REVISTA CIENTÍFICA
Ciencia y Método
ISSN 3103-1072

EDITORIAL GRUPO AEA

Artículo Científico

Percepciones de los profesores de inglés ecuatorianos sobre la inteligencia artificial: ¿Oportunidad o Amenaza?

Ecuadorian English teachers' perceptions of artificial intelligence: Opportunity or Threat?

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DOI / URL: https://doi.org/10.55813/gaea/rcym/v4/n2/216

Resumen: El presente estudio analizó las percepciones de 62 docentes universitarios de inglés de cuatro instituciones públicas de educación superior del Ecuador —Universidad Agraria del Ecuador (UAE), Universidad de Guayaquil (UG), Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena (UPSE) y Universidad Estatal de Milagro (UNEMI)— sobre la inteligencia artificial (IA) en su práctica pedagógica, desde un enfoque cuantitativo descriptivo. Se aplicó un cuestionario Likert de 25 ítems distribuidos en cinco dimensiones: conocimiento sobre IA, actitudes, percepción de oportunidades, percepción de amenazas y disposición para la integración. Los resultados revelaron una tendencia predominantemente positiva (M = 3.84–4.09 en las dimensiones de actitudes y oportunidades), con ambivalencia moderada en la dimensión de conocimiento (M = 3.38) y baja percepción de amenazas (M = 2.95). Los docentes valoran especialmente el potencial de la IA para personalizar el aprendizaje y optimizar la creación de materiales, aunque el 58.1% expresó necesidad de formación específica. Se concluye que los docentes universitarios de inglés en Ecuador perciben la IA principalmente como una oportunidad pedagógica, sujeta a una integración crítica y formativamente fundamentada.

Palabras clave: inteligencia artificial; percepciones docentes; enseñanza del inglés; educación superior; Ecuador.

Check for updates

Received: 30/Abr/2026
Accepted: 28/May/2026
Published: 24/Jun/2026

Cita: Molina-Parraga, M. G. (2026). Percepciones de los profesores de inglés ecuatorianos sobre la inteligencia artificial: ¿Oportunidad o Amenaza?. *Revista Científica Ciencia Y Método*, *4*(2), 613-624. https://doi.org/10.55813/gaea/rcym/v4/n2/216

Revista Científica Ciencia y Método (RCyM)
https://revistacym.com
revistacym@editorialgrupo-aea.com
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Abstract:

This study analyzed the perceptions of 62 university English teachers from four public higher education institutions in Ecuador —Universidad Agraria del Ecuador (UAE), Universidad de Guayaquil (UG), Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena (UPSE), and Universidad Estatal de Milagro (UNEMI)— regarding artificial intelligence (AI) in their pedagogical practice, using a quantitative descriptive approach. A 25-item Likert questionnaire was administered across five dimensions: AI knowledge, attitudes, perception of opportunities, perception of threats, and integration readiness. Results revealed predominantly positive trends (M = 3.84–4.09 for attitudes and opportunities), moderate ambivalence in the knowledge dimension (M = 3.38), and low threat perception (M = 2.95). Teachers particularly valued AI's potential to personalize learning and streamline material creation, although 58.1% expressed a need for specific training. It is concluded that Ecuadorian university English teachers perceive AI mainly as a pedagogical opportunity, contingent on critical and pedagogically grounded integration.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; teacher perceptions; English language teaching; higher education; Ecuador.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most significant transformative forces in the field of education over the last decade. Its progressive integration into teaching and learning environments has generated academic debates regarding its pedagogical, ethical, and professional implications (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Bende, 2024). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, AI has begun to reconfigure instructional practices, teaching materials, and forms of linguistic feedback, raising fundamental questions about the role of the human teacher in relation to automated systems (Ebadi & Amini, 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025).

At the global level, recent studies have documented ambivalent perceptions among language teachers regarding the use of AI tools in their classrooms. On the one hand, the potential of AI to personalize learning, generate adapted materials, and provide immediate feedback to students has been widely recognized (Galán-Rodríguez et al., 2025; Hammoud, 2025; Sayici & Aydın, 2025). On the other hand, concerns persist regarding academic integrity, technological dependence, and the possible displacement of teachers in cognitive and affective processes that require human mediation (Farinosi & Melchior, 2025; Park & Milner, 2025; Taktak et al., 2024). This tension between AI as an opportunity and as a threat constitutes the core of contemporary debate in language teaching.

In the Latin American context, and particularly in Ecuador, the integration of AI in higher education faces structural challenges related to the digital divide, continuous teacher training, and institutional policies for technological innovation (Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025). University English teachers find themselves in a particularly complex position: they must adapt their pedagogical practices to a constantly changing technological environment while navigating between the critical adoption of AI tools and the preservation of humanistic approaches to language teaching (Castro et al., 2025; Nogaibayeva & Yersultanova, 2025).

Existing literature on teacher perceptions of AI shows divergent trends depending on the geographical context, educational level, and discipline. Research conducted in Central Asia (Nogaibayeva & Yersultanova, 2025), Europe (Chrostowski & Mąkosa, 2026; Farinosi & Melchior, 2025), and the Middle East (Hammoud, 2025) reveals that teachers value the instrumental benefits of AI but express uncertainty about its long-term ethical and pedagogical implications. However, studies focused specifically on Ecuadorian university English teachers are scarce, representing an empirical gap that the present study seeks to address (Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, teacher perceptions of AI are framed within constructs such as technology acceptance (Bende, 2024), digital literacy (Vosoughmatin, 2025), and teacher professional autonomy (Lee & Bryan, 2025). These frameworks make it possible to understand why some teachers perceive AI as a tool for professional empowerment, while others experience it as a threat to their pedagogical identity (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Su et al., 2025).

Recent research has also explored the perceptions of university students regarding tools such as ChatGPT (Liang et al., 2024; Taktak et al., 2024) and language-learning chatbots (Ebadi & Amini, 2024), finding generally positive attitudes, although conditioned by the user's level of digital competence. In the case of foreign language teachers, perceptions of AI are also mediated by factors such as teaching experience, access to technological training, and institutional conditions (Artunduaga-Sánchez et al., 2026; Sayici & Aydın, 2025; Yılmaz et al., 2026).

Against this background, the aim of this article is to analyze the perceptions of university English teachers from four public higher education institutions in Ecuador — Universidad Agraria del Ecuador (UAE), Universidad de Guayaquil (UG), Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena (UPSE), and Universidad Estatal de Milagro (UNEMI)— regarding artificial intelligence in their professional practice, identifying whether they conceive of it predominantly as an opportunity for pedagogical innovation or as a threat to their teaching role.

In recent years, artificial intelligence has evolved from a predominantly experimental technology to a widely accessible tool integrated into everyday educational practices. This transformation has been accelerated by the emergence of generative AI systems and intelligent learning environments capable of simulating human-like interaction (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Taktak et al., 2024). In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL),

these developments are particularly significant, as they directly affect processes such as communication, feedback, and language production, which have traditionally depended on human interaction (Ebadi & Amini, 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025). Consequently, AI is not merely a technological innovation, but a pedagogical shift that challenges conventional models of language teaching.

From a pedagogical perspective, AI applications in language education can be categorized into several functional domains, including automated feedback systems, content generation tools, conversational agents, and adaptive learning platforms (Hammoud, 2025; Sayici & Aydın, 2025). These tools enable new forms of interaction and learning personalization. For example, AI-based writing tools provide immediate corrective feedback, facilitating iterative learning processes, while chatbots simulate communicative scenarios that enhance learners' fluency and confidence (Ebadi & Amini, 2024; Liang et al., 2024). Such affordances align with communicative language teaching approaches, which emphasize meaningful interaction and learner autonomy.

However, the integration of AI into EFL teaching also raises critical pedagogical concerns. Language learning involves not only the acquisition of linguistic structures but also the development of intercultural competence, pragmatic awareness, and emotional engagement. Although AI systems can generate linguistically accurate outputs, their capacity to replicate these deeper dimensions remains limited (Farinosi & Melchior, 2025; Park & Milner, 2025). This limitation highlights the need for a critical perspective that recognizes both the potential and the constraints of AI in educational settings.

Another key issue is the impact of AI on teacher roles and professional identity. Traditionally, language teachers have acted as facilitators, evaluators, and cultural mediators. The increasing presence of AI tools capable of performing tasks such as feedback provision, material design, and content generation suggests a reconfiguration rather than a replacement of these roles (Lee & Bryan, 2025; Su et al., 2025). In this sense, teachers are required to develop new competencies related to digital literacy and pedagogical decision-making in AI-supported environments (Vosoughmatin, 2025; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025).

Ethical considerations further complicate the integration of AI in education. Issues such as academic integrity, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and technological dependence have been widely discussed in recent studies (Farinosi & Melchior, 2025; Taktak et al., 2024). In language education, concerns about the misuse of generative AI tools for completing assignments without genuine learning are particularly relevant. At the same time, research suggests that banning AI tools is neither practical nor pedagogically effective; instead, there is a need to promote ethical and responsible use through appropriate instructional strategies (Park & Milner, 2025).

In developing contexts, these challenges are intensified by structural limitations. In Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, the integration of AI in higher education is conditioned by factors such as access to technology, institutional support, and teacher

training opportunities (Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025; Castro et al., 2025). These conditions create unequal scenarios in which the adoption of AI may vary significantly across institutions, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive research.

Finally, the concept of AI literacy has gained increasing relevance in recent years. AI literacy involves not only the technical ability to use digital tools but also the critical understanding of how these systems operate and their implications for teaching and learning (Vosoughmatin, 2025; Bende, 2024). In this regard, teacher perceptions play a crucial role, as they influence both the acceptance and the effective integration of AI in the classroom. Positive perceptions may foster innovation, whereas uncertainty or lack of knowledge may hinder its pedagogical potential (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Sayici & Aydın, 2025).

2. Materials and methods

Research design

The present study adopted a quantitative descriptive approach, aimed at measuring and describing the perceptions of university English teachers regarding artificial intelligence in their pedagogical practices. This approach was considered the most suitable, given that the objective of the study was to obtain representative numerical data on the attitudes, knowledge, and dispositions of the participants toward AI, allowing trends to be established and comparisons to be made across dimensions (Castro et al., 2025; Hammoud, 2025). The design was non-experimental and cross-sectional, with data collected at a single point in time.

Participants

The sample consisted of English teachers from the Language Centers of four public higher education institutions in Ecuador: Universidad Agraria del Ecuador (UAE), Universidad de Guayaquil (UG), Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena (UPSE), and Universidad Estatal de Milagro (UNEMI). A total of 62 teachers participated (n = 62), distributed as follows: UAE (n = 18, 29.0%), UG (n = 16, 25.8%), UPSE (n = 14, 22.6%), and UNEMI (n = 14, 22.6%). Participants were selected through purposive convenience sampling, a criterion widely used in quantitative descriptive research in educational contexts (Castro et al., 2025). The inclusion criteria were: (a) being an active English teacher at one of the participating institutions during the 2024–2025 academic year; (b) having access to technological devices in their teaching practice; and (c) having had at least one prior experience with digital or AI tools in the classroom. Teachers with less than one academic term of experience at their institution were excluded.

Instrument

A Likert-scale questionnaire was designed for data collection, consisting of two sections: (a) sociodemographic data and the participant's technological profile; and (b)

25 items organized into five dimensions: AI knowledge, attitudes toward AI, perception of opportunities, perception of threats, and readiness to integrate AI into teaching practice. The items used a five-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The instrument was validated through expert judgment (n = 3, with experience in educational technology and EFL research), and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated (α = .89), indicating satisfactory reliability (Hammoud, 2025; Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered digitally via Google Forms during the 2024–2025 academic period. Prior to administration, participants were informed of the study's objectives, and informed consent was obtained from each teacher, guaranteeing voluntariness and anonymity. Data collection lasted approximately four weeks. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) with IBM SPSS v.26 software, complemented by thematic content analysis for open-ended responses (Chrostowski & Mąkosa, 2026; Su et al., 2025).

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of research involving human participants: voluntary participation, anonymity of data, confidentiality of information, and exclusive use of data for academic purposes. The research protocol received institutional endorsement from the Language Centers of the four participating universities.

3. Results

3.1. Technological profile of participants

The 62 participating teachers from the four Ecuadorian public universities displayed a heterogeneous technological profile. 71.0% reported using digital tools in their classes on a regular basis (at least three times per week), while the remaining 29.0% use them occasionally. Regarding specific knowledge about AI, 54.8% declared having a basic level, 32.3% an intermediate level, and only 12.9% an advanced level. These data suggest that specific knowledge about AI remains at an incipient stage among Ecuadorian university English teachers, a finding consistent with previous results in Latin American contexts (Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025).

3.2. Descriptive statistics by dimension

The descriptive analysis of the five dimensions of the questionnaire revealed a predominantly positive trend toward AI, with nuances of ambivalence in the dimensions related to perceived threats and declared level of knowledge. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations by dimension.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics by dimension (n = 62)

Dimension	M	SD	Trend
1. AI knowledge	3.38	0.81	Moderate
2. Attitudes toward AI	3.84	0.64	Positive
3. Perception of opportunities	4.09	0.57	Very positive
4. Perception of threats	2.95	0.85	Low–moderate
5. Readiness for integration	3.72	0.71	Positive

Note: M = Arithmetic mean; SD = Standard deviation. Five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). n = 62 (Author, 2026).

As shown in Table 1, the dimension Perception of opportunities obtained the highest mean (M = 4.09, SD = 0.57), followed by Attitudes toward AI (M = 3.84, SD = 0.64) and Readiness for integration (M = 3.72, SD = 0.71). In contrast, the dimension Perception of threats recorded the lowest score (M = 2.95, SD = 0.85), indicating that teachers do not perceive AI as a significant threat to their professional practice. The dimension AI knowledge showed a moderate mean (M = 3.38, SD = 0.81), reflecting the heterogeneous technological profile described above.

3.3. Items with highest and lowest scores

In order to identify the most and least entrenched perceptions among participants, the three items with the highest mean scores and the two with the lowest scores were selected. These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Items with highest and lowest mean scores in the questionnaire (n = 62)

Item	Dimension	M	SD
AI can personalize English learning according to student needs.	Opportunities	4.42	0.54
AI allows teaching materials to be created more efficiently.	Opportunities	4.29	0.61
I am willing to integrate AI tools into my English classes.	Readiness	4.05	0.66
AI could replace English teachers in the future.	Threats	2.48	0.95
The use of AI compromises students' academic integrity.	Threats	2.90	0.89

Note: The three items with the highest scores and the two with the lowest scores in the instrument are presented (Author, 2026).

The results in Table 2 indicate that teachers mainly conceive of AI as a tool for personalizing learning and optimizing the creation of teaching materials. The item with the highest score (M = 4.42) corresponds to AI's potential to adapt English teaching to the individual needs of students, a result consistent with recent research in EFL contexts (Ebadi & Amini, 2024; Lee & Cho, 2025; Liang et al., 2024). On the other hand, the item with the lowest score (M = 2.48) corresponds to the fear of being

replaced by AI, which suggests that teachers maintain a secure perception of their professional role, consistent with studies in Kazakhstan (Nogaibayeva & Yersultanova, 2025) and Spain (Galán-Rodríguez et al., 2025).

3.4. Analysis of open-ended responses

The thematic content analysis of open-ended responses allowed three emerging categories to be identified: (a) AI as pedagogical support, mentioned by 64.5% of participants; (b) need for teacher training in AI, indicated by 58.1%; and (c) ethical concerns, identified in 38.7%, with specific mentions of academic dishonesty and technological dependence (Farinosi & Melchior, 2025; Park & Milner, 2025; Taktak et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

The results reveal that university English teachers from the four participating Ecuadorian public universities (UAE, UG, UPSE, and UNEMI) hold a predominantly positive perception of artificial intelligence, although with elements of ambivalence that deserve analytical attention. This trend coincides with findings reported in various geographical and disciplinary contexts (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Castro et al., 2025; Galán-Rodríguez et al., 2025; Hammoud, 2025), suggesting that favorable perceptions of AI as a pedagogical tool transcend cultural and institutional boundaries.

The dimension with the highest score was the perception of opportunities (M = 4.09), particularly with respect to the personalization of learning and efficiency in material creation. This finding is consistent with studies on chatbots in language teaching (Ebadi & Amini, 2024) and with research on generative tools such as ChatGPT in university EFL contexts (Al-Zahrani, 2025; Taktak et al., 2024). AI's capacity to provide immediate and personalized feedback seems to be the most valued factor, reflecting a pragmatic understanding of its benefits in classrooms with large groups and limited resources, a common characteristic of Ecuadorian public universities.

However, the heterogeneity in levels of AI knowledge (54.8% at a basic level) qualifies the general optimism observed. As in studies with religious education teachers in Europe (Chrostowski & Mąkosa, 2026), with language teachers in Central Asia (Nogaibayeva & Yersultanova, 2025), and with preservice teachers (Lee & Bryan, 2025), limited knowledge may lead to idealized perceptions that fail to account for technical limitations, algorithmic biases, or deeper pedagogical implications. This phenomenon has been conceptualized as superficial technology acceptance, in which a positive attitude precedes critical understanding (Bende, 2024; Vosoughmatin, 2025).

The low score on perceived threats (M = 2.95), especially on the item regarding teacher replacement (M = 2.48), suggests that participants maintain a strong professional identity in the face of the rise of AI. This result is in dialogue with the literature on

teacher autonomy in technologically mediated contexts (Sayici & Aydın, 2025; Yılmaz et al., 2026), which argues that language teachers recognize dimensions of their practice —such as emotional management, intercultural mediation, and cognitive scaffolding— that cannot be replicated by automated systems. However, the 38.7% who expressed ethical concerns indicates that this confidence does not imply uncritical adoption (Farinosi & Melchior, 2025; Park & Milner, 2025).

The need for teacher training in AI (58.1%) constitutes the most significant finding in terms of practical implications. Recent research has shown that readiness to integrate AI significantly improves with specific training and institutional support (Artunduaga-Sánchez et al., 2026; Lee & Bryan, 2025; Sayici & Aydın, 2025). In the Ecuadorian context, where continuous training policies in educational technology are still incipient (Mena-Salcedo et al., 2025), this finding raises an urgent challenge: to design professional development programs that promote a critical and pedagogically oriented AI literacy (Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025; Vosoughmatin, 2025).

Considering the participation of four public universities from different regions of the coastal area of Ecuador (Guayas, Santa Elena, and Milagro), the findings provide initial evidence of a shared trend among teachers in this macro-region. Nevertheless, a limitation of the present study lies in the fact that the sample (n = 62) is restricted to public universities on the Ecuadorian coast, which limits the generalization of the findings to institutions in the Sierra, the Amazon region, or the private sector. Future research could expand the sample nationally and incorporate semi-structured interviews to explore in greater depth the meanings that teachers themselves attribute to AI.

5. Conclusions

The present study analyzed the perceptions of 62 university English teachers from the UAE, UG, UPSE, and UNEMI regarding artificial intelligence. The findings allow us to conclude that teachers hold a mostly positive attitude toward AI, with a particularly high valuation of its potential to personalize learning and optimize the production of teaching materials.

Nevertheless, this positive perception coexists with moderate levels of declared knowledge about AI and with genuine ethical concerns. This ambivalence reflects a mature teaching stance that recognizes both the instrumental value of AI and the need to integrate it critically, contextually, and in a pedagogically grounded manner.

The study provides empirical evidence from an Ecuadorian context that is scarcely represented in the international literature on teacher perceptions of AI in EFL. Its results have direct implications for the design of continuous teacher training policies, the development of AI literacy programs in Ecuadorian higher education, and reflection on the role of the language teacher in the age of artificial intelligence.

In sum, English teachers from the UAE, UG, UPSE, and UNEMI do not perceive AI as an existential threat to their professional role, but rather as a tool with transformative potential that demands specific training, institutional support, and critical awareness. The question that titles this article receives a nuanced answer: AI is mainly an opportunity, but only to the extent that it is managed with pedagogical criteria, equity of access, and sustained ethical reflection.

CONFLICTO DE INTERESES

“Los autores declaran no tener ningún conflicto de intereses”.

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