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EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO SUPPORT READERS

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ABSTRACT
Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in literacy instruction to support struggling readers through personalized and adaptive learning tools. This qualitative phenomenological study explored elementary teachers' experiences using AI to support readers in Grades 1 to 3. Six teachers participated in semi-structured interviews examining how they use AI tools, evaluate AI-generated reading materials, and address ethical and accuracy concerns. Thematic analysis revealed three major themes: AI as a tool for personalized reading support and engagement; teachers' critical evaluation and adaptation of AI-generated materials to ensure linguistic accuracy, curriculum alignment, and cultural relevance; and ethical concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, equity, and reliability. Findings highlight that teachers act as critical mediators who ensure responsible AI integration through professional judgment and ethical awareness. AI enhances reading support but requires human oversight, AI literacy, and institutional support to ensure equitable and effective literacy instruction.

KEYWORDS: *Artificial Intelligence in Education, Literacy Instruction, Struggling Readers, Teacher Decision-Making, Ethical AI, Differentiated Reading Instruction*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming literacy instruction by enabling teachers to provide personalized and responsive support for struggling readers. AI-powered tools can adapt text difficulty, generate leveled reading materials, and provide real-time feedback, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction and monitor progress efficiently (Wagner, 2024; Maine, 2024; Silor & Silor, 2025). These features have been shown to improve reading comprehension and engagement, particularly among learners with low proficiency (Baylan et al., 2020; Silor & Silor, 2025). Interactive and adaptive elements may also reduce cognitive load and enhance motivation, creating more supportive reading experiences (Bushnell, 2025).

Despite these benefits, teachers remain central to evaluating and mediating AI-generated materials. Educators assess AI outputs for linguistic accuracy, curriculum alignment, readability, cultural relevance, and student engagement before integrating them into instruction (Lee & Hwang, 2025; Huang et al., 2025). They may accept, modify, or reject AI-generated content based on pedagogical suitability and ethical considerations (Jen et al., 2024; Prestoza et al., 2025). Teachers' confidence, AI literacy, and institutional support influence how effectively these tools are integrated into classroom practice (Ding et al., 2025; Hazzan et al., 2025).

However, the use of AI in education raises important ethical and equity concerns. Issues related to data privacy, algorithmic transparency, bias, and unequal access may affect trust and fairness in AI-supported instruction (Barrot, 2026; Chavez et al., 2026; Chen & Delaney, 2025). Teachers also express concerns about the accuracy of AI-generated feedback and the risk of over-reliance on automated systems, underscoring the need for human oversight and ethical guidelines (Angeles et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2025).

While prior studies emphasize the effectiveness and challenges of AI in education, limited research examines teachers' experiences and decision-making processes when using AI to support struggling readers in authentic classroom contexts. In particular, little is known about how teachers evaluate AI-generated materials and navigate ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns during implementation.

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To address this gap, this study explores teachers' experiences using artificial intelligence to support readers. Specifically, it investigates: (1) how teachers use AI tools to support struggling readers; (2) how they evaluate and decide whether to accept, modify, or reject AI-generated reading materials; and (3) the ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns they encounter when using AI for reading support.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore teachers' experiences using artificial intelligence (AI) to support struggling readers. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their lived experiences within a particular phenomenon (Tavakol & Sandars, 2025). This design was appropriate to examine how teachers use AI tools, evaluate AI-generated reading materials, and navigate ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns in literacy instruction. By focusing on participants' perspectives, the study captured the meanings, judgments, and professional decisions that shape AI-supported reading instruction.

Participants

Participants included six (6) elementary teachers responsible for literacy instruction in Grades 1 to 3. These grade levels were selected as they represent the emergent and early reading stages where targeted support is critical.

Selection criteria included:

a. currently teaching literacy or language-related subjects in S.Y 2025-2026;
b. a minimum of two (2) years of teaching experience;
c. experience using or exposure to AI-supported tools and digital technologies for reading instruction; and
d. willingness to share instructional experiences.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants possessed relevant experience with literacy instruction and technology integration.

Data Collection

Data were collected using qualitative methods to obtain a rich and in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences using artificial intelligence (AI) in reading instruction. Prior to data collection, permission was secured from school authorities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source. An interview guide was developed based on the research questions to explore how teachers use AI tools to support struggling readers, how they evaluate and modify AI-generated reading materials, and the ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns they encounter. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to describe their decision-making processes, classroom applications, and reflections on AI-assisted literacy support. Follow-up probes were used to clarify responses and elicit deeper descriptions of experiences.

Interviews were conducted at a time convenient for participants and in a setting that ensured privacy and minimal disruption. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to confirm accuracy and ensure that their perspectives were accurately represented.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke. Thematic analysis is a flexible and systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It is widely used in education and social science research due to its accessibility and rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Campbell et al., 2021).

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process:

1. **Familiarization with the data** through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes.
2. **Generating initial codes** by identifying meaningful units related to teachers' use of AI, decision-making processes, and ethical concerns.
3. **Searching for themes** by grouping related codes into broader patterns.
4. **Reviewing themes** to ensure coherence and alignment with the dataset and research questions.
5. **Defining and naming themes** to clearly capture the essence of participants' experiences.
6. **Producing the report** by integrating themes with supporting excerpts to present a coherent interpretation of teachers' experiences.

To enhance credibility, coding and theme development were reviewed iteratively, and emerging interpretations were compared with participants' accounts to ensure faithful representation of their perspectives.

This analytic process enabled the identification of key themes that show how teachers use AI to support struggling readers, evaluate AI-generated materials, and navigate ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns in literacy instruction.

RESULTS

Analysis of the interview data revealed three major thematic areas aligned with the study's research questions: (1) teachers' use of AI tools to support struggling readers, (2) teachers' evaluation and adaptation of AI-generated reading materials, and (3) ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns in AI-assisted literacy instruction.

Teachers' Use of AI Tools to Support Readers who struggles

Findings indicate that teachers use AI as a supportive instructional tool to personalize reading instruction, enhance engagement, and monitor learner progress.

Personalized and Differentiated Reading Support

Teachers reported using AI tools to generate leveled texts, simplify passages, and provide vocabulary support suited to

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learners' reading abilities. AI allowed them to quickly tailor materials for diverse reading levels. This aligns with research showing that AI can personalize reading content and support differentiated instruction to meet individual learning needs (Wagner, 2024; Silor & Silor, 2025). Adaptive AI systems help struggling readers access texts matched to their proficiency and pace.

Immediate Feedback and Comprehension Support

Participants described using AI tools to provide instant feedback, summaries, and guided comprehension prompts that help learners understand texts and correct errors. This corroborates findings that AI-supported feedback enhances comprehension and supports skill development by offering timely reinforcement (Maine, 2024). AI-generated summaries and interactive prompts have been shown to improve understanding among low-proficiency readers (Silor & Silor, 2025).

Increased Engagement and Motivation

Teachers observed that AI-assisted activities increased student participation and motivation, particularly among reluctant readers. Interactive and multimodal features made reading tasks more engaging. This supports research indicating that AI-enhanced reading tools can improve engagement and reduce cognitive load, creating more supportive learning environments (Bushnell, 2025).

Teachers' Evaluation and Adaptation of AI-Generated Reading Materials

Teachers described a critical decision-making process when determining whether to accept, modify, or reject AI-generated materials.

Evaluating Linguistic Quality and Curriculum Alignment

Participants emphasized reviewing grammar, vocabulary appropriateness, readability, and alignment with learning objectives before using AI-generated texts. This reflects findings that teachers assess linguistic accuracy and educational suitability to ensure instructional relevance (Lee & Hwang, 2025; Huang et al., 2025).

Modifying AI Outputs to Fit Learner Needs

Teachers reported modifying AI-generated materials to simplify language, contextualize examples, or align with cultural and local realities. Research supports that educators often adapt AI outputs using pedagogical expertise to improve relevance and effectiveness (Jen et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021).

Rejecting Inaccurate or Inappropriate Content

Participants rejected materials that contained factual inaccuracies, culturally insensitive examples, or content unsuitable for learners. This corroborates studies indicating that teachers reject AI-generated materials that fail to meet pedagogical, cultural, or ethical standards (Prestoza et al., 2025).

Teacher Judgment and Confidence in AI Use

Teachers emphasized that professional judgment remained central in deciding whether to use AI outputs. This finding aligns with research showing that teacher self-efficacy and AI literacy influence effective integration and evaluation of AI-generated materials (Ding et al., 2025).

Ethical, Fairness, and Accuracy Concerns in AI-Supported Reading Instruction

Teachers expressed awareness of ethical and equity issues associated with AI use.

Data Privacy and Student Protection

Participants expressed concerns about protecting student information when using AI tools and ensuring compliance with privacy standards. This concern is consistent with studies highlighting privacy risks and the need for strong data protection measures in AI-supported education (Chavez et al., 2026; Gomez-Garcia et al., 2025).

Algorithmic Bias and Equity Issues

Teachers noted that AI tools may not reflect learners' cultural or linguistic backgrounds and may disadvantage students with limited digital access. This aligns with research warning that biased datasets and unequal access may reinforce educational inequities (Barrot, 2026; Chen & Delaney, 2025).

Accuracy and Reliability of AI Outputs

Participants emphasized verifying AI-generated content to prevent misinformation and instructional errors. This corroborates findings that AI-generated feedback and materials require continuous validation to ensure reliability and prevent negative learning consequences (Angeles et al., 2024).

Maintaining the Teacher's Role in Instruction

Teachers stressed that AI should assist—not replace—the teacher, highlighting the importance of human judgment and relational support in literacy learning. This supports research emphasizing the need for human oversight to maintain pedagogical integrity and the teacher–student relationship (Ismail et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

This study examined teachers' experiences using artificial intelligence (AI) to support struggling readers, focusing on instructional use, evaluative decision-making, and ethical concerns. Findings indicate that teachers view AI as a supportive instructional partner that enhances differentiation, engagement, and formative feedback. Participants used AI tools to personalize reading materials, generate leveled texts, and provide immediate comprehension support, helping struggling readers access texts aligned with their abilities. This supports prior research showing that AI-assisted tools can improve comprehension and engagement, particularly among learners with low proficiency (Wagner, 2024; Maine, 2024; Silor & Silor, 2025).

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Beyond instructional support, teachers exercised strong professional judgment when evaluating AI-generated reading materials. Participants emphasized reviewing linguistic accuracy, readability, curriculum alignment, and cultural relevance before classroom use. They frequently modified AI outputs to better suit learners' needs and contextual realities, demonstrating that pedagogical expertise remains central in technology-mediated instruction. This finding reinforces research showing that teachers critically assess and adapt AI-generated content rather than adopting it uncritically (Lee & Hwang, 2025; Jen et al., 2024; Ding et al., 2025).

At the same time, teachers expressed ethical, fairness, and accuracy concerns related to AI use. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, unequal access to technology, and the reliability of AI-generated content highlight the need for responsible implementation and human oversight. These concerns align with scholarship warning that AI may reinforce inequities and require careful monitoring (Barrot, 2026; Chen & Delaney, 2025; Angeles et al., 2024). Overall, the findings position teachers as critical mediators between AI technologies and learners, underscoring the importance of AI literacy, ethical awareness, and institutional support to ensure responsible and effective integration in literacy education.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers view artificial intelligence (AI) as a valuable tool for supporting struggling readers through personalized instruction, immediate feedback, and improved engagement. However, effective use depends on teachers' professional judgment in evaluating, adapting, and contextualizing AI-generated materials. Rather than relying on AI uncritically, teachers act as decision-makers who ensure that reading materials are accurate, culturally appropriate, and aligned with learning goals.

The findings also highlight important ethical responsibilities in using AI for literacy instruction. Concerns about data privacy, bias, accuracy, and unequal access emphasize the need for transparency, safeguards, and human oversight. AI should complement—not replace—teachers' expertise and the human support essential to literacy development. In conclusion, responsible AI integration requires teacher AI literacy, ethical awareness, and institutional support, while future research and training initiatives can help ensure its equitable and effective use.

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