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From Digital Tools to Teacher Creativity: Managing Character-Based ELT in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Sri Yusriani^{1,2}, Endang Sondari³, Riza Pranita⁴, Aldirsas⁵, Lasmawati⁶, Muji Gunarto⁷

¹English Education Master's Program, Graduate School, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia, sriysarahlistener@gmail.com

²Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia, sriysarahlistener@gmail.com

³English Education Master's Program, Graduate School, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁴English Education Master's Program, Graduate School, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁵English Education Master's Program, Graduate School, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁶English Education Master's Program, Graduate School, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁷Management Study Program, Universitas Bina Darma, Palembang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: sriysarahlistener@gmail.com^{1,2}

Abstract: Artificial intelligence is reshaping English Language Teaching, yet digital adoption alone does not guarantee creative, ethical, or meaningful learning. This study addresses the limited integration of classroom practice and educational-management perspectives by examining how educators position artificial intelligence in relation to teacher creativity, character formation, and human-centered learning. A qualitative two-wave focus group design involved eleven educators and academic practitioners: six participants in a management-oriented discussion in March 2026 and five in a teaching-oriented discussion in August 2026. Data were interpreted through reflexive thematic analysis. The findings show that artificial intelligence improves lesson preparation, material design, assessment, and administrative efficiency, but unguided use can encourage dependency, plagiarism, shallow thinking, and reduced originality. Teachers therefore remain essential as pedagogical decision-makers, emotional guides, and builders of honesty, responsibility, empathy, and confidence. Institutions must complement access with policy, professional development, digital infrastructure, and teacher-parent collaboration. The study introduces the CREATE framework; Character formation, Responsible guidance, Educator creativity, Academic integrity, Technology-pedagogy alignment, and Emotional-ethical support, as a practical architecture for managing human-led artificial-intelligence use in character-based English Language Teaching.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Character-Based ELT, Educational Management, Human-Centered Education, Teacher Creativity

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most influential developments in contemporary education. In English Language Teaching (ELT), AI can support teachers in designing materials, generating classroom activities, preparing assessment items, translating texts, providing feedback, and creating more interactive learning experiences. These possibilities show that AI is not merely a technological trend, but part of a broader transformation in how teachers, learners, and institutions organize educational practices. However, the main challenge is not simply whether schools and universities should use AI. The deeper issue is how AI can be managed without weakening the human purpose of education.

In the context of ELT, digital tools can enrich language learning by expanding access to authentic materials, supporting differentiated instruction, and providing flexible learning resources. Bates (2015) explains that technology in education should be used systematically and strategically to improve the quality of learning. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) also argue that blended learning can transform higher education when digital tools are integrated meaningfully into pedagogical design. However, technology does not automatically produce better learning. Without clear educational direction, AI may only accelerate task completion while reducing students' critical thinking, reading discipline, originality, and academic responsibility.

The authors' academic reflections in *Principles of Education in ELT* positioned AI as a tool that can support teachers in technical tasks, but cannot replace the essence of teachers as human educators. Teachers do not only transfer knowledge; they guide values, read classroom emotions, strengthen student confidence, shape character, and make ethical decisions in context. AI may generate answers quickly, but it does not possess conscience, lived experience, moral responsibility, or relational sensitivity. This reflection is consistent with the view that the future of education should not be framed as "AI versus teachers," but as how teachers can work creatively and ethically with AI while protecting the human soul of education.

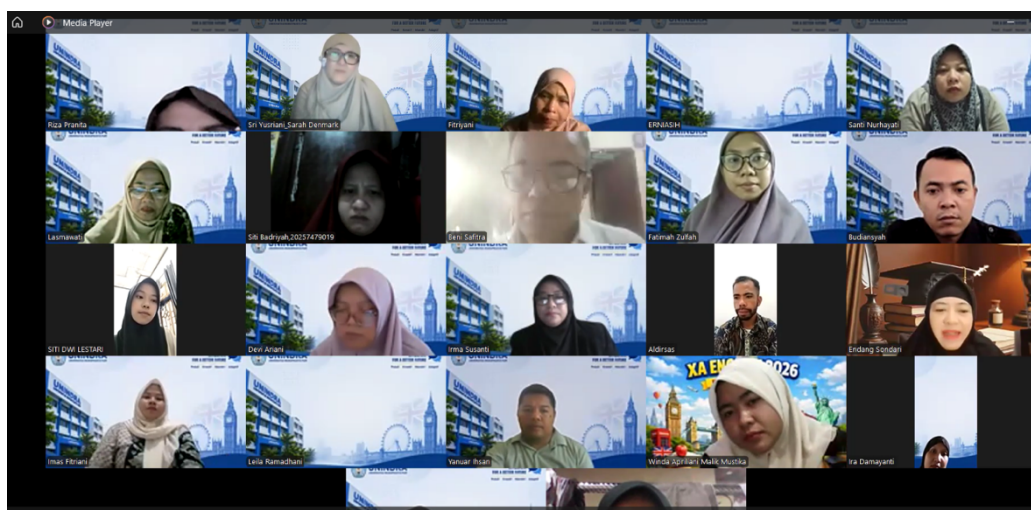


Figure 1. Principles of Education in ELT class discussion on integrity in the digital artificial-intelligence era (June 2026).

This issue is increasingly important because the rise of AI in education creates both opportunities and risks. Kasneci et al. (2023) argue that large language models can support learning through explanation, feedback, content generation, and tutoring-like interaction, but they also raise concerns related to bias, misinformation, academic integrity, and overreliance. Long and Magerko (2020) further emphasizes the importance of AI literacy, which includes

not only technical understanding, but also critical awareness of what AI can and cannot do. Therefore, educators need to help students use AI responsibly, not passively depend on it.

Developing responsible AI literacy also requires structured teacher preparation. Teachers need opportunities to strengthen their technological knowledge, evaluate digital tools critically, and align technology with pedagogical objectives and learner needs (Tondeur et al., 2016; OECD, 2021). This preparation is particularly important because AI competence involves not only operational skills, but also the ability to recognize technological limitations, verify information, and make responsible educational decisions.

International policy discussions also highlight the need for human-centered AI implementation. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI in education and research stresses that institutions need ethical regulation, teacher preparation, and long-term capacity building to ensure that AI supports rather than harms education (Miao & Holmes, 2023). In a more specific teacher-focused framework, Miao and Cukurova (2024) argue that teachers need competencies to understand AI, use it pedagogically, evaluate its ethical implications, and manage the new relationship among teachers, learners, and intelligent systems. This perspective supports the central argument of this paper: AI integration is not only a classroom issue, but also a matter of educational management.

Educational management becomes essential because AI affects curriculum, assessment, teacher professional development, student guidance, academic integrity, and institutional culture. Poorly managed AI use may encourage shortcut learning, plagiarism, dependency, and shallow engagement with knowledge. In contrast, responsible AI management can support teacher creativity, reduce administrative burden, expand learning resources, and strengthen personalized learning. From a governance perspective, educational institutions need accountability, transparency, and ethical direction to ensure that technology serves educational values rather than replacing them (Weiss, 2012).

Human-centered AI management must also consider how educational technologies shape teacher autonomy, professional judgment, and institutional accountability. Data-driven systems may support educational decision-making, but they can also narrow teaching practices when measurable outputs are prioritized over contextual understanding and human relationships (Williamson, 2020). Therefore, institutions should adopt AI through transparent governance that protects teacher agency and ensures that technological innovation remains aligned with educational values.

Teacher creativity is therefore a central concern in this paper. Teachers in the AI era are expected not only to use digital platforms, but also to redesign learning experiences, create meaningful tasks, adapt materials to students' needs, and guide students in ethical knowledge production. Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge reminds us that effective teaching requires more than content mastery. Mishra and Koehler (2006) extends this idea through the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which shows that effective technology integration requires the intersection of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. In other words, creative ELT does not emerge from AI tools alone, but from teachers' ability to connect technology with pedagogy, language content, and learner context.

This alignment is consistent with human-centered artificial intelligence in education, which positions technology as a means of extending human capabilities rather than replacing teachers' pedagogical and ethical responsibility (Yang et al., 2021). Within this perspective, creative teaching emerges when educators combine technological possibilities with professional judgment, contextual knowledge, and sensitivity to learners' cognitive and emotional needs.

Creativity in teaching is also important because ELT requires more than grammar instruction and vocabulary memorization. Language learning involves communication,

confidence, identity, culture, emotion, and social interaction. Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) Four C model of creativity reminds us that creativity can appear not only in extraordinary innovation, but also in everyday learning practices. In ELT, teacher creativity may appear in simple but meaningful strategies: designing relatable speaking tasks, using songs and stories, encouraging students to express personal experiences, integrating digital media critically, and creating safe spaces for students to make mistakes. Such creativity is deeply connected with students' motivation and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is relevant because students' willingness to learn and communicate is influenced by their belief in their own capability. Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy shapes how individuals think, feel, act, and persist in the face of difficulty. In language classrooms, learners who believe they can improve are more likely to take risks, speak, revise, and continue practicing. This idea is aligned with Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as important psychological needs in learning. It also relates to Dörnyei's (2001) work on language learning motivation, where teacher support and classroom atmosphere play a significant role in sustaining student engagement.

Character-based ELT becomes increasingly important in the AI era because students are not only learning language; they are also learning how to use knowledge responsibly. Education should develop meaning, moral awareness, resilience, empathy, and the ability to face challenges. Spirituality helps learners find meaning and values, while adversity strengthens endurance and the ability to rise after failure. These aspects are central to character formation because students today face digital distraction, information overload, social pressure, and the temptation to use AI as a shortcut. Prior work on resilience and well-being also shows that self-efficacy, social support, and adaptive coping are important psychological resources for sustaining human functioning under pressure (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Rekarti et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020).

In this sense, character-based ELT is not separate from language teaching. It can be integrated through honest academic work, respectful communication, reflective reading, meaningful speaking tasks, responsible use of sources, and ethical AI disclosure. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports this view by emphasizing that learning develops through social interaction and guided participation. Students do not grow only through tools, but through human mediation, dialogue, and meaningful support. Therefore, AI should be used to enrich interaction and reflection, not to replace the teacher-student relationship.

Based on these concerns, this paper uses two FGD waves to connect management-oriented and English-education-oriented perspectives. The study asks: (1) how educators perceive the role of AI in supporting and challenging ELT practices, (2) what human-centered educational values should be preserved in AI-mediated ELT, and (3) what strategic educational management practices can strengthen teacher creativity in the AI era. Through these questions, this paper argues that the future of ELT should move from digital tools to teacher creativity. The goal is not merely to adopt AI, but to build learning ecosystems where teachers remain value builders, students grow as responsible learners, and technology serves creativity, character, and human dignity.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design using two online focus group discussions to explore educators' experiences and judgments concerning artificial intelligence in teaching and English Language Teaching. The design was appropriate because the inquiry focused on professional meaning, contextual interpretation, and practitioner voice rather than statistical relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The first focus group was conducted in March 2026 with six participants and emphasized management, leadership, institutional readiness, policy, collaboration, and strategic capability. The second was conducted in August 2026 with five participants and emphasized classroom practice, teacher creativity, character-based learning, digital exposure, and responsible technology use. The eleven participants represented management, English education, mathematics, and elementary-school teaching contexts, enabling a cross-disciplinary comparison between institutional and classroom concerns.

Participants were selected purposively because they were educators or academic practitioners with sustained experience of curriculum change and digital transformation. The available profiles included experience from eight years onward and teaching across elementary, junior-secondary, senior-secondary, language-course, and higher-education settings. This variation was analytically useful because the educational consequences of artificial intelligence differ by learner age, subject, institution, and digital access.

Data were collected through Zoom-based discussions guided by questions on the benefits and risks of artificial intelligence, teacher roles, student character, academic integrity, institutional support, teacher-parent collaboration, and recommendations for creative learning. Written reflections supplied after the discussions were used to clarify participants' points. The recordings and discussion notes were reviewed as supporting evidence; quotations were lightly edited only for grammar and readability without changing their intended meaning.

The FGD procedure was inspired by Sondari et al. (2025), who emphasized that digital literacy training, simulation, group discussion, and hands-on practice can strengthen teachers' digital competencies for technology-based learning. In this study, educators were positioned not only as respondents, but also as reflective practitioners whose voices can explain how AI may support teacher creativity without replacing human values in education.

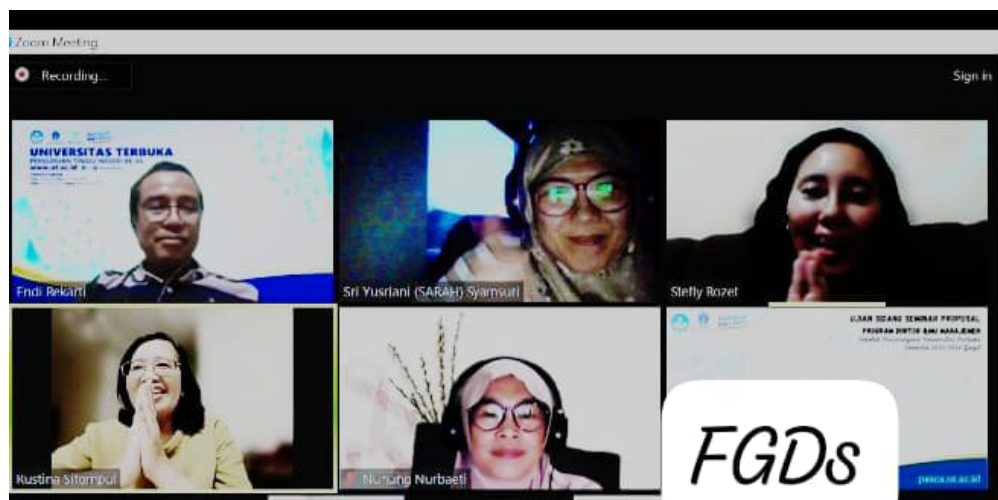
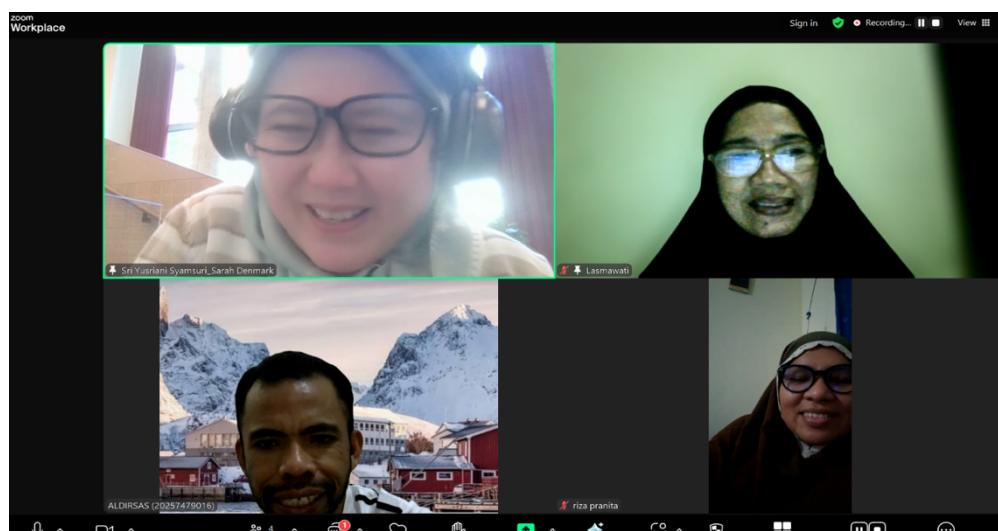
The material was analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis following familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, naming, and interpretive writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes included artificial intelligence as pedagogical assistant, efficiency, dependency, academic integrity, teacher judgment, age-sensitive exposure, creativity, character formation, institutional governance, and relational support. Themes were compared across the two waves and interpreted with pedagogical content knowledge, the TPACK framework, self-efficacy theory, and human-centered artificial-intelligence guidance (Bandura, 1997; Miao & Cukurova, 2024; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1987).

Participants were informed that their contributions would support academic writing, participation was voluntary, and identities would be protected in the manuscript. The analysis therefore reports aggregated profiles and participant labels rather than personal names. The study seeks analytic insight rather than statistical generalization. Its trustworthiness was strengthened by comparing oral and written evidence, retaining contrasting age- and context-sensitive views, and reviewing the thematic structure against the research questions.

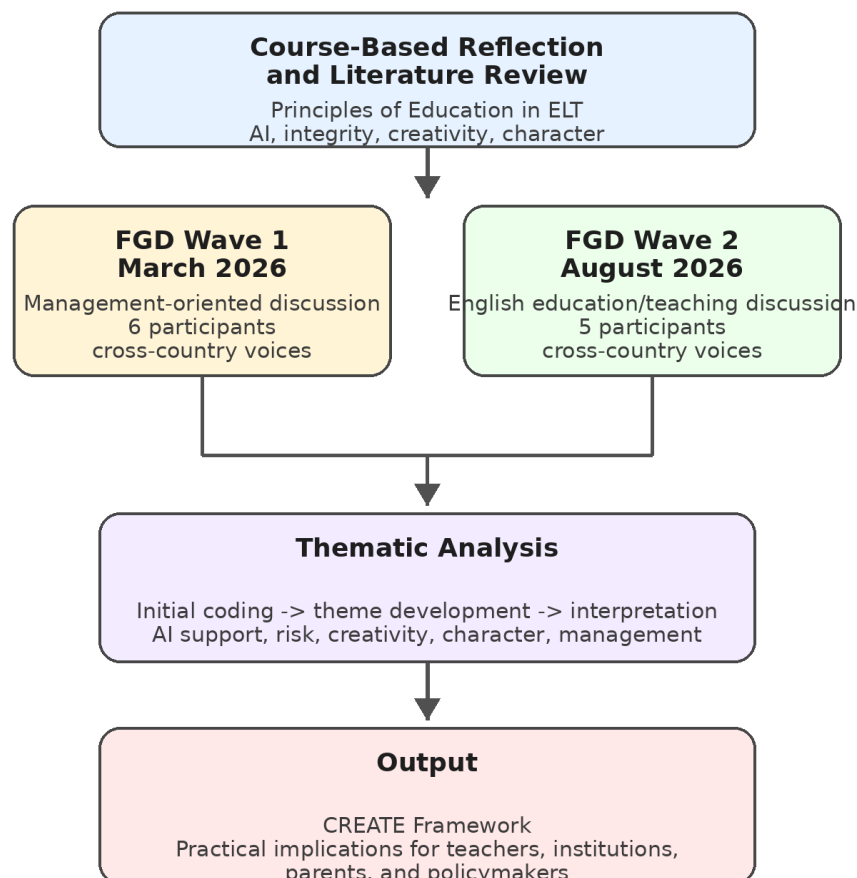
Table 1. Two FGD waves and their analytic contribution

FGD Wave	Time and Participants	Main Orientation	Analytic Contribution
Wave 1	March 2026; 6 participants	Management-oriented FGD	Strengthens leadership, policy, institutional readiness, collaboration, accountability, and strategic management themes.
Wave 2	August 2026; 5 participants	English education / teaching-oriented FGD	Strengthens classroom-based insight on AI use, teacher creativity, character-based learning, age-sensitive use, and teacher-parent collaboration.

Source: Researchers' analysis of FGD data (2026).


Figure 2. Management-oriented online focus group discussion conducted in March 2026.

Figure 3. Teaching-oriented online focus group discussion on artificial intelligence, teacher creativity, and character-based learning (August 2026).

Two-Wave FGD Methodological Flow



AI is treated as a pedagogical assistant, not a teacher replacement.

Figure 4. Methodological flow of the two-wave focus group study (Yusriani et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced six connected themes. The March discussion foregrounded institutional strategy and governance, whereas the August discussion brought classroom realities, learner age, and teacher judgment into sharper focus. Across both waves, participants rejected two extremes: uncritical adoption and complete rejection. They instead described artificial intelligence as useful supporting infrastructure whose educational value depends on human purpose, verification, and care.

AI as a Supporting Tool, Not the Main Tool

Participants consistently positioned artificial intelligence as an assistant rather than the central actor in teaching. An educator from Southeast Sulawesi explained that it helped him locate complementary material, but remained “just a tool to make human work easier.” Another participant described its strongest benefit as generating ideas for innovative activities, differentiated examples, and varied designs that prevent lessons from becoming

monotonous. These accounts show that efficiency becomes educationally valuable only when teachers select, revise, and contextualize the output.

Participants reported gains in lesson preparation, translation, assessment design, classroom wording, and administrative work. One educator observed that this time saving creates “more time to interact with students.” This redistribution of effort matters more than speed alone: artificial intelligence can take over routine drafting while the teacher invests attention in explanation, feedback, and relationships. The finding is consistent with strategic technology integration (Bates, 2015) and with TPACK, which locates value in the alignment of technology, pedagogy, content, and context (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

AI Risks: Dependency, Shortcut Learning, and Academic Integrity

The strongest warning concerned use without boundaries. One participant identified “plagiarism, laziness in creative thinking,” fewer opportunities to develop original ideas, and weaker independent problem solving. The focus groups also associated shortcut use with copy-paste habits, reduced reading, shallow verification, and uncertain authorship. These concerns mirror evidence that large language models can support explanation and feedback while also producing bias, misinformation, overreliance, and academic-integrity risks (Kasneci et al., 2023; Long & Magerko, 2020).

The problem, therefore, is not the presence of artificial intelligence but the absence of guided practice. Participants favored a sequence in which learners first think, read, draft, or attempt a solution; use artificial intelligence for support; then verify, revise, disclose, and remain accountable for the final work. This moves academic integrity beyond prohibition toward responsible authorship and makes critical judgment part of artificial-intelligence literacy.

Age-Sensitive AI Use and Guided Digital Exposure

The August FGD showed that AI influence differs by learner age and school level. A West Java-based elementary educator explained that AI is not yet a major direct concern for young learners. In her context, AI is mostly used by teachers, while students are more commonly exposed to technology through games, social media, videos, and general digital content. Children may learn vocabulary or general knowledge from social media and games, but they still need teacher guidance to understand meaning, context, and values.

This finding is important because it prevents the paper from treating all learners as the same. For elementary students, the focus should remain on reading habits, book-based learning, library activities, classroom interaction, handwriting, discipline, and social-emotional development. In the FGD, it was also noted that gadgets are kept during school hours to maintain focus. Therefore, AI integration should be age-sensitive: teachers may use AI behind the scenes to support preparation, but young learners still need books, direct guidance, and human interaction.

Teachers as Value Builders in Character-Based Learning

Participants were equally clear that automation cannot replace relational teaching. One educator explained that artificial intelligence “cannot motivate or understand students’ emotions and social needs,” nor fully provide fairness, accountability, professionalism, or a comfortable classroom climate. Teachers remain value builders who model honesty, empathy, discipline, responsibility, respect, and the courage to learn from mistakes.

Character-based ELT, therefore, is not an additional topic outside language teaching. It appears in how teachers design tasks, correct students, respond to mistakes, build confidence, and discuss ethical technology use. In language classrooms, students need more than grammar and vocabulary; they also need courage to speak, responsibility to revise, honesty in

writing, and empathy in communication. This links with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, because students' willingness to try is shaped by belief, support, and meaningful feedback.

The importance of human feedback further supports this finding. Effective feedback helps learners understand their current performance, identify areas for improvement, and determine the next steps in learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Although AI can generate rapid responses, teachers remain responsible for interpreting students' difficulties, adjusting feedback to their emotional readiness, and ensuring that correction strengthens rather than weakens learner confidence.

Teacher Creativity in the Age of AI

Artificial intelligence did not automatically make teachers creative. Creativity emerged when teachers converted raw suggestions into age-appropriate stories, songs, pictures, speaking tasks, reflective reading, real-life questions, and differentiated examples. As one participant recommended, teachers should strengthen "creativity, empathy, communication, and critical thinking" while using artificial intelligence for routine work and inspiration. Creativity therefore remained situated, relational, and accountable to learner needs.

This theme is aligned with Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge and Mishra and Koehler's (2006) TPACK framework. Teachers need to connect subject content, pedagogy, technology, learner readiness, and classroom context. AI may offer raw ideas, but teachers decide whether those ideas fit students' age, language level, emotional condition, cultural context, and character needs. Thus, the movement from digital tools to teacher creativity depends on pedagogical agency.

Human-Centered Educational Management for Responsible AI Use

The management-oriented wave showed that responsible adoption cannot be left to individual improvisation. Participants called for clear policy, regular professional development, ethical guidance, reliable digital infrastructure, and teacher communities for sharing practices. These provisions build institutional capacity while preserving teacher agency. They also make responsibility visible: leaders establish boundaries and support, teachers exercise contextual judgment, and learners remain accountable for their work.

The August FGD also highlighted the importance of teacher-parent collaboration, especially for young learners. Communication through WhatsApp groups allows teachers and parents to stay connected in monitoring learning habits, gadget use, assignments, and school information. This suggests that human-centered educational management should include not only technology policy, but also relational coordination among teachers, parents, students, and institutions. Previous studies also suggest that digital competence develops within a broader social and institutional environment. Self-efficacy and peer support can shape learners' enthusiasm and engagement with digital learning, indicating that technological readiness cannot be separated from confidence and supportive relationships (Yusriani et al., 2023). Similarly, digitalization becomes more sustainable when institutional change is accompanied by self-efficacy and support from learners' wider social environment (Yusriani & Patiro, 2024).

From a strategic management perspective, AI readiness can be understood as part of dynamic capability: institutions need to sense digital change, seize useful opportunities, and transform teaching practices without losing ethical direction (Teece, 2007). In this study, human-centered management means that technology should serve learning, character, teacher creativity, and student well-being.

Emerging Framework: The CREATE Model

The study's novelty is the CREATE framework for managing human-led artificial-intelligence use in character-based English Language Teaching: Character formation, Responsible artificial-intelligence guidance, Educator creativity, Academic integrity, Technology-pedagogy alignment, and Emotional-ethical learning support. Rather than treating creativity as a direct product of tool access, CREATE explains the managerial and pedagogical conditions through which digital assistance can become meaningful teaching.

Character formation places honesty, empathy, responsibility, resilience, and respect within everyday language tasks. Responsible guidance establishes boundaries, verification, disclosure, and accountability. Educator creativity keeps teachers as designers of contextual learning experiences. Academic integrity protects original thought and responsible authorship. Technology-pedagogy alignment connects tools with objectives, content, age, and learner readiness. Emotional-ethical support preserves feedback, confidence, relationships, and care. Together, these elements translate human-centered principles into an actionable management architecture.

Table 2. Emerging themes from the two FGD waves

Theme	Meaning	Contribution to the Paper
AI as supporting tool	AI helps preparation but is not the main teacher.	Strengthens RQ1 and the pedagogical-assistant argument.
Age-sensitive use	Elementary students need books, libraries, direct interaction, and guided digital exposure.	Strengthens RQ2 and the character-based learning argument.
Teacher as value builder	Teachers guide honesty, empathy, confidence, and responsibility.	Strengthens RQ2 and the human-centered education argument.
Teacher creativity	Teachers transform digital tools into meaningful tasks.	Strengthens RQ3 and the TPACK/creativity argument.
Human-centered management	Institutions need policy, training, guidelines, parent communication, and communities of practice.	Strengthens RQ3 and the educational management contribution.

Source: Researchers' analysis of FGD data (2026).

Taken together, the themes presented in Table 2 show that responsible AI integration is not determined by technological access alone, but by the interaction between teacher agency, learner readiness, ethical guidance, and institutional support. AI becomes educationally meaningful when teachers transform its outputs into contextual learning experiences, guide students to remain honest and intellectually active, and preserve the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching. This integrated pattern reinforces the CREATE model by showing that teacher creativity and character-based learning must develop together within a supportive human-centered management system.

Practical Implications

For teachers, the findings suggest that AI should be used as a co-thinking assistant, not as an automatic answer machine. Teachers need to revise AI-generated materials, adjust them to students' levels, and connect them with speaking, reading, writing, reflection, and character-building activities.

For schools and universities, the findings suggest the need for responsible AI guidelines, teacher training, peer-sharing forums, and clear rules about academic integrity. Institutions should not only provide digital tools, but also build a culture of ethical and creative technology use.

For parents and communities, the findings suggest the importance of collaboration with teachers, especially for young learners. Gadget use, social media exposure, reading habits, and digital discipline should be monitored through continuous communication between school and home.

Limitations

This study is limited by a small purposive group and two focus-group waves with different disciplinary orientations; its findings therefore offer transferable insight rather than population-level generalization. Uneven detail in the participant profiles and the use of discussion notes alongside recordings also limit fine-grained comparison across individuals. Nevertheless, convergence across oral and written evidence, together with the retention of contrasting classroom and management perspectives, supports the interpretive credibility of the framework.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The study concludes that artificial intelligence can extend teachers' capacity without replacing the human work that gives education its meaning. Across the two focus-group waves, participants valued support for preparation, material development, assessment, translation, and administration, yet warned that unguided use can weaken originality, reading, independent thought, and academic integrity. The three research questions are answered by positioning artificial intelligence as a bounded pedagogical assistant, identifying honesty, empathy, responsibility, creativity, confidence, and care as non-negotiable values, and specifying policy, professional learning, infrastructure, collaboration, and contextual teacher judgment as the managerial conditions for responsible use.

The central contribution is the CREATE framework, which connects character formation and academic integrity with educator creativity, technology-pedagogy alignment, responsible guidance, and emotional-ethical support. It explains why access to digital tools does not directly produce creative teaching: transformation occurs through teacher agency and institutional capability. Educational excellence in the artificial-intelligence era is therefore neither technological rejection nor passive acceptance, but disciplined augmentation in which humans retain responsibility for purpose, verification, relationships, and consequential decisions.

Recommendations

Future research should test and refine CREATE with larger, more diverse groups across elementary, secondary, vocational, and higher education. Comparative and longitudinal designs could examine how institutional policy, teacher artificial-intelligence literacy, and student digital habits change over time and across national contexts. Classroom observation, student work, interviews, and mixed methods would also help assess how guided artificial-intelligence use shapes speaking confidence, reading discipline, originality, academic integrity, and self-efficacy.

Author Contributions

Sri Yusriani led the conceptualization, methodological integration, data analysis, and manuscript drafting. Endang Sondari, Riza Pranita, Aldirsas, and Lasmawati contributed to data collection, practitioner insights, contextual interpretation, and manuscript review. Muji Gunarto contributed the management perspective, critical scholarly review, and refinement of the study's strategic contribution. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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