appropriate instructional methods in establishing positive classroom environments, suggesting that technologies should support rather than

replace these essential dimensions of teaching. Meanwhile, Ding and Min Li (2025) draw attention to the potential tensions associated with technology integration, including the need for teachers to adapt their practices, concerns regarding reduced instructional autonomy, and the possibility of increasing technological dependence. Shukla et al. (2025) further illustrate how AI technologies are transforming educational practices through intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment, and adaptive learning environments.

This limitation indicates an important research gap in the literature on Teacher–AI Collaboration. First, existing research has predominantly examined AI as a technological tool used to improve educational efficiency, generate learning materials, facilitate assessment, or support teaching and learning activities. Comparatively limited attention has been given to AI as a collaborative partner involved in the pedagogical decision-making processes of teachers. Second, studies concerning teachers’ use of AI have frequently focused on practicing or experienced educators, while the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers remain underexplored. This distinction is important because pre-service teachers occupy a unique professional position: they are expected to design pedagogically appropriate lessons while simultaneously developing the practical knowledge, professional judgment, and confidence necessary for becoming teachers. Third, although AI-assisted lesson planning has received increasing attention, limited research has explored the specific habits that emerge when pre-service teachers work with AI, the opportunities they perceive, the challenges they encounter, and the ways they evaluate and negotiate AI-generated recommendations.

Narrative inquiry enables researchers to investigate how individuals understand, interpret, and reconstruct experiences through stories while considering the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place. By examining participants’ narratives, research can move beyond determining whether AI is useful or effective and instead investigate how collaboration with AI is experienced, negotiated, and interpreted within the process of becoming a professional teacher. Therefore, the present study addresses a gap at the intersection of AI-assisted lesson planning, Teacher–AI Collaboration, EFL teacher education, pedagogical decision-making, and pre-service teachers’ professional development.

Based on this research gap, the present study focuses on exploring the lived experiences of EFL pre-service teachers collaborating with Artificial Intelligence during lesson planning through a narrative inquiry approach. Specifically, this study investigates the habitual practices that emerge when pre-service teachers interact with AI, the opportunities AI provides for

generating instructional ideas and supporting lesson preparation, and the challenges encountered when evaluating, modifying, or relying on AI-generated recommendations.

This study is grounded in four interconnected concepts: AI in education, AI-supported lesson planning, pre-service teachers' professional learning, and Teacher-AI Collaboration. Together, these concepts explain how AI supports lesson planning, pedagogical decision-making, and the professional development of EFL pre-service teachers.

Artificial Intelligence in Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to digital technologies capable of performing functions associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Strohmeier, 2021). In educational contexts, AI has developed from rule-based systems into more advanced technologies, including intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment tools, adaptive learning platforms, and generative AI. These technologies can support teaching and learning by providing personalized assistance, generating instructional materials, offering immediate feedback, and supporting educational decision-making (Shukla et al., 2025).

Recent developments in generative AI have further expanded opportunities for interaction between teachers and technology. AI-based conversational systems can generate ideas, respond to users' requests, and provide alternative solutions to instructional problems. However, AI should function as a supportive technology rather than replacing teachers' professional roles. Teachers remain responsible for evaluating AI-generated information and ensuring that its use is appropriate to learning objectives and classroom contexts (Adablanu et al., 2025).

AI-Supported Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is a fundamental teaching process involving the formulation of learning objectives, selection of instructional materials and methods, organization of classroom activities, and development of assessment procedures (Houella, 2022). For pre-service teachers, lesson planning can be challenging because they are still developing the pedagogical knowledge and practical experience required to make appropriate instructional decisions. AI technologies can support lesson preparation by generating teaching materials, suggesting classroom activities, recommending instructional media, and providing alternative assessment strategies. Noroozi et al. (2024) explain that AI can assist teachers in generating creative instructional ideas and developing learning resources. Nevertheless, AI-generated recommendations still require teachers'

evaluation and adaptation because they may not always correspond to students' needs, curriculum requirements, or actual classroom conditions. Therefore, AI-supported lesson planning involves interaction between technological assistance and human pedagogical judgment.

EFL Pre-Service Teachers in Teaching Practicum

Pre-service teachers are prospective educators who develop their teaching competence through coursework, microteaching, and teaching practicum experiences. The School Field Experience Program (PLP) provides opportunities for prospective teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic classroom settings and develop practical skills in lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional delivery.

During teaching practicum, pre-service teachers often encounter difficulties in selecting appropriate instructional strategies, preparing learning materials, engaging students, and adapting lessons to classroom situations (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). The integration of AI provides additional support for addressing these instructional challenges. However, using AI effectively requires prospective teachers to develop digital competence and critically evaluate technological recommendations. Consequently, experiences of using AI during teaching practicum may contribute to the development of pre-service teachers' pedagogical judgment and professional practices.

Teacher-AI Collaboration

Teacher-AI Collaboration refers to an active, collaborative relationship where teacher and AI are working purposefully, regularly, and collaboratively to deliver substantive instruction, and to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Kim, 2024). AI can generate teaching materials, provide recommendations, suggest instructional activities, and offer alternative solutions, while teachers contribute contextual understanding, pedagogical knowledge, and professional judgment.

In this study, Teacher-AI Collaboration is examined through EFL pre-service teachers' experiences of using AI during lesson planning. The analysis focuses on their habits, opportunities, and challenges when working with AI, as well as how AI influences their pedagogical decision-making processes. These concepts provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how pre-service teachers interact with, evaluate, and negotiate AI-generated recommendations while preparing lessons.

Accordingly, this study is guided by two research questions: (1) What are EFL pre-service teachers' habits, opportunities, and challenges when

working with AI for lesson planning? and (2) How do pre-service teachers perceive AI influencing their decision-making processes in lesson planning? In line with these questions, this study aims to reveal the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers in collaborating with AI during lesson planning, identify the opportunities and challenges arising from this collaboration, and understand how AI influences their instructional decision-making and developing professional identity.

Research Methods

This section discusses the methodology employed in this study. It consists of several subsections: research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore the lived experiences of EFL pre-service teachers collaborating with Artificial Intelligence (AI) during lesson planning. Narrative inquiry was selected because it enables researchers to understand how participants interpret and construct meaning from their experiences through stories. The study was guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place, which allows participants' to tell their stories capturing the complexity of lived experiences rather than reducing them to static descriptions (Connelly & Clandinin, as cited in Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Participants

The participants (participant 1/P1 and participant 2/P2) were two EFL pre-service teachers from a university in West Java who had completed the School Field Experience Program (PLP). They were in the eighth semester which was the final year of university. During PLP, they taught English in grade 11 and 12 in upper secondary level. Prior to PLP, they did not have any teaching experiences unless several micro-teaching sessions at their English department. The participants mainly used ChatGPT and Gemini to help them in planning their lessons during a semester of PLP experience. They were selected because they had direct experience using AI tools during lesson planning and had experienced the transition from theoretical teacher education to actual classroom practice. Their experiences provided insights into their habits, opportunities, and challenges when collaborating with AI and the ways AI influenced their pedagogical decision-making.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two main sources: semi-structured in-depth interviews and narrative frames. The interviews allowed participants to share stories about their experiences, practices, challenges, and reflections regarding the use of AI during lesson planning. The semi-structured format provided flexibility for participants to elaborate on significant experiences while remaining connected to the research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019). The questions put in the interview included their stories about teaching experience during PLP, the participants' use of artificial intelligence (AI) as collaborator in planning their English lesson, the benefits of collaborating with AI, the challenges and how they coped with them, in what ways AI influence their lesson planning, as well as the changes in their perspective toward themselves as English teacher candidates and lesson planning process. The interviews were conducted twice with each session lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviews used Indonesian language as it was the chosen language by the participants. For the publication purpose, the transcription of interviews was translated into English. The interviews were conducted face to face and video recorded.

Narrative frame was also used as data collection with the participants writing their stories based on the prompts provided. The prompts used Indonesian language to ensure the participants understand them and can share their stories written meaningfully. The prompts were divided into three main sections. The first section focused on habits, opportunities, and challenges in using AI for lesson planning such as "When I think about my habits in using AI for lesson planning, I realize that..." and "One opportunity I discovered when working with AI was...". The second section focused on AI use in lesson planning such as "Based on the objectives, AI guided me in designing the learning activities, for example...". The last section focused on the participants' professional identity and reflection as a result of their collaboration with AI such as "Through my collaboration with AI, I learned that as a future teacher I...". Both interviews and narrative frames were triangulated to provide rich data of participants' stories and experiences.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using narrative inquiry procedures while considering the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place. Following the narrative inquiry procedures adapted from Creswell (2012, as cited in Chu & Chang, 2017), the analysis involved collecting participants' stories, identifying experiences relevant to the research questions, organizing the experiences chronologically and contextually, reconstructing and retelling

participants' narratives, and interpreting the meanings reflected in their experiences.

The interview narratives and narrative frame were examined together to understand participants' habits, opportunities, and challenges when collaborating with AI, as well as how AI influenced their pedagogical decision-making. The reconstructed narratives were interpreted within participants' personal, social, and teaching practicum contexts to provide a holistic understanding of their experiences.

The trustworthiness was maintained by implementing member checking and triangulation. Member checking was implemented by involving participants in looking at the transcription in the early process of analysis as well as the result of analysis. The triangulation was also carried out by analysing the data from three different data sources to cross check the findings.

Results and Discussion

This study explored two EFL pre-service teachers' experiences of collaborating with AI during lesson planning in the School Field Experience Program (PLP). The findings address two research questions: (1) What habits, opportunities and challenges do EFL pre-service teachers experience when using AI for lesson planning?, and (2) How do they perceive AI as influencing their lesson-planning decisions? The findings are presented through the individual narratives of Participant 1 and Participant 2, followed by a cross-narrative analysis.

Results

Participants' Narratives of AI-Assisted Lesson Planning

Participant 1 (P1): Using AI to Generate Ideas and Adapt Learning Materials

Participant 1 (P1) described her teaching practicum as an experience involving both challenges and rewarding moments. Since she had limited teaching experience, she sometimes felt uncertain about how to respond to unfamiliar situations, including how to support students who were falling behind. At the same time, she found teaching rewarding when students participated enthusiastically in lessons she had prepared. She also observed that her students preferred digital learning experiences to conventional worksheets. These experiences formed part of the context in which she approached lesson planning and sought support from AI.

P1 described AI as particularly useful for generating instructional ideas. She explained that it was "very helpful, especially for brainstorming ideas" (P1, interview, 02:06, translated from Indonesian). She frequently used ChatGPT because she felt it could provide suggestions reflecting her

teaching preferences. However, she did not describe AI-generated suggestions as finished lesson plans. Instead, she explained that she continued to improve the suggestions by drawing on what she had learned in her university courses and adapting them to her own teaching approach (P1, interview, 02:31-02:48).

Her account illustrates a process in which AI-generated ideas were considered alongside her developing pedagogical knowledge. AI provided an initial set of possibilities, while P1 remained responsible for deciding what to modify and how to incorporate it into her planning. This was particularly relevant to her experience as a novice teacher who was still developing confidence in responding to classroom situations.

Despite these perceived benefits, P1 encountered difficulties when communicating her needs to AI. She explained that when her instructions were clear, the responses did not match her expectations. She recognized that her own prompt-writing skills needed improvement and tried to clarify her requests by providing concrete examples, including visual references. She described sharing an image from Pinterest to help AI understand the kind of output she wanted (P1, interview, 03:01-03:46). Her account suggests that interaction with AI involved experimentation and adjustment. When an initial response was unsuitable, she modified the information provided to obtain a more relevant result.

P1's use of AI also extended to assessment and worksheet preparation. She explained that learning objectives were guided by the curriculum and textbooks used at school. When developing assessments, she consulted the textbook and used AI to explore ways of making assessment activities more engaging. For a lesson on narrative figures, for instance, she sought ideas for an assessment that students would find interesting. She also described developing a worksheet that required students to observe and interview people to collect information. Although she created the worksheet herself, AI supported its development, and she checked its relevance against the textbook used at school (P1, interview, 04:21-05:16).

P1 also expressed concerns about the implications of excessive AI use. She worried that students might become dependent on AI and gradually lose the habit of thinking independently. She further noted that AI-generated information could be biased and should be checked rather than accepted immediately. For her, ethical AI use and digital literacy were important aspects of a teacher's responsibilities. Rather than prohibiting students from using AI, she advocated guiding them to use it appropriately (P1, interview, 05:45-06:50). Her narrative thus presents a tension between the convenience

of AI-assisted lesson planning and the need to preserve independent thinking.

Participant 2 (P2): Using AI as a Planning and Self-Evaluation Partner

Participant 2 (P2) described her PLP experience at the secondary level as enjoyable, partly because she felt supported by her students. She also incorporated digital activities, particularly educational games, into her teaching to encourage students' interest and participation, although she used digital tools selectively rather than extensively in every lesson.

In planning lessons, P2 described AI as a partner for brainstorming and preparation. She explained that she frequently used AI to find references, generate ideas, and evaluate her lesson plans before discussing them with her supervising teacher. She would present a proposed lesson plan and ask AI whether it appeared appropriate for the characteristics and circumstances of the class (P2, interview, 02:27-03:21). This use of AI as a preliminary review resource was part of a broader preparation process and did not replace guidance from her supervising teacher.

P2 also used AI to locate potential learning resources. When she was uncertain about which website would be suitable for teaching vocabulary, she asked AI for recommendations. She additionally used ChatGPT to generate images for instructional media (P2, interview, 03:36-05:11). These practices illustrate how AI expanded the range of resources she could consider when preparing lessons.

Nevertheless, P2 acknowledged that AI did not always produce responses that matched her plans. She explained that even when AI generated useful suggestions, the results could differ from what she had intended. She therefore considered prompt formulation important for obtaining more suitable responses (P2, interview, 05:29-06:21).

P2's approach to instructional objectives further clarifies the role she assigned to AI. She explained that she determined her learning objectives beforehand, following the requirements established by the school. She did not primarily use AI to determine those objectives; instead, she consulted AI about activities and resources that could help students achieve them. As she explained, "I have already determined my learning objectives beforehand" (P2, interview, 06:58; translated from Indonesian).

P2 perceived time efficiency as another important opportunity. She argued that AI could reduce the time required to prepare teaching administration and materials, leaving more time for other responsibilities, including preparing instructional media and assessments. However, she emphasized that this benefit depended on responsible use. In her view, AI should help teachers prepare for instruction rather than replace teaching

itself. She maintained that teachers must remain responsible for understanding classroom conditions, students' characteristics, and the direction of learning (P2, interview, 08:52-10:40). P2's narrative therefore presents AI as a planning and self-evaluation partner that supports the development of instructional activities and resources.

Cross-Narrative Findings: Habits, Opportunities, and Challenges

Habits of AI Use

Both participants incorporated AI into their lesson-planning routines, particularly for brainstorming instructional ideas. However, their accounts revealed different interaction patterns. P1 emphasized using ChatGPT to generate ideas and subsequently improving them according to her developing pedagogical knowledge. P2 described a broader set of purposes, including brainstorming, searching for references, evaluating lesson plans, and generating instructional media. For P1, interaction was closely associated with idea generation and subsequent modification; for P2, AI also served as a source of feedback during preliminary self-evaluation. In both cases, AI was incorporated into an existing planning process rather than treated as an independent decision-maker.

Opportunities for Lesson Planning

The participants identified opportunities related to idea generation, resource development, and time efficiency. P1 used AI to explore assessment ideas and develop a worksheet, whereas P2 used it to identify educational websites, generate images, and review lesson plans before consulting her supervising teacher. Their accounts also indicate that AI could broaden the range of instructional options available to pre-service teachers. For P1, this was relevant when seeking engaging activities and materials for students who preferred digital learning experiences. For P2, AI helped her consider alternative activities for achieving learning objectives that had already been established. These accounts demonstrate perceived opportunities; the interviews do not establish that AI use itself caused improvements in student achievement or engagement.

Challenges and Strategies for Managing AI Outputs

Both participants reported difficulties obtaining responses that matched their expectations. P1 explicitly connected this problem to her developing prompt-writing skills and described using concrete examples and visual references to clarify her requests. P2 similarly emphasized the importance of formulating prompts carefully when AI-generated suggestions

required contextual evaluation. P1 emphasized checking information for possible bias and avoiding excessive dependence on AI, while P2 stressed that AI could facilitate preparation but should not replace teachers' professional responsibilities. Together, the narratives suggest that AI-assisted planning required participants to refine requests, evaluate relevance, and retain responsibility for instructional decisions.

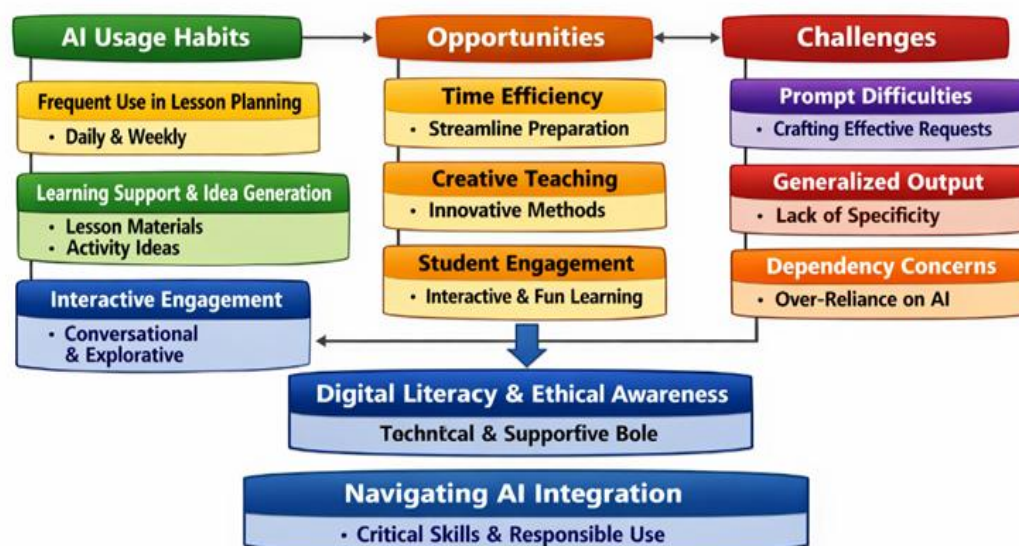


Figure 1. Summary of the participants' reported habits, perceived opportunities, and challenges in AI-assisted lesson planning

AI's Influence on Lesson Planning Decisions

The second research question concerned how the participants perceived AI's influence on their lesson-planning decisions. Their accounts showed that this influence was not uniform across planning components. AI was used most explicitly to explore activities and resources, while learning objectives remained closely connected to curriculum and school requirements.

Learning Objectives: Curriculum-Guided Planning

Learning objectives were primarily established through existing curricular expectations and school requirements. P1 explained that she referred to the curriculum and textbooks when determining learning objectives. P2 similarly stated that she had already determined her objectives before consulting AI. Their accounts suggest that AI did not replace the institutional and curricular basis of planning. Instead, it was used in relation to objectives that had already been established. The participants' written narrative frames also described AI as potentially useful for clarifying or

supporting the formulation of objectives; therefore, AI's role should not be characterized as independently determining their instructional goals.

Learning Activities: Generating and Adapting Instructional Options

Learning activities were an important area of AI assistance for both participants. P1 used AI to explore engaging assessment possibilities and develop materials connected to her lessons. P2 consulted AI to identify activities that could help students achieve predetermined learning objectives. In both accounts, AI expanded the options available during planning, while the participants retained responsibility for selecting and adapting them. Their narratives do not suggest that every AI-generated suggestion was adopted without modification.

Learning Media: Exploring Digital Resources

AI also supported the participants in considering learning media. P1's observations about students' preference for digital learning experiences formed part of her planning contexts. P2 used AI to identify possible educational websites and generate images for instructional media. These experiences show that AI could support resource exploration and material development. However, recommendations still required evaluation for their relevance to the lesson and the learners. The data indicate that AI helped participants consider possible resources; they do not establish that every recommended resource was implemented or produced a measurable improvement in learning.

Assessment and Instructional Materials

Assessment and material preparation were additional areas in which AI provided support. P1 described consulting AI after reviewing the textbook and using its suggestions to improve the appeal of an assessment. She also described developing a worksheet involving observation and interviews, with AI supporting the process. P2's account emphasized working within objectives and requirements established by the school, while using AI to explore activities and resources. These accounts suggest that AI could provide ideas for assessment and material development without assuming responsibility for alignment with curriculum or school expectations. The final design remained dependent on the participants' evaluation of the proposed materials.

Reflection and Professional Responsibility

Reflection emerged as an important dimension of the participants' experiences. P2 used AI to review lesson plans before obtaining feedback from her supervising teacher, while P1 reflected on the need to check information, improve her prompting skills, and avoid excessive dependence on AI. Their accounts indicate that reflection involved both evaluating lesson plans and considering the appropriate role of AI in teaching. Both participants maintained that teachers should remain responsible for understanding students' needs and making context-sensitive decisions.

Cross-Narrative Synthesis of Decision-Making

Overall, the findings suggest that AI influenced lesson planning primarily by expanding instructional options, supporting material development, and providing opportunities for preliminary evaluation. Its role was more limited in establishing learning objectives, which remained guided by curriculum and school requirements. Across these components, the participants continued to exercise judgment in deciding how AI-generated suggestions could be used. These findings describe the participants' perceptions and reported practices rather than demonstrating casual effects on lesson quality or student learning.

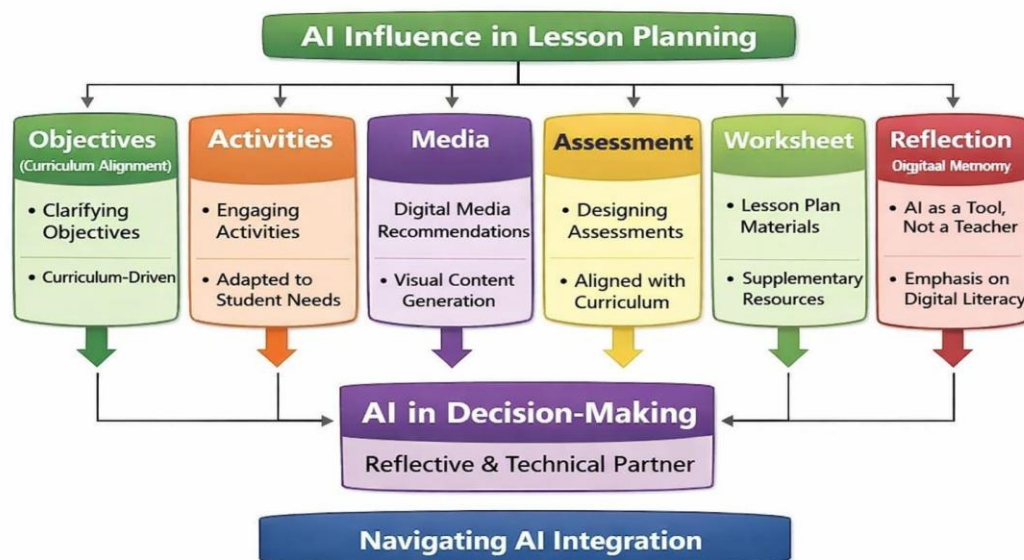


Figure 2. Summary of the lesson-planning components in which participants reported using or considering AI assistance

Discussion

AI Collaboration as an Individualized Planning Practice

The findings show that AI-assisted lesson planning was not experienced in exactly the same way by the two participants. Although both frequently used AI, P1 emphasized brainstorming, adapting suggestions, and improving her prompt-writing skills, whereas P2 described AI as a broader planning partner that supported brainstorming, resource searching, and preliminary self-evaluation. This difference is significant in a narrative inquiry because it demonstrates that the meaning of AI collaboration depends on participants' experiences, purposes, and developing professional development.

P1's narrative was shaped partly by uncertainty when encountering unfamiliar classroom situations and her effort to create engaging materials. P2's account emphasized the value of reviewing lesson plans and exploring ways to achieve objectives established by the school. Treating both accounts as a single, uniform experience would obscure these distinctions. The findings instead show how AI's perceived usefulness was interpreted through particular planning practices and the institutional context of the PLP, including curriculum requirements, textbooks, school expectations, and supervising teachers.

From the perspective of Teacher-AI Collaboration, the two narratives illustrate different ways in which technological assistance was incorporated into pedagogical work. AI supplied ideas and suggestions, but the participants' existing knowledge, instructional purposes, and classroom observations shaped how those suggestions were interpreted. The findings therefore support an understanding of AI collaboration as a situated process rather than a uniform technological practice (Chen et al., 2026).

Opportunities and Challenges in AI-Assisted Lesson Planning

The participants perceived several opportunities associated with AI, including generating ideas, finding learning resources, developing instructional media, preparing materials, and reviewing lesson plans. P2 explicitly connected AI with time efficiency, explaining that assistance with lesson preparation could leave more time for other teaching responsibilities. P1 emphasized the value of brainstorming and using AI to explore more engaging assessment and worksheet designs. These findings are consistent with the discussion of generative AI as a resource for instructional design and material development (Noorozi et al., 2024). The contribution of the present study lies in showing how these opportunities were experienced by pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum.

The participants did not describe AI as a complete solution to planning challenges. Instead, they used it to expand the range of possibilities they could consider while retaining responsibility for the resulting plans. The challenges they reported reinforce this interpretation. P1 experienced difficulties when her prompts did not adequately communicate her expectations, while P2 noted that AI responses could be inconsistent with her intended plans. These experiences indicate that the usefulness of AI-generated suggestions depended partly on the participants' ability to formulate requests and evaluate the resulting responses.

Prompt-writing difficulties were not the only challenge. P1 also expressed concerns about bias, excessive dependence, and the possible reduction of independent thinking. These concerns introduce an ethical dimension to the findings: even when AI provides convenient assistance, its use requires critical evaluation and awareness of its limitations. AI literacy in teacher education should therefore extend beyond technical proficiency to include clear prompting, checking information, evaluating relevance, and deciding when suggestions should be modified or rejected. This interpretation is grounded in the participants' reported experiences rather than an assumption that AI use automatically improves instructional quality.

AI's Influence on Pedagogical Decision-Making

The second research question reveals that AI's perceived influence differed across lesson-planning components. The participants' learning objectives remained closely connected to curricular and institutional requirements, while AI was used more explicitly to generate activity ideas, explore learning resources, develop materials, and support assessment preparation. This pattern distinguishes assistance with generating options from responsibility for making pedagogical decisions.

P1 consulted AI to explore assessment ideas and develop a worksheet, but she continued to refer to textbooks and curriculum requirements. P2 had already established her learning objectives and used AI primarily to explore how those objectives could be achieved through classroom activities. In both accounts, AI-supported planning operated within a framework of existing educational expectations. The findings are consistent with the Teacher-AI Collaboration perspective, in which AI contributes technological assistance while teachers provide contextual understanding and pedagogical judgment (Kim, 2024; Shukla et al, 2025). Noroozi et al. (2024) can contextualize AI's potential contribution to instructional design, while the present study adds an account of how two pre-service teachers perceived and negotiated that assistance during the PLP.

The findings should not be interpreted as evidence that AI directly improved the quality of the participants' lesson plans or student learning. The available interviews and narrative frames document perceived influence and reported practices; they do not establish causal effects. A more defensible conclusion is that AI broadened the instructional options the participants considered, while curricular expectations and their own evaluations continued to shape their decisions. AI could suggest alternative formats, activities, and resources, but the participants still needed to judge whether those suggestions were relevant to the lesson and its contexts.

Reflection, Ethical Awareness, and Developing Teacher Autonomy

The findings also highlight the participants' growing awareness of their professional responsibilities when using AI. P2 used AI to review lesson plans before consulting her supervising teacher, while P1 emphasized verifying information and avoiding excessive dependence on AI. These practices reflect the importance of reflective engagement with AI-supported education (Chiu & Rospigliosi, 2025).

During teaching practicum, pre-service teachers must make instructional decisions based on students' needs, classroom conditions, and curriculum requirements, which Ding and Min Li (2025) refers to as adjusting professional practices. Although AI can offer useful suggestions, teachers remain responsible for evaluating and adapting its outputs. The participants' accounts indicate awareness of the importance of critical reflection and professional judgment when integrating AI into lesson planning, particularly in verifying AI-generated information, adapting suggestions to students' needs, and maintaining teachers' responsibility for pedagogical decisions or instructional autonomy.

Implications for EFL Teacher Education

The findings suggest three priorities for EFL teacher education. First, pre-service teachers need practical training in prompt formulation and evaluating AI-generated responses. Second, AI literacy should be integrated with pedagogical decision-making so that teachers can assess whether suggested activities, media, and assessments align with learning objectives, curriculum requirements, and students' characteristics. Third, teacher education should promote reflective and ethical AI use, including information verification, independent thinking, and awareness of AI's limitations.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry explored EFL pre-service teachers' experiences of collaborating with artificial intelligence (AI) during lesson planning. The findings revealed that AI had become a flexible planning partner, supporting brainstorming, activity development, material preparation, and reflection. While AI enhanced efficiency and creativity, participants also encountered challenges related to prompt formulation, generic outputs, and potential dependency. These experiences highlight the tension between technological convenience and the development of pedagogical autonomy. A key finding is that AI's influence varied across lesson-planning components. While learning objectives remained primarily guided by curriculum requirements, AI contributed more directly to developing activities, instructional media, assessments, and worksheets. Participants (P1 and P2) evaluated and adapted AI-generated suggestions according to learners' needs, classroom conditions, and curricular expectations. Their stories suggest that AI integration is not simply a technical process but an ongoing negotiation between technological assistance and emerging professional judgment. In the context of EFL teacher education, AI can support novice teachers' creativity and confidence, provided that its use is accompanied by critical thinking, contextual awareness, and reflective practice.

These findings suggest that teacher education programs should integrate AI literacy with pedagogical reasoning, critical evaluation, and ethical awareness rather than focusing only on technical skills. Pre-service teachers should learn to assess and adapt AI-generated content while maintaining responsibility for instructional decisions. However, because this study focused on participants' narratives within a particular context, its findings are context-specific and may not represent the experiences of all EFL pre-service teachers. Future research could incorporate classroom observations, lesson-plan analyses, and longitudinal investigations to examine how AI use shapes pedagogical decision-making and professional autonomy over time. As a highlight, the participants' stories demonstrate that the value of AI in EFL lesson planning lies not in replacing teachers' professional judgment but in expanding their instructional possibilities.

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