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Assessing the Human Touch in Language Learning and AI

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Abstract

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has transformed language teaching. Alongside technological advances, human interaction, emotional intelligence (EI), and literary reading remain important dimensions of pedagogy. This study explores the perceptions and self-reported practices of 70 teachers in Georgia concerning literary reading, students' emotional development, and the integration of AI tools. Using a descriptive cross-sectional online survey, the study examines teachers' views on literature and affective skills, their reported use of AI, and their perceptions of the limits of AI-generated support. The findings represent teachers' perceptions and reported practices; they do not directly measure changes in students' EI or learning outcomes.

Keywords: Language learning, artificial intelligence, emotional intelligence, literary reading, human connection, Georgia

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has introduced new challenges and opportunities to the education system. This transformation is particularly evident in the field of language teaching, where artificial intelligence (AI) tools are being increasingly integrated. However, language learning remains fundamentally a human process, grounded in emotions, communication, cultural context, and mutual trust. This article aims to

evaluate the roles of human interaction and artificial intelligence in the language learning process and to explore how they can be effectively balanced.

In recent years, artificial intelligence has been increasingly integrated into education, including foreign-language teaching (Adıgüzel et al., 2023). AI-based platforms can provide personalized learning opportunities, automated feedback, and support for the development of language skills. At the same time, researchers and educators have raised questions about the extent to which technology can reproduce the empathy, contextual understanding, and social relationships involved in teaching (Holmes et al., 2019).

Language learning involves more than mastering grammar and vocabulary; it also encompasses cultural awareness, emotional responsiveness, critical thinking, and human interaction. Literary texts may provide opportunities for learners to consider different perspectives, reflect on human experiences, and discuss emotional and ethical questions. This raises an important pedagogical question: how can language teachers integrate AI tools while preserving the human relationships and affective dimensions of learning? (Ma & Chen, 2025).

Literature review

Research discussed in the literature suggests that AI tools can support selected language-learning tasks, including grammar and vocabulary practice, pronunciation work, and feedback. However, the extent to which such tools can support affective and interpersonal dimensions of learning remains an important question. The present study therefore focuses on teachers' perceptions of the respective roles of human interaction and AI in language education.

Literary reading can create opportunities for learners to engage with diverse perspectives and human experiences and to discuss empathy, values, and social relationships. These potential contributions depend on the texts selected and on how teachers facilitate reading and discussion. In this context, AI is considered in this study as a possible pedagogical support rather than an assumed replacement for the teacher.

The Importance of Human Touch in Language Learning

Language learning is not just about mastering linguistic structures; it also encompasses:

- Emotional Engagement
- Formation of Motivation
- Development of Social Interaction
- Introduction to Cultural Nuances

The teacher's human touch is evident in the tone of feedback, the recognition of the student's emotional state, the consideration of individual needs, and the creation of a psychologically safe classroom environment. These factors collectively influence the student's confidence, engagement, and authentic communicative use of the language (Chiu et al., 2024)

Studies indicate that students who perceive their teacher's support and empathy use the foreign language more confidently, are less afraid of making mistakes, and sustain a long-term interest in learning.

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning

The integration of artificial intelligence has expanded the range of tools available for language learning (Yang, 2024). AI can:

- Adapt to the individual learning pace.
- Provide immediate feedback.
- Automatically assess vocabulary and grammar.
- Support autonomous learning.

AI platforms may be useful for repetitive practice, writing feedback, and some listening activities. They can also support autonomous learning by making practice available beyond the classroom (Liu, 2025).

However, AI does not possess emotional intelligence in the same way humans do. It cannot fully interpret irony, cultural context, or nonverbal cues, all of which are essential components of language learning (Jakesch et al., 2023).

The Balance Between Humans and AI: Competition or Collaboration?

Artificial intelligence should not automatically be viewed as a substitute for teachers; it may instead be used as a supportive tool. In a collaborative model, AI can assist with technical, analytical, and repetitive tasks (Nguyen et al., 2023), while teachers remain responsible for communication, critical thinking, contextual interpretation, and emotional support. Such a division of roles may help teachers use technology while retaining the relational dimensions of classroom practice (Otaki & Lindwall, 2024).

Ethical and Pedagogical Challenges

The use of AI in language learning raises several important questions.

- Data Privacy
- Academic Fairness
- Student Overreliance on Technology
- Risk of Diminished Critical Thinking

Therefore, teacher professional development should address the ethical and purposeful use of AI and consider how technology can be

integrated without undermining the human-centred dimensions of teaching (Zou et al., 2023).

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objective:

This study explores how participating language teachers in Georgia perceive literary reading, the development of students' emotional intelligence, and the use of artificial intelligence in pedagogy. It also examines teachers' self-reported professional development in EI-related and AI-related areas.

Research questions:

The study addresses the following questions: (1) How do participating teachers perceive the contribution of literary reading to empathy, self-regulation, social skills, and discussion of moral and cultural issues? (2) To what extent do they report using AI tools for lesson preparation, differentiation, and feedback? (3) How do they perceive the capacity and limitations of AI in relation to emotional support, moral interpretation, and cultural understanding?

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to examine teachers' perceptions of the role of human interaction in language learning within the context of artificial intelligence (AI). A survey-based approach was chosen to collect measurable data on teachers' experiences, beliefs, and practices.

The use of a structured questionnaire facilitated the collection of standardized responses, enabling statistical analysis and comparison across participants.

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to capture teachers' perspectives at a single point in time. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions.
The questionnaire was divided into four sections.

Section A: Teacher Profile and Professional Background
Section B: Beliefs About Reading and Emotional Intelligence
Section C: The Utilization of AI in Language Teaching
Section D: Perceptions of AI, Empathy, and Human Connection

This design enabled the identification of patterns in both pedagogical beliefs and AI-related practices.

Target Population

The participants were 70 language teachers in Georgia who completed the online questionnaire. The survey was distributed through teachers' Facebook groups, professional contacts, colleagues, and teacher acquaintances. Participation was based on accessibility and respondents' decision to complete the questionnaire.

The sample included teachers of English, Georgian, Georgian as a second/foreign language, and other foreign languages.

A total of 70 teachers participated in the study (Fig. 1).

Participants represented diverse teaching contexts:

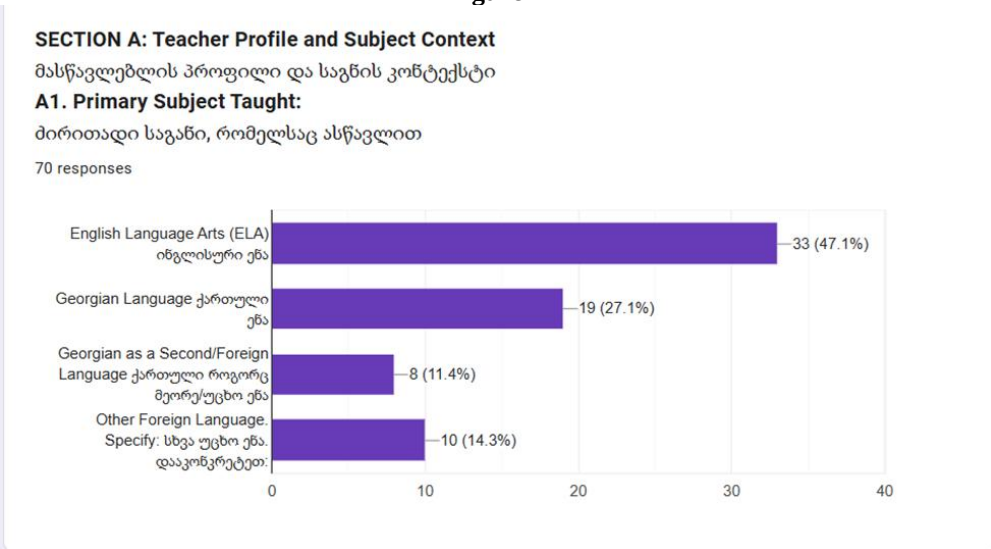
47.1% taught English (33 respondents)

27.1% taught Georgian (19 respondents)

11.4% taught Georgian as a second/foreign language (8 respondents)

14.3% taught another foreign language (10 respondents)

Figure 1



Teaching experience (Fig. 2) was reported as follows:

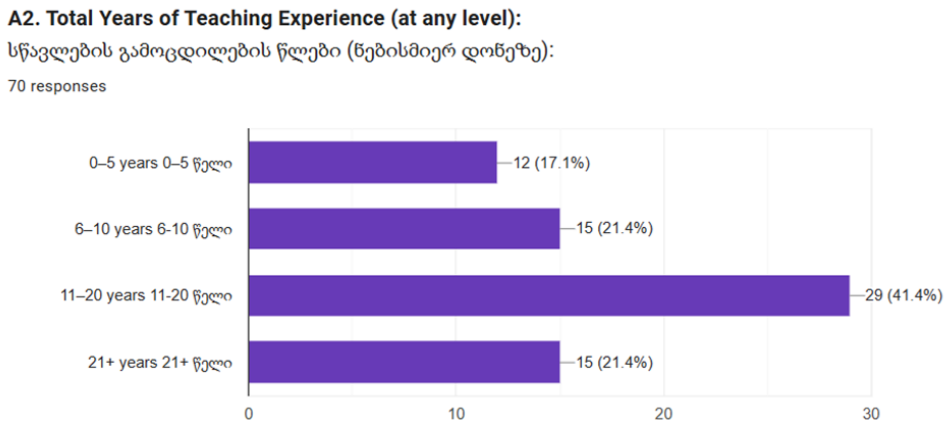
0–5 years: 12 selections (17.1%)

6–10 years: 15 selections (21.4%)

11–20 years: 29 selections (41.4%)

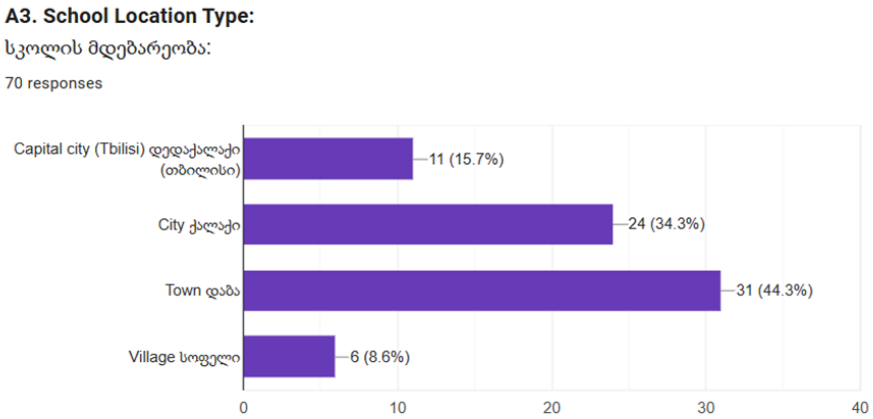
21 years or more: 15 selections (21.4%)

Figure 2



School location (Fig. 3) was reported as follows: town, 31 selections (44.3%); city, 24 (34.3%); capital city (Tbilisi), 11 (15.7%); and village, 6 (8.6%).

Figure 3



The study used convenience sampling. The questionnaire was shared through accessible professional networks, including teachers' Facebook groups, colleagues, and teacher acquaintances.

Data collection

Data were collected through Google Forms from March 25 to April 24, 2026. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher for this study and included demographic and attitudinal questions. Its introductory section explained the study's purpose: to examine how language teachers in Georgia balance literary reading, students' emotional intelligence, and the integration of AI tools into pedagogy. The form did not collect email addresses, and no

personally identifying information was requested. The questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's academic supervisors, who are also co-authors of the article. Their feedback was used to consider the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the study's objectives; this review did not constitute formal psychometric validation.

The original Google Forms settings allowed respondents to select more than one option in the teaching-experience and school-location items, although these characteristics would ordinarily be single-choice variables. Review of the raw responses confirmed that one respondent selected both 0–5 years and 6–10 years of teaching experience, while two respondents selected two school-location categories each. Consequently, the frequency totals are 71 selections for teaching experience and 72 selections for school location, although the number of individual respondents remains 70. The categories and selections have been retained as recorded; no response was retrospectively reassigned or deleted. Percentages are calculated using the respondent denominator (N = 70), and therefore the category percentages for these two items may exceed 100% when summed.

The study also examined teachers' self-reported professional development (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

For EI and social-skills training, 31 respondents selected annual training (44.3%), 15 selected never (21.4%), 15 selected bi-annual training (21.4%), and 9 selected frequent training (12.9%).

For AI-related training, 29 selections indicated annual training (41.4%), including one respondent who also selected bi-annual training; 18 respondents selected never (25.7%), 14 selected bi-annual training (20.0%), and 10 selected frequent training (14.3%).

For the AI-training item, one respondent selected both annual and bi-annual training; the number of selections therefore exceeds the number of respondents by one.

Figure 4

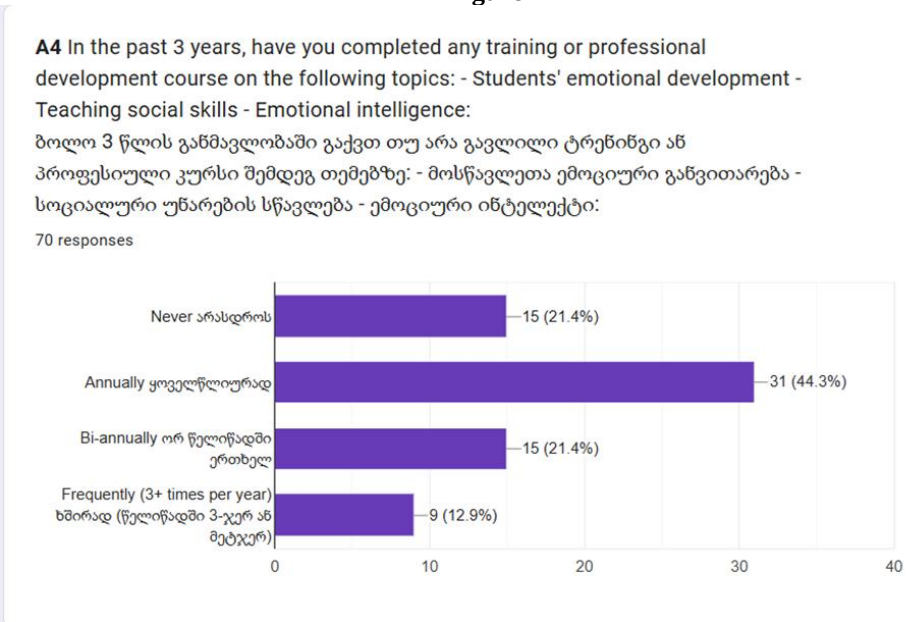
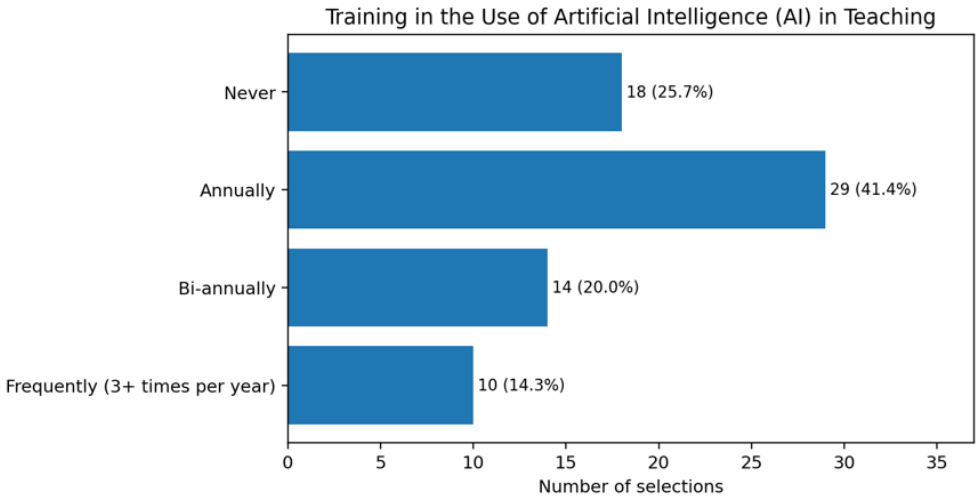


Figure 5: Reported training in the use of AI in teaching



N = 70; multiple selections permitted

These self-reports suggest differing levels of professional development in emotional-development and AI-related topics.

Results

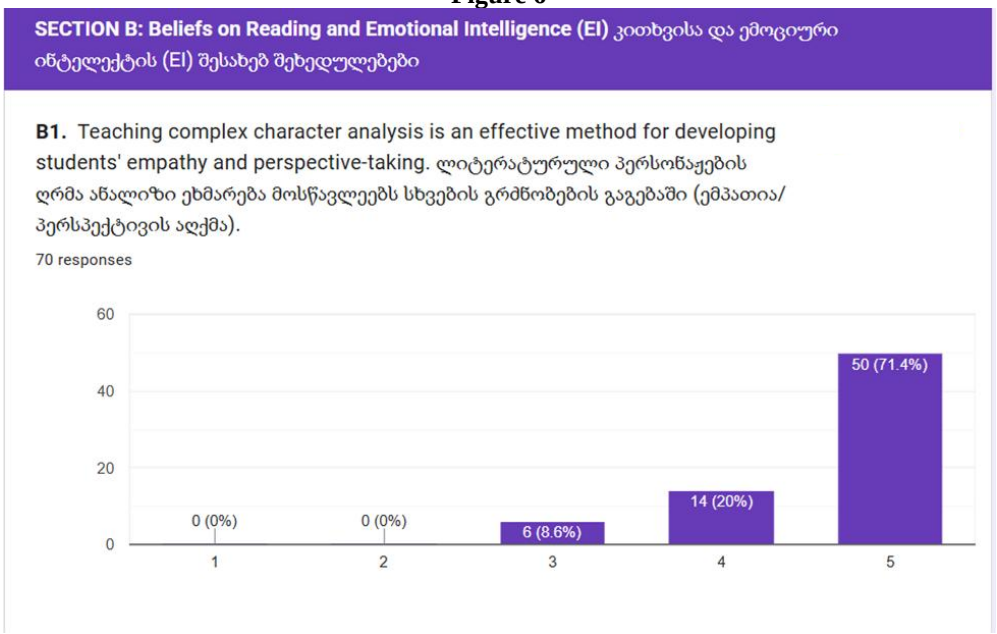
The findings reveal several significant trends:

1. Strong emphasis on emotional and human-centered learning

Teachers expressed strong support for the potential contribution of literature and reading to emotional and social development (Fig. 6):

- 71.4% strongly agreed that character analysis fosters empathy
- 72.9% strongly agreed that literary texts support self-regulation and stress management
- 80% strongly agreed that independent reading improves social skills
- 84.3% strongly agreed that curricula provide opportunities to explore moral and cultural dimensions.

Figure 6



These findings indicate strong teacher endorsement of literature-based and human-centred learning. They reflect respondents' beliefs and observations rather than direct measurements of student EI development.

2. High adoption of AI as a pedagogical support tool

Teachers actively use AI in their teaching practices (Fig. 7):

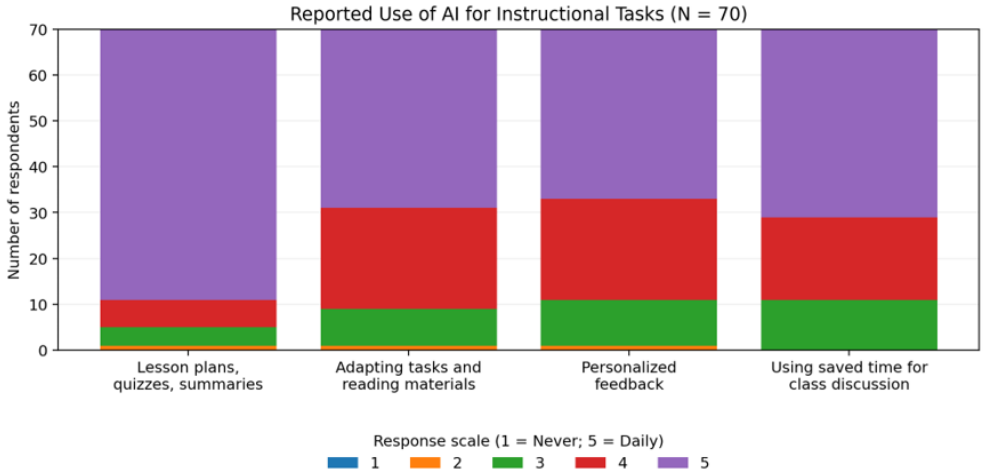
55.7% strongly agreed they use AI to generate lesson plans and materials

52.9% strongly agreed they use AI for differentiated instructions.

58.6% strongly agreed AI helps provide personalized feedback

61.4% strongly agreed they use time saved by AI for deeper classroom discussions.

Figure 7: Frequency of AI use for instructional tasks



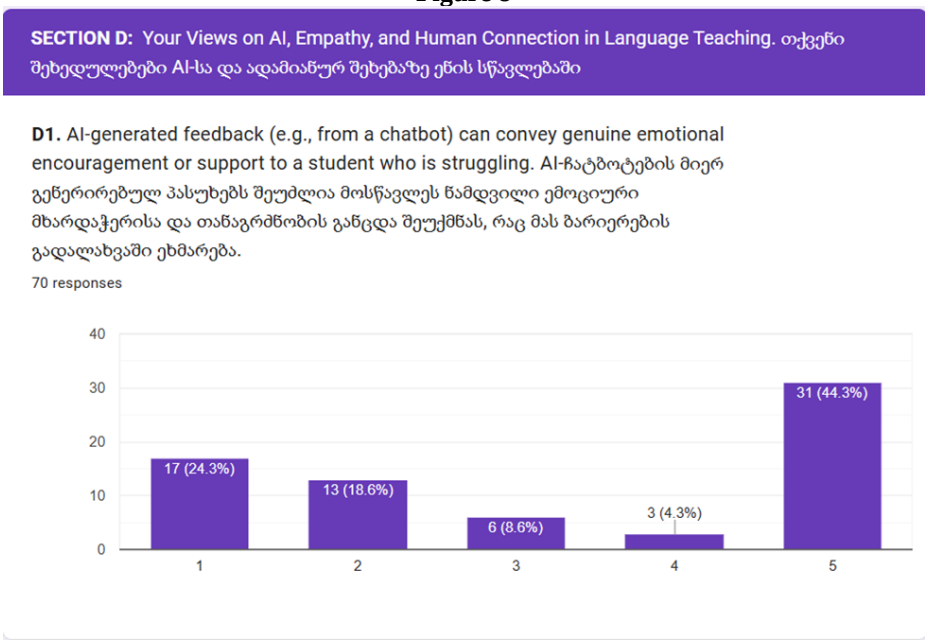
N = 70; 1 = Never; 5 = Daily

These responses indicate that participating teachers reported using AI for instructional efficiency and personalization. They do not independently verify the frequency or effectiveness of these practices.

3. Balanced Perception: AI as Support, Not Replacement

Despite reported AI use, teachers expressed reservations about its limitations (Fig. 8). When asked whether AI-generated feedback can offer genuine emotional support: Only 44.3% strongly agreed.

Figure 8



A substantial portion either disagreed or remained neutral, comprising over 50% combined. This response pattern indicates that many participants were uncertain or unconvinced that AI-generated feedback can provide genuine emotional support. It reflects teacher perceptions, not a direct assessment of AI systems or students' emotional experiences.

Limitations of the Study

Despite offering valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of AI and the human dimension in language learning, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the sample was relatively small (N = 70) and was recruited through convenience sampling. It is not statistically representative of all teachers in Georgia. In addition, the respondents included Georgian-language teachers and teachers of Georgian as a second/foreign language, as well as foreign-language teachers; therefore, the sample should be described as a broader group of language teachers rather than exclusively foreign-language teachers.

Second, the use of convenience sampling introduces potential bias, as participants were selected based on accessibility and willingness to respond. This approach may lead to an overrepresentation of teachers who are more engaged, motivated, or interested in AI and pedagogy.

Third, the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Teachers might have provided responses they believed to be professionally appropriate rather than those reflecting their actual practices.

Another limitation is the absence of qualitative data. While the quantitative approach enabled the identification of trends and patterns, it did not capture deeper insights into teachers' reasoning, experiences, and nuanced perspectives on AI and human interaction.

Additionally, the study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives, without incorporating students' views or classroom observations. This limitation restricts a comprehensive understanding of how AI and human interaction operate in real learning environments.

Finally, the study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing perceptions at a single point in time. Since AI technologies are rapidly evolving, teachers' attitudes and practices may change over time.

Discussion

Based on the study's findings and limitations, several recommendations are proposed for both practical application and future research.

First, there is a clear need to promote a balanced integration of AI in language teaching, where AI serves as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for human interaction. Educational stakeholders should emphasize pedagogical models that combine technological efficiency with emotional and social engagement.

Second, the results underscore the importance of professional development programs. Training opportunities should focus not only on technical AI skills but also on integrating AI in ways that preserve and enhance the human elements of teaching, such as empathy, communication, and relationship-building.

Third, curriculum developers should ensure that language programs continue to prioritize literature-based and discussion-oriented activities, as these have been strongly associated with the development of emotional intelligence and social skills.

Fourth, future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach that incorporates qualitative data, such as interviews and classroom observations. This approach would provide deeper insights into how teachers and students experience AI-supported learning.

It is also recommended to include students' perspectives, as their experiences are crucial for evaluating the true impact of AI and human interaction in language education.

Moreover, longitudinal studies are necessary to examine how teachers' attitudes and practices evolve as AI technologies become increasingly advanced and widely adopted.

Finally, policymakers and educational institutions should establish ethical guidelines and frameworks for AI use in education to ensure that technological innovation does not compromise the human-centered nature of teaching and learning.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that participating teachers do not necessarily view human teaching and AI as mutually exclusive. Rather, their responses indicate support for using AI as a supplementary tool while retaining the teacher's role in communication, emotional support, and culturally informed interpretation.

Within this sample, teachers expressed strong support for the educational value of literary reading and human interaction, while also reporting the use of AI for selected instructional tasks. These findings describe teacher perceptions and self-reported practices; they should not be interpreted as evidence that students' EI or academic outcomes improved as a result.

A consistent pattern emerges from the responses: participants reported using AI for lesson preparation, differentiation, and feedback, while also emphasizing the importance of human support in affective learning. The survey captures these views at one point in time and does not test the comparative effectiveness of human teachers and AI.

The findings are consistent with a teacher-centred, AI-supported model in which:

- AI may support selected instructional processes, such as lesson preparation, adaptation, and feedback.
- Teachers remain responsible for relational, contextual, and emotionally responsive aspects of classroom interaction.

Further research involving students, classroom observations, and validated measures is needed before conclusions can be drawn about effects on students' EI or learning outcomes.

Ethical Statement

The purpose of the research was explained to participants in the introductory section of the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary: teachers chose whether or not to complete the questionnaire. No directly identifying personal information was collected, and the form did not collect email addresses. Formal institutional ethics approval was not obtained before data collection, and no separate written informed consent statement was included in the questionnaire. The manuscript does not claim that formal ethics approval or a separate written informed-consent procedure was in place. The data were used for academic research purposes.

Conflict of Interest: The authors reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All data are included in the content of the paper.

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Appendix A. Research Questionnaire

The following items reproduce the questionnaire administered to participants. The original questionnaire was presented in English and Georgian. The item wording below is reproduced in English for transparency.

Section A. Teacher Profile and Subject Context

A1. Primary subject taught: English Language Arts (ELA); Georgian Language; Georgian as a Second/Foreign Language; Other Foreign Language (please specify).

A2. Total years of teaching experience (at any level): 0–5 years; 6–10 years; 11–20 years; 21+ years.

A3. School location type: Capital city (Tbilisi); City; Town; Village.

A4. In the past 3 years, have you completed any training or professional development course on the following topics: students' emotional development, teaching social skills, or emotional intelligence? Response options: Never; Annually; Bi-annually; Frequently (3+ times per year).

A5. In the past 3 years, have you completed any training or course on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching? Response options: Never; Annually; Bi-annually; Frequently (3+ times per year).

Section B. Beliefs on Reading and Emotional Intelligence

B1. Teaching complex character analysis is an effective method for developing students' empathy and perspective-taking.

B2. I explicitly use literary texts to help students develop self-regulation and stress-management skills.

B3. Students who read fiction independently (for pleasure) show noticeably better social skills and relationship management in the classroom.

B4. My curriculum provides sufficient opportunities to discuss the cultural context and moral dimensions of texts.

Section C. The Utilization of AI in Language Teaching

C1. I use AI tools to generate lesson plans, quizzes, or content summaries for classes.

C2. I use AI tools to adapt assignments and reading materials for students with different proficiency levels.

C3. I use AI tools to provide students with personalized, real-time feedback on their writing or speaking performance.

C4. I use the time saved by AI to discuss character motivations and emotions with students in class.

Section D. Views on AI, Empathy, and Human Connection
D1. AI-generated feedback (e.g., from a chatbot) can convey genuine emotional encouragement or support to a student who is struggling.
D2. AI is as effective as a human teacher in helping students understand complex moral issues in literature.
D3. If students primarily interact with AI instead of a teacher, they are less likely to develop social skills.
D4. AI can fully replicate the nuance necessary to evaluate student understanding of cultural references and context within complex narratives.
D5. A teacher's emotional support is essential for literature to fully develop empathy in students.

Response Scales
For Section B (Beliefs on Reading and Emotional Intelligence) and Section D (Views on AI, Empathy, and Human Connection), respondents indicated their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral / Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.
For Section C (AI Utilization in Language Teaching), respondents indicated the frequency of AI use on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Daily.