



# Generative AI as a Conditional Job Resource: Examining ELT Teacher Well-being and Critical AI Literacy through the JD-R Model

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## Abstract

The English Language Teaching (ELT) profession faces a systemic crisis of well-being characterized by high rates of burnout and administrative intensification. While Generative AI (GenAI) offers the technological affordance to automate monotonous tasks and alleviate these pressures, its integration into the teacher's workflow presents a complex psychological paradox. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, this qualitative phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of 16 ELT professionals across diverse institutional contexts in Turkey. The findings reveal that GenAI functions not as a static benefit but as a Conditional Job Resource; its capacity to enhance well-being is contingent upon the teacher's Critical AI Literacy (CAIL). The analysis uncovers an efficiency paradox, where the reduction of manual labor often leads to a treadmill effect of work intensification rather than psychological recovery. Furthermore, the integration of GenAI instigates a fundamental shift in professional identity from creator to curator, introducing a new cognitive Verification Burden. The study distinguishes between high-agency Architects, who utilize CAIL to maintain pedagogical sovereignty, and Imposters, who experience efficiency as a threat to their competence. The research concludes that for GenAI to serve as a sustainable resource for well-being, the profession must cultivate human-in-the-loop competencies that empower teachers to navigate the boundary between automation and agency.

**Keywords:** Generative AI, ELT, Teacher Well-being, Job Demands-Resources Model, Critical AI Literacy, Professional Identity

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT) profession faces a global crisis of teacher professional well-being, characterized by high rates of exhaustion, stress, and eventual attrition (Agyapong et al., 2022). Research consistently identifies teaching as one of the six high-risk occupations reporting worse-than-average scores on key indicators of psychological health, physical health, and job satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005). This is a critical concern, as the efficacy of teachers' instruction and their relationships with students are profoundly influenced by their mental health and well-being (McConnell, 2023). Consequently, the sustainability of educational outcomes depends on organizational systems intentionally supporting, motivating, and retaining their qualified teachers (McConnell, 2023). However,

the primary drivers of this systemic fatigue are escalating Job Demands (JD) extending far beyond core pedagogical duties, with data confirming that teachers lose a significant portion of lesson time to administration and maintaining order (OECD, 2019).

For language educators specifically, chronic stress stems from the daily burden of monotonous, high-volume tasks such as routine paper marking, exhaustive material preparation, and drafting lesson plans (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). This extensive time commitment to non-instructional activity consumes critical energy (MacIntyre et al., 2020), which is central to overall psychological health (Billett et al., 2023). Beyond these administrative burdens, the field is subject to unique stressors, including high intercultural and linguistic demands and the frequent use of energy-intensive methodologies (Mercer, 2023). Given the inherent dynamic nature of teacher well-being in this ecology, effective coping mechanisms are essential to navigate these instantaneous contextual shifts (Sakid & Gurbuz, 2023).

To rigorously frame this urgent professional challenge, this study is grounded in the established Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R model is a comprehensive framework designed to examine the interplay between job demands, resources, and their impact on employee well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job Demands are "aspects of a job that require sustained physical and psychological effort" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and deplete energy resources, leading to exhaustion and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The model identifies a dual pathway: the health impairment pathway highlights that high job demands drain energy, leading to negative health outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Conversely, Job Resources (JR) refer to "physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These resources mitigate the negative effects of demands, enhancing engagement, motivation, and professional success (Bakker et al., 2011; Fan & Wang, 2022). The JD-R model's strength lies in its flexibility to capture these dynamic interactions across diverse occupational settings (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Sakid & Gurbuz, 2023).

Applying this framework to the current technological landscape, the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), exemplified by LLMs like ChatGPT, represents an unprecedented new Job Resource (Wu & Miller, 2025). Its promise lies in the automation of the highest-frequency, monotonous demands, such as providing timely feedback and innovating assessment methods (Liu, 2025; Ma et al., 2024).

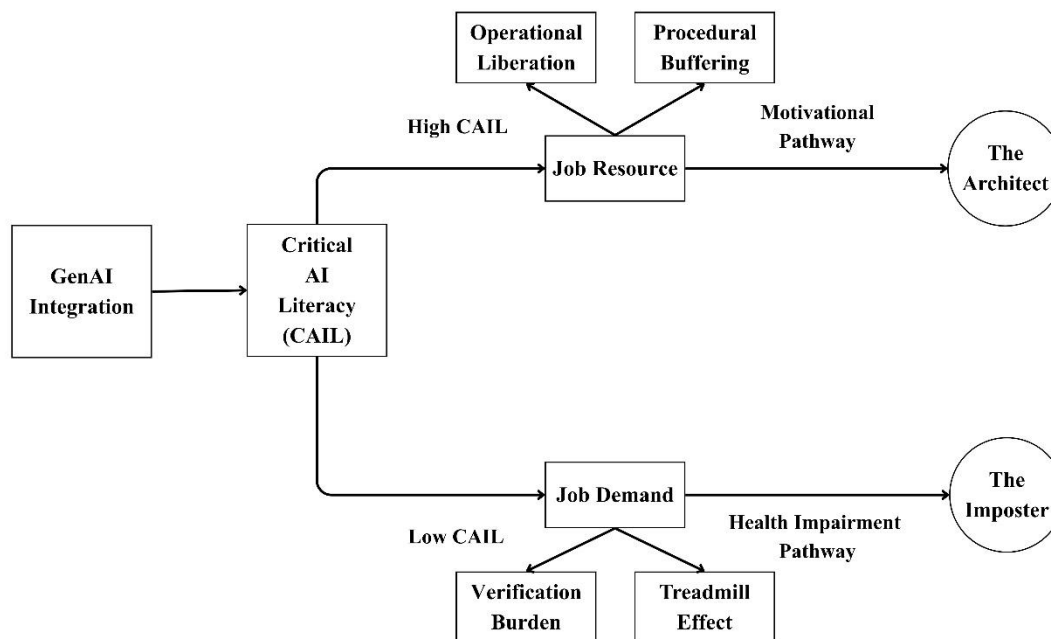
However, a critical paradox exists: introducing a digital tool yields mixed results in alleviating teacher strain, often described as a "bittersweet journey" (Wu & Miller, 2025). This tension aligns with the research agenda proposed by Mercer and Murillo-Miranda (2025), who identify AI as a pivotal domain for exploring the conflict between efficiency and self-view. They argue that while AI can boost well-being by reducing administrative loads, it simultaneously threatens teacher self-efficacy through two distinct mechanisms: the pressure to rapidly master constantly evolving tools, and the psychological cost of comparing one's own linguistic output to the 'flawless' texts generated by algorithms—a comparison that can severely undermine the confidence of perfectionist educators (Hart et al., 1998; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025)

In light of this duality, this study argues that AI's effectiveness as a well-being-enhancing Job Resource is fundamentally conditional upon the teacher's psychological response, which is mediated by Critical AI Literacy—a crucial Personal Resource. This literacy determines whether a teacher engages in Approach Coping to actively manage the integration of these tools, a proactive strategy correlated with

positive well-being and professional success, or defaults to Avoidant Coping, a maladaptive response consistently associated with increased stress and negative outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Fan & Wang, 2022).

Furthermore, the efficacy of this resource is inextricably linked to the teacher’s Technological Self-Efficacy—their belief in their ability to manage the digital environment (Shao, 2023). We posit that Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) fosters this efficacy, empowering educators to maintain professional agency and actively determine the role of technology in their practice, rather than succumbing to a state of passive reliance (Liu, 2025; Wu & Miller, 2025). Educators equipped with robust CAIL leverage technical competencies, such as advanced prompt engineering, to effectively automate routine tasks and maximize efficiency (Liu, 2025; Ma et al., 2024). Simultaneously, these teachers mitigate professional strain and uphold pedagogical autonomy by employing critical evaluation strategies to identify and address biases within AI-generated content (Liu, 2025; Wu & Miller, 2025).

This in-depth qualitative investigation into the individual factors influencing engagement will provide actionable implications for future training and policy (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). Given that current research calls for a diversification in studies across social contexts, including the neglected private sector (Mercer, 2023), this research addresses a critical gap by exploring the conditional relationship between GenAI, literacy, and well-being through the lived experiences of practitioners (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025; Sakid & Gurbuz, 2023). The central purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore how the introduction of Generative AI tools impacts the perceived workload and professional well-being of ELT teachers, with a specific focus on the enabling function of Critical AI Literacy within the Job Demands-Resources framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). This inquiry aims to supply a thick description of the lived experiences of ELT professionals, distinguishing between educators who exercise proactive pedagogical agency and those who adopt a passive role in their engagement with the technology.



**Figure 1.** The Conditional Job Resource Model of GenAI Integration for Language Teachers

Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do ELT teachers describe the impact of Generative AI on the quantity and qualitative nature of their workload?
2. How does the perceived efficiency of GenAI tools influence the professional well-being of ELT teachers?
3. In what ways does Critical AI Literacy mediate the teacher's professional identity and pedagogical sovereignty?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Context: Precarity and Crisis in ELT**

The teaching profession is globally characterized by high rates of professional attrition and systemic fatigue (Agyapong et al., 2022; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers consistently report lower levels of psychological health and job satisfaction compared to other professions, a disparity resulting in high burnout rates—defined as the cynicism and emotional exhaustion responding to chronic stress (Johnson et al., 2005; McIntyre et al., 2017; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Travers & Cooper, 1996; Zurlo et al., 2016). The English Language Teaching (ELT) field is acutely affected by these trends, often described as a profession in crisis due to disturbing attrition rates (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mercer, 2023). While occupational strain manifests individually as burnout and depersonalization (An & Tao, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Fathi et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2018; Maslach et al., 1996), the crisis in ELT is fundamentally structural. Litzenberg and Fraser (2023) characterize ELT as "the least stable form of employment," where enrollment volatility and a lack of full-time opportunities force professionals into a "permanent temporary" status. This adjunctification of higher education marginalizes language professionals, restricting access to professional development (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025). Furthermore, the private ELT sector is frequently driven by a for-profit agenda that creates precarious working conditions, including zero-hour contracts, low pay, and insufficient investment in resources (Mercer, 2023). This pervasive instability creates an environment of fear; for instance, Samadi et al. (2020) identified "organizational silence" as a critical stressor where instructors withhold concerns due to fear of negative consequences—a defensive response directly linked to job insecurity.

### **2.2. Teacher Job Demands and Workload in ELT**

The pervasive occupational strain is structurally examined using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This framework posits that Job Demands (JD)—workplace aspects requiring sustained physical, emotional, or cognitive effort—initiate a health impairment pathway leading to exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Conversely, Job Resources (JR) mitigate these demands and activate a motivational process leading to engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Although historically applied to general organizational contexts, the JD-R model is increasingly used to understand the complex predictors of innovation and well-being among university and language teachers (Cao et al., 2020; Mudrak et al., 2018). However, applying this lens to ELT reveals a critical structural imbalance: the profession is currently defined by an overwhelming volume of demands that dominates the health impairment pathway, thereby threatening teacher efficacy and sustainability (Billett et al., 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

### 2.2.1. Job Demands in the Language Classroom

Workload and time pressure are consistently reported as the most significant stressors in the profession (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). For English language teachers, this workload is characterized by the 'administrative intensification thesis,' where external pressures result in a proliferation of non-teaching tasks—such as data tracking and bureaucratic 'red tape'—that detract from pedagogy (De Carlo et al., 2019; Hargreaves, 1992; Wahab et al., 2024).

Within this intensified landscape, the most cognitively demanding and 'endless' burden is the cyclical nature of assessment-related duties (Manuel et al., 2018). Beyond mere grading, the technical requirements of Assessment Literacy (AL)—including test construction and statistical interpretation—impose a significant cognitive load that significantly predicts burnout (Rastegar & Zarei, 2023). Teachers frequently bear the responsibility of preparing students for external examinations, resulting in marking loads that spill over into weekends (Manuel et al., 2018; Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010). This burden is further exacerbated by the shift toward ubiquitous digital availability, which has dissolved the temporal boundaries between home and school, preventing necessary psychological recovery (Gregersen et al., 2023; Karanfil & Khatami, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Wahab et al., 2024).

While administrative tasks deplete cognitive resources, the act of language instruction itself demands high levels of emotional labour (Gkonou & Miller, 2017). Teachers often rely on high-energy methodologies and must manage learner anxiety and intercultural encounters, placing them on an "emotional rollercoaster" (Borg, 2006; Gkonou et al., 2020; Horwitz, 1996; King & Ng, 2018; Wieczorek, 2016). This performance of role-appropriate emotions functions as a significant drain on psychological resources (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

This cumulative strain is further compounded by structural role conflict. In university settings, Cao et al. (2020) found that Teaching-Research (TR) conflict—the struggle to balance instructional duties with research expectations—significantly predicts exhaustion. Crucially, job insecurity acts as a moderator that intensifies this exhaustion, creating a potent health impairment pathway independent of job satisfaction (Cao et al., 2020; Samadi et al., 2020). Furthermore, personal role conflicts, such as managing home-schooling or covering for absent colleagues on short notice, further contribute to chronic strain (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mercer, 2023).

### 2.2.2. Psychological Resources and Coping Strategies

Given the documented scarcity of structural support—such as limited materials or precarious contracts (Gironzetti & Muñoz-Basols, 2025; Walsh, 2019)—teacher sustainability relies heavily on the mobilization of *personal resources*. Within the JD-R framework, these internal psychological assets function as a critical buffer, allowing educators to maintain engagement despite external deficits (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Paramount among these is *self-efficacy*, the conviction in one's instructional ability, which serves as a major predictor of burnout mitigation (An & Tao, 2024; Khani & Mirzaee, 2015).

However, language teachers face unique threats to this efficacy, including native speaker discourses that position them in a deficit (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025) and perfectionist tendencies that exacerbate self-criticism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Wieczorek, 2016). To survive these high-intensity threats, teachers must develop *language teacher immunity*, a protective armoring system that helps maintain equilibrium and mediates the negative impact of job insecurity on reflective teaching (Rahimpour et al., 2020). This internal stability is the foundation of well-being, which is understood here not as a static trait,

but as a dynamic state encompassing both hedonic (satisfaction) and eudaimonic (meaning) dimensions that fluctuate throughout a career (Butler & Kern, 2016; Day & Gu, 2010; Mercer, 2021; Seligman, 2011; Shin et al., 2023; Sulis et al., 2023). The extent to which these fluctuations result in sustained well-being or burnout is largely determined by a teacher's coping strategies (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). While avoidance-oriented coping—such as denial or behavioral disengagement—consistently correlates with negative psychological outcomes (Boyce, 2013; MacIntyre et al., 2020), approach-oriented coping involves actively addressing stressors through strategic planning and resource management (Bonanno, 2004; Gregersen et al., 2021).

This distinction is particularly relevant when considering the integration of Generative AI. This technology presents a dual possibility for educator well-being. On one hand, it poses a threat to self-efficacy for teachers who fear comparing their output to 'flawless' AI texts or struggle to keep up with evolving tools, potentially triggering avoidant responses (Hart et al., 1998; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). However, this study proposes that when supported by Critical AI Literacy, AI utilization becomes a powerful form of approach-oriented coping. In this proactive mode, AI has the potential to alleviate the heavy administrative and assessment workloads highlighted earlier (Wang et al., 2024). By actively employing these tools to automate drudgery, teachers can better manage workload boundaries—a strategy observed in resilient mid-career educators (Sulis et al., 2023). Thus, the capacity to convert AI from a threat into a resource depends on the teacher's internal psychological capital, specifically self-efficacy and a sense of meaning (Hiver, 2018; Herzallah & Makaldy, 2025; Pentón Herrera et al., 2023).

### 2.3. Generative AI as a Conditional Job Resource

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory posits that *job resources* (JR) are essential for mitigating the negative impact of high *job demands* (JD) and fostering motivation and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Within this framework, the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)—particularly large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT—represents an unprecedented technological resource aimed squarely at alleviating the chronic workload and time pressure demands that characterize teacher strain (Hashem et al., 2024; Liu, 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Wu & Miller, 2025).

#### 2.3.1. Technological Affordances: Automation and Workload Relief

Generative AI, utilizing transformer architectures to generate human-like content, has experienced rapid uptake across educational sectors (Collie et al., 2024; Karataş & Yüce, 2024). These tools are viewed as having the potential to revolutionize practice by automating the tedious and time-consuming administrative and instructional tasks previously identified as primary job demands (Peikos & Stavrou, 2025; Taani et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

The specific affordances of GenAI target the drudgery of the profession. Firstly, GenAI enables the rapid development of teaching resources and lesson plans, which Australian teachers identify as a primary use case (Collie & Martin, 2025; Hashem et al., 2024). The ability to create quality content in a short timeframe serves as a direct counter to the time pressures of the field (Taani et al., 2025). Secondly, GenAI streamlines assessment procedures—a major source of burnout—by assisting in the creation of exam-style questions, automated essay scoring, and the provision of timely feedback (Lo, 2023; Mizumoto & Eguchi, 2023). Furthermore, teachers report using GenAI for knowledge management, summarizing complex policy documents or theses. This function directly addresses the cognitive exhaustion of the profession by

offloading the heavy information processing required for administrative compliance, such as summarizing complex policy documents or theses. This function directly addresses the cognitive exhaustion of the profession by offloading the heavy information processing required for administrative compliance (Torres-Casierra et al., 2025; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024).

### 2.3.2. *The Paradox: Conditional Resource and the Necessity of Literacy*

While these affordances offer significant workload relief, the integration of GenAI presents a critical paradox: it is a conditional Job Resource that simultaneously introduces new psychological demands (Wu & Miller, 2025). Research describes this integration as a *bittersweet journey* characterized by disruption, where the benefits of efficiency are often counterbalanced by the stress of adaptation (García-Peñalvo, 2023).

This psychological tension arises because AI introduces risks that threaten teacher self-efficacy and professional identity (Liu, 2025; Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). Educators face apprehension regarding the evolution of their responsibilities, fearing a loss of professional agency, *de-skilling*, or a descent into passive reliance on technology (Gentile et al., 2023; Wu & Miller, 2025). Beyond these internal fears, the tool imposes specific cognitive burdens. Teachers are tasked with the *policing* of academic integrity against student plagiarism, as well as the constant requirement to verify AI-generated information for inaccuracies—a process that can be as time-consuming as the task the AI was meant to automate (Karataş & Yüce, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the deciding factor in resolving this paradox is knowledge. The most common barrier to effective utilization is a lack of competence, which transforms the tool from a potential resource into a formidable demand (Collie & Martin, 2025). Consequently, the capacity of GenAI to enhance well-being is intrinsically conditional: it necessitates that educators possess Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). CAIL functions as a fundamental personal resource that empowers teachers to maintain pedagogical agency and active control over the technology (Liu, 2025; Wu & Miller, 2025). Without this literacy, the lack of competence leads to anxiety and a lower valuation of the tool (Collie et al., 2024). Therefore, Critical AI Literacy acts as the critical mediator—determining whether GenAI serves as a supportive mechanism that alleviates job demands or manifests as an additional, overwhelming burden (Karaduman, 2025; Tancelosky et al., 2025).

## 2.4. Critical AI Literacy of Language Teachers

To navigate this conditional landscape, the successful integration of GenAI hinges fundamentally on the teacher possessing sufficient AI literacy (Liu, 2025). This literacy is no longer optional; it is increasingly recognized as a foundational competency for all educators, essential not only for their own practice but for preparing students for a future where these skills are highly valued (Karaduman, 2025; Wang et al., 2024). However, a pervasive lack of essential AI knowledge, competencies, and practices currently acts as a significant barrier to successful integration (Karaduman, 2025; Ng et al., 2023). Consequently, bridging this gap represents a pressing professional development challenge (Ding et al., 2024; Sperling et al., 2024).

### 2.4.1. *Defining AI Literacy and its Dimensions*

AI literacy is a multifaceted construct that extends beyond mere technical proficiency; it encompasses the competence to understand, evaluate, and use AI ethically and critically (Collie et al., 2024;

Long & Magerko, 2020; Walter, 2024). To operationalize this for educators, the UNESCO AI Competency Framework for Teachers (AI CFT) provides a structured approach organized around five key dimensions: a human-centred mindset, ethics of AI, AI foundations and applications, AI pedagogy, and AI for professional development (Cukurova & Miao, 2024). Other comprehensive frameworks identify four core components essential for language teachers: technical understanding, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and practical application (Pérez-Paredes et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025).

At the foundational level, teachers must possess a robust technical understanding. This involves recognizing what GenAI tools are, how they operate, and their specific limits (Karaduman, 2025; Long & Magerko, 2020). A requisite competency in this era is prompt engineering—the ability to formulate effective inputs to guide algorithmic output—which is now viewed as a necessary twenty-first-century skill for effective human-AI interaction (Federiakin et al., 2024; Walter, 2024). However, technical skill alone is insufficient without AI Pedagogy. This dimension involves strategically integrating AI into curriculum design and selecting appropriate tools for specific learning outcomes (Ding et al., 2024; Karaduman, 2025; Michos & Hernández-Leo, 2020). Yet, research utilizing the TPACK model indicates a critical gap: while teachers often possess technological knowledge (TK), they face significant challenges in integrating this fluency into the pedagogical domain (Torres-Casierra et al., 2025).

Finally, true Critical AI Literacy must extend beyond classroom mechanics to encompass *ethical and critical awareness*. This requires educators to move beyond simple academic integrity concerns and address broader sociopolitical implications (Ding et al., 2024; Holmes et al., 2022; Karaduman, 2025). Teachers must be equipped to critique algorithmic bias (Archambault et al., 2024; Buolamwini, 2024), navigate data privacy concerns (Karataş & Yüce, 2024), and evaluate the environmental costs of Large Language Models (Ligozat et al., 2022). Furthermore, a critical stance requires examining whose perspectives are prioritized—and whose are marginalized—within GenAI models (Crawford, 2021; Tancelosky et al., 2025).

#### 2.4.2. *The Crucial Role of Critical AI Literacy (CAIL)*

The necessity of Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) arises directly from the inherent limitations of the technology itself. Given that GenAI models are trained on vast datasets that often replicate or amplify systemic biases, simple technical proficiency is insufficient; educators require a deep capacity for critical evaluation (Karaduman, 2025; Yang & Appleget, 2024). For language teachers, this literacy is particularly vital because linguistic competence is inextricably intertwined with critical thinking (Pérez-Paredes et al., 2025; Tancelosky et al., 2025). CAIL empowers teachers to leverage their subject-matter expertise to correct inherent flaws in AI output, such as hallucinations or grammatical inaccuracies (Karataş & Yüce, 2024; Liu, 2025). Moreover, by applying principles of multiliteracies, educators can move beyond passive consumption to actively question how AI-generated language conveys power, identity, and cultural assumptions (Cazden et al., 1996; Luke, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Beyond technical correction, CAIL serves a protective function for professional identity. Teachers frequently grapple with anxiety regarding *de-skilling* or the fear of replacement (Wu & Miller, 2025). This tension is acute for Non-Native English Teachers (NNETs), for whom AI-generated "native-like" text offers a double-edged sword: it can enhance perceived linguistic legitimacy while simultaneously inducing anxiety about professional redundancy (You & Zhang, 2025). In this context, CAIL ensures that educators retain pedagogical autonomy and design agency, allowing them to use the tool as a scaffold rather than a crutch (Liu, 2025; Wu & Miller, 2025).

In the final analysis, AI literacy functions as the critical personal resource that mediates the impact of GenAI on well-being. The literature establishes a clear divergence: low literacy is consistently linked to higher technology anxiety and lower self-efficacy, effectively transforming AI into a Job Demand (Hsu et al., 2023; Hur, 2025; Schiavo et al., 2024). Conversely, robust training is associated with increased self-efficacy and ethical integration (Ding et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2024). Therefore, institutional support is vital to move teachers from a state of passive anxiety toward active, critical engagement (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024).

## 2.5. Summary of the Literature Review and Research Gap

The preceding review establishes that the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession faces a systemic crisis of well-being, characterized by high rates of exhaustion and attrition (Agyapong et al., 2022; MacIntyre et al., 2020). Using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, this crisis is understood as a structural imbalance where chronic demands—such as excessive administrative burdens—dominate the health impairment pathway (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Into this precarious landscape, Generative AI (GenAI) enters as a disruption. While it offers the promise of an unprecedented Job Resource by automating monotonous tasks (Hashem et al., 2024; Liu, 2025), this review highlights that its benefits are not automatic. Instead, GenAI presents a paradox: it is a *conditional* resource that, without the proper psychological scaffolding, can introduce new demands such as anxiety over de-skilling and the burden of verification (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025; Wu & Miller, 2025).

This study argues that the critical variable resolving this paradox is Critical AI Literacy (CAIL). We posit that CAIL acts as the mediator that empowers teachers to maintain pedagogical control and engage in Approach Coping, rather than succumbing to avoidant behaviors (Fan & Wang, 2022; Hur, 2025).

While recent scholarship has begun to map these factors, existing studies are largely quantitative or theoretical (An & Tao, 2024; Sakid & Gurbuz, 2023). There is a marked scarcity of empirical research that explores the lived experience of this negotiation. Consequently, there is a critical need for qualitative inquiry to supply a thick description of how ELT professionals navigate the complex interaction between GenAI integration, literacy, and professional well-being (Mercer, 2023; Tacelosky et al., 2025). This study aims to bridge that gap.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals as they navigate the integration of Generative AI (GenAI) into their pedagogical and administrative workflows (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach was deemed essential to capture the complex, context-dependent nature of teacher well-being and to provide a thick description of how emerging technologies interact with professional identity (Mercer, 2021).

The inquiry was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging that the impact of AI is not an objective constant but is socially constructed through the teacher's individual agency, literacy levels, and institutional context (Creswell, 2013). While the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is traditionally examined through quantitative metrics, this study applies a qualitative lens to the framework. This design facilitates a deep examination of the mechanisms that make AI a conditional resource, revealing the specific

psychological processes that determine whether the technology functions as a demand or a resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

### 3.2. Context and Participants

To capture the heterogeneity of the ELT landscape and ensure the transferability of findings across diverse professional ecologies, this study employed a purposive sampling technique, specifically maximum variation sampling (Memon et al., 2025). This strategy was selected to deliberately maximize the diversity of the sample, allowing the researchers to identify central themes and shared patterns that cut across significant variations in institutional contexts and job demands (Memon et al., 2025). By selecting participants from distinct sectors with varying characteristics, the study addresses the call for research that moves beyond monolithic views of the teaching profession and ensures the robustness of the findings across varied conditions (Memon et al., 2025; Mercer, 2023).

The sample consisted of 16 in-service ELT professionals currently working in Turkey, with data collection occurring during the 2024–2025 academic year. The maximum variation strategy stratified the sample across four distinct professional contexts ( per group), encompassing *Private Universities* characterized by high administrative volumes and performance pressure; *State Universities* characterized by bureaucratic density and varying levels of resource support; *the Ministry of National Education (MEB/K-12)* characterized by centralized curricula and specific assessment protocols; and the *Freelance/Private Tutoring market*, which is defined by market-driven demands, precarity, and the need for high customization. The participants ranged from early-career instructors with four years of experience to veterans with over 35 years of practice. This variation ensured a broad spectrum of AI adoption profiles, ranging from high-agency innovators to reluctant skeptics, facilitating a contrastive analysis of Critical AI Literacy (CAIL).

### 3.3. Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted via online video conferencing platforms. The interview protocol was grounded in the theoretical constructs of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Critical AI Literacy. The semi-structured format allowed for the flexibility to probe unexpected themes while ensuring all participants addressed the core research questions (Creswell, 2013). The protocol consisted of three core sections designed to elicit a holistic view of the teacher's experience. The first section, Job Demands Analysis, focused on retrospective questions regarding workload intensity, administrative drudgery, and time pressure prior to AI integration. The second section, Job Resources & Well-being, explored current AI usage habits and specific tools employed, probing the resulting impact on emotional energy and recovery. The final section on Agency and Literacy investigated verification strategies, prompting competence, and perceived professional autonomy.

Interviews lasted between 11 and 48 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, resulting in a total corpus of approximately 65,000 words. To ensure interpretive validity, the analysis was primarily conducted on the original Turkish transcripts. Selected excerpts were subsequently translated into English for reporting, with particular attention paid to preserving the semantic weight of metaphoric language (e.g., "like a bird," "drudgery").

### 3.4. Data Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry, this study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Creswell, 2013). Credibility was established through the

pursuit of thick description, ensuring that the findings captured the nuance and complexity of the teachers' lived experiences rather than reducing them to simplistic metrics (Mercer, 2021). Furthermore, to mitigate the risk of meaning loss during translation, interpretive validity was prioritized by conducting the primary thematic analysis on the original Turkish transcripts, with translation occurring only for the final reporting of excerpts.

Transferability was secured through the maximum variation sampling strategy (Memon et al., 2025). By deliberately selecting participants from divergent professional ecologies—ranging from precarious freelance markets to centralized state bureaucracies—the study ensures that the identified themes (such as the Efficiency Paradox) are not artifacts of a single institutional context but represent shared phenomenological patterns across the ELT profession.

Finally, dependability and confirmability were addressed through the rigorous application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This involved a recursive "two-level process" of validation, where candidate themes were first checked against individual coded extracts for internal coherence and subsequently mapped against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the spectrum of "Architect" and "Imposter" profiles.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA), following the rigorous six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected for its theoretical flexibility, allowing for an inductive analysis of the lived experience while remaining sensitive to the deductive constructs of the JD-R theory, specifically Job Demands, Resources, and Personal Resources. The analysis began with the familiarization phase, where the researcher immersed themselves in the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts and noting initial ideas regarding workload shifts and emotional affect. In the second phase, the entire dataset was coded systematically using an inductive approach to generate codes such as "Verification Burden" or "Operational Liberation," which were then mapped onto the JD-R framework.

Subsequently, codes were collated into potential themes during the third phase, clustering related concepts like "time saving" and "ROI" under broader categories such as The Efficiency Paradox. The fourth phase involved reviewing these candidate themes through a two-level process, checking them against coded extracts for internal coherence and validating the thematic map against the entire dataset to ensure it accurately reflected divergent experiences across the different professional contexts. In the fifth phase, themes were finalized and defined to capture the essence of the data, yielding three overarching themes: *The Redistribution of Cognitive Labor*, *The Spectrum of Professional Affect*, and *Critical AI Literacy as the Mediator of Agency*. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a cohesive analytic narrative, weaving together data extracts with the JD-R theoretical framework to answer the research questions.

## 4. Results

Three main themes regarding the impact of Generative AI (GenAI) on ELT professionals emerged from the analysis, implying a complex process of adaptation within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework. These are: the redistribution of cognitive labor, the spectrum of professional affect, and Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) as the mediator of agency. Crucially, the intersection of these themes revealed that participants tended to cluster into two distinct psychological profiles—the "Architect" and the "Imposter"—which are defined by their contrasting emotional and behavioral responses to AI integration.

#### **4.1. The Redistribution of Cognitive Labor: Operational Liberation and Verification Burden**

The findings show that the integration of GenAI did not simply reduce the quantity of work but qualitatively shifted the nature of job demands from creation to verification. For a significant subset of teachers, this shift manifested as operational liberation, where GenAI automated high-volume, low-complexity tasks that previously acted as chronic stressors. Simon, a veteran instructor at a state university, reported that the elimination of manual material searching allowed him to complete tasks in an hour that previously took three days. He described this contrast vividly, noting, "The thing I used to do in 3 days, I do in an hour now... We must have been suffering." This sentiment was echoed by Iris, working under the Ministry of National Education (MEB), who noted that GenAI reduced the "overwhelming" burden of exam creation from nearly a week to mere minutes, significantly alleviating bureaucratic strain. Similarly, Mark, a freelance tutor, highlighted how AI enabled him to handle customized student needs instantly—a process that previously required hours of research—thereby reducing the cognitive load of lesson planning.

However, for other teachers, this reduction in manual labor was offset by a new job demand: the Verification Burden. This burden required teachers to meticulously audit AI outputs for accuracy and bias, effectively replacing the physical labor of grading with the cognitive load of auditing. Frank, a department head at a private university, provided a paradigmatic example of this efficiency negation. He described a specific incident where he attempted to use an AI tool to grade student papers, only to find that the system generated "three different scores" when assessing the same text three times. This reliability failure forced him to "stop trusting AI" and revert to manual assessment. Consequently, Frank concluded that utilizing GenAI was "perhaps more time taking" than traditional methods, as the necessity to "double check" every output to prevent the "virus" of error consumed more cognitive energy than the task itself. This illustrates the conditional nature of the resource: without 100% reliability, the tool functions not as an assistant, but as a subordinate requiring constant supervision. Zara formalized this new demand into a workflow she termed the "Sandwich Technique" (Prompt Check Refine), illustrating that responsible use requires active, continuous labor rather than passive acceptance.

Furthermore, the efficiency paradox was evident where time saved was not used for recovery but for work intensification. Fiona, an early-career instructor, explicitly noted that she does not use the time AI saves to "have some fun," but instead reinvests it into other professional tasks such as her PhD research or administrative duties. Oscar, a freelance tutor, viewed time savings through an economic lens, explaining that rather than resting, he viewed the time saved as a Return on Investment (ROI), allowing him to "squeeze another class in." Consequently, for these teachers, the technological resource did not lead to rest, but to an increase in production quotas.

#### **4.2. The Spectrum of Professional Affect: Rejuvenation and Guilt**

The emotional impact of this labor redistribution varied significantly across the participants, revealing a spectrum of professional affect that lays the psychological groundwork for the Architect and Imposter profiles. The findings indicate that for some, the removal of administrative drudgery acted as a powerful job resource, activating the motivational pathway associated with the Architect mindset.

On this positive end of the spectrum, Simon described a profound sense of professional renewal, noting, "I am like a bird. I have no anxiety... I would have retired... now things relaxed". Similarly, Alice reported a boost in self-confidence and reduced anxiety, as the tool ensured she was always prepared for her administrative duties as an Erasmus coordinator. For Nora, a freelance teacher facing professional

isolation, AI provided social substitution, acting as a "savior" and a "friend" that was more patient than human colleagues, thus buffering the emotional demands of solitary work.

In sharp contrast, other teachers experienced the ease of AI as a threat to their professional identity, triggering the feelings of guilt and fraudulence central to the Imposter profile. Natalie reported feeling that AI made teachers "a tad lazy," associating professional virtue with the "toil" of manual creation. She expressed a sense of guilt for "landing on something ready-made" without having struggled for it. This sentiment was echoed by Nina, who confessed to feeling "dumb" and "guilty" due to a perceived over-reliance on the tool, fearing a loss of competence. For Henry, a freelance tutor, this negative effect manifested as technological fatalism, where the efficiency of AI was viewed not as a relief but as a precursor to the obsolescence of the teaching profession. He argued that delegating tasks to AI meant that "half of your identity is kind of cut down," leading to deep professional anxiety rather than relief.

### 4.3. Critical AI Literacy as the Mediator of Agency: The Architect vs. The Imposter

Despite experiencing similar technological affordances, the divergence between these two profiles was fundamentally determined by the teacher's level of Critical AI Literacy (CAIL). The analysis identified that CAIL functioned as the decisive personal resource that bifurcated participants into the "Architect" or "Imposter" categories based on their capacity for agency.

The Architect profile (exemplified by Simon, Alice, and Adam) is defined by high CAIL and a view of AI as a subordinate tool. These teachers exercise pedagogical sovereignty, using verification protocols to maintain their status as the expert human-in-the-loop. Conversely, the *Imposter* profile (exemplified by Nina, Natalie, and Henry) is defined not merely by lower technical skill, but by a specific emotional response of guilt and fraudulence. For these teachers, the efficiency of AI was internalized as "cheating" or "laziness," leading to a fear of de-skilling and a loss of professional legitimacy.

Teachers fitting the Architect profile utilized their literacy to instrumentalize the tool, strictly maintaining a command hierarchy. For example, Adam asserted, "I am the boss... I control it," viewing AI strictly as a calculator to be directed rather than a replacement. Alice demonstrated this technical agency by creating specific "Gems" (personas) for different administrative roles, ensuring the AI functioned as a subordinate colleague under her command. Crucially, this sovereignty extended to the domestication of the technology for local contexts. Simon actively filtered out hallucinations and adapted Western-centric AI outputs to fit the cultural reality of Turkish students, noting that he must "*adapt it to his own context.*" Similarly, Alex utilized his "gut feeling" derived from 20 years of experience to intuitively filter AI outputs. Furthermore, Paula engaged in *ethical guard railing*, strictly limiting AI use to ideation while refusing to use it for interpersonal communication to preserve authenticity. These behaviors demonstrate that for the Architect, professional experience acts as a vital filter for maintaining control over technological integration.

In contrast, the Imposter experience emerged when teachers lacked this critical literacy or technical self-efficacy, leading to passive dependency. Nina's admission that she "can't do anything without AI" illustrates how low self-efficacy can transform a job resource into a source of anxiety. Without the protective buffer of CAIL, these teachers were unable to view the tool as a subordinate aid, resulting in a sense of reduced professional competence.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that CAIL is not merely a technical skill, but a protective factor that allows teachers to harness AI without surrendering their professional identity.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Generative AI as a Conditional Job Resource

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of ELT professionals integrating Generative AI (GenAI) into their workflows. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, the findings reveal that GenAI functions not as a static benefit, but as a conditional Job Resource. While the quantitative literature has posited GenAI as a promising tool for workload relief, this qualitative inquiry suggests its capacity to enhance well-being is heavily mediated by the teacher's professional context and Critical AI Literacy. The data indicates that GenAI can either sever the health impairment pathway by automating administrative drudgery or, conversely, accelerate *the hedonic treadmill* of work through the "Efficiency Paradox". Consequently, the impact of GenAI is determined by whether the time saved is invested in psychological recovery or reinvested into intensified productivity.

### 5.2. The Efficiency Paradox: Operational Liberation vs. The Treadmill Effect

The first research question investigated how ELT teachers perceive changes in workload and efficiency. The analysis yielded a dichotomy between "Operational Liberation" and the "Efficiency Paradox," confirming that the reduction of manual labor does not automatically equate to a reduction in total psychological strain.

#### 5.2.1. Bureaucracy Shielding and the Reduction of Drudgery

Consistent with previous research identifying administrative overload as a primary driver of teacher burnout, this study found that GenAI successfully acted as a bureaucracy shield for specific participants. Teachers like Simon and Iris reported that GenAI effectively automated high-volume, monotonous tasks such as material searching and exam creation, reducing tasks that once took days to mere hours. This supports the argument by MacIntyre et al. (2020) and Billett et al. (2023) that non-instructional activities consume critical energy necessary for psychological health. More specifically, by targeting the reduction of working hours, GenAI alleviates time pressure, which Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) identified as the single strongest negative predictor of teacher well-being—exerting a far greater impact on exhaustion than discipline problems or student motivation. By minimizing these specific Job Demands, GenAI appears to block the health impairment pathway described in the JD-R model, allowing teachers to reclaim time and reduce the drudgery associated with systemic fatigue. In these instances, the findings align with techno-optimist perspectives (e.g., Hashem et al., 2024; Liu, 2025) which view LLMs as allies in workload relief and burnout prevention by streamlining non-teaching tasks.

#### 5.2.2. The Treadmill Effect and Work Intensification

However, contrasting with the view that efficiency inherently leads to well-being, the findings reveal a *treadmill effect* where efficiency gains resulted in work intensification. This phenomenon, observed in participants like Fiona, validates the "bittersweet journey" described by Wu and Miller (2025), where the introduction of a digital tool creates new psychological demands rather than simple relief. While Wu and Miller (2025) categorized this response as "Sweat"—characterized by anxiety and a fear of "teaching workload increase"—our study extends this by identifying that even for capable users, the time saved is often immediately reinvested into other professional duties (e.g., PhD research, administrative tasks) rather than recovery.

This reinvestment is further compounded by structural role conflict. In university settings, Cao et al. (2020) found that Teaching-Research (TR) conflict—the struggle to balance instructional duties with research expectations—significantly predicts exhaustion. Crucially, job insecurity acts as a moderator that intensifies this exhaustion, creating a potent health impairment pathway independent of job satisfaction (Cao et al., 2020; Samadi et al., 2020). For participants like Fiona, the time saved by AI was not used for rest but was immediately absorbed by these competing research demands (e.g., PhD work), effectively keeping her on the hedonic treadmill of productivity.

Theoretical interpretation through the JD-R lens suggests that for these teachers, GenAI did not increase Job Resources (recovery time) but rather increased the capacity to handle higher Job Demands. This reflects the "acceleration of working speed" noted in broader educational literature (Hargreaves, 1992), where systemic changes lead to a continuous expansion of work assignments rather than relief. Consequently, the time saved became a vacuum instantly filled by the pressure to produce more. This validates the paradox identified by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018), who found that high work engagement is positively associated with increased time pressure, as motivated teachers utilize available resources to invest more effort into instruction rather than less. Thus, without intentional boundary management, AI efficiency can inadvertently contribute to the health impairment pathway by sustaining high levels of time pressure, which Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) identified as the single strongest negative predictor of teacher well-being. Furthermore, the findings indicate a qualitative shift in workload from creation to verification, as participants like Frank and Zara reported a new *verification burden* requiring meticulous auditing of AI outputs. This aligns with the assertion that AI literacy requires not just usage but the capacity to monitor and critically reflect on applications, adding a new layer of cognitive load.

### 5.2.3. Contextual Nuance: The ROI Mindset in the Gig Economy

A critical contribution of this study is the explication of the efficiency paradox within the under-researched freelance sector, addressing the gap identified by Mercer (2023) regarding private sector precarity. For freelance tutors like Oscar, the efficiency of GenAI was viewed strictly through an economic lens—a "Return on Investment" (ROI) that allowed him to "squeeze another class in." Unlike state sector teachers who might seek relief from bureaucracy, freelance teachers utilized AI to maximize billable hours. This finding highlights a distinct mechanism: in precarious employment contexts, GenAI acts as a tool for economic survival rather than psychological well-being. The precarity of the market serves as a contextual moderator in the JD-R model, transforming the resource of time into a pressure to generate income, thereby validating the link between job insecurity and the inability to derive motivational benefits from personal resources (Cao et al., 2020).

### 5.3. Well-being & Identity: The Architect vs. The Imposter

The second research question sought to determine the impact of AI-driven efficiency on professional well-being. The findings reveal a stark psychological divide: while some teachers experienced a surge in confidence and relief, others grappled with guilt and identity crises. This dichotomy can be theoretically explained through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, specifically by examining how *personal resources*, such as Technological Self-Efficacy and Critical AI Literacy, moderate the impact of technological change (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Herzallah & Makaldy, 2025).

### 5.3.1. *The Architect: Technological Self-Efficacy as a Buffer*

For participants in the *high competence* group, such as Simon and Alice, GenAI functioned as a powerful Job Resource that activated the JD-R's motivational pathway. These teachers adopted the role of the "Architect," viewing AI not as a replacement but as a subordinate tool used to execute their pedagogical vision. This finding aligns with Herzallah and Makaldy (2025), whose quantitative analysis confirmed that Technological Self-Efficacy (TSE) fully mediates the relationship between a teacher's attitude toward AI and their intention to adopt it. Teachers with high TSE, like Alex, who utilized intuitive filtering based on 20 years of experience, perceive the technology as manageable and useful, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing professional engagement.

Furthermore, these "Architects" utilized AI to reclaim time for professional development and authentic recovery, supporting Liu's (2025) assertion that GenAI can empower teachers by allowing them to concentrate on creative and interactive pedagogy rather than administrative drudgery. By positioning themselves as the "master" of the tool—as articulated by Adam—these educators maintained a strong sense of professional identity, validating the finding by Gao et al. (2025) that previous experience and specific personality traits (such as openness) significantly shape positive attitudes and perceived usefulness of GenAI.

### 5.3.2. *Literature Contrast: The Bittersweet Journey and Imposter Syndrome*

Conversely, for participants with lower self-efficacy or those operating under the efficiency paradox, the integration of GenAI triggered a "Health Impairment" response characterized by professional guilt and anxiety. Nina, who admitted feeling "dumb" and "guilty," and Natalie, who feared becoming "lazy," exemplify the Imposter profile. For these teachers, the removal of the "toil" of manual creation was perceived not as efficiency, but as a loss of professional legitimacy. This echoes the "Sweat" profile described by Wu and Miller (2025), where uncertainty about how to integrate AI leads to anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed rather than supported.

Theoretically, this "Imposter" phenomenon arises when the reduction of quantitative Job Demands (workload) is interpreted as a reduction in professional competence. Karataş and Yüce (2024) highlight that while AI enhances accessibility, it simultaneously raises ethical concerns regarding academic integrity and the accuracy of information, which can exacerbate teacher stress if they feel unable to verify AI outputs. Furthermore, Natalie's fear that AI "blunts" or "dulls" professional skills aligns with Torres-Casierra et al. (2025), who noted that while teachers may possess technological knowledge, they often struggle to integrate it pedagogically, leading to a disconnect between tool usage and professional identity. Without the "gut feeling" provided by extensive experience (a Personal Resource), these teachers view AI as a threat to their identity rather than an asset.

### 5.3.3. *The Mediating Role of Critical Appraisal*

The distinction between the "Architect" and the "Imposter" is ultimately mediated by the capacity for critical appraisal. Laru et al. (2025) found that critical appraisal and technical understanding are positively associated with the practical application of AI, suggesting that teachers who can critically evaluate AI outputs feel more empowered to use them effectively.

However, the findings reveal a complex nuance. Frank, despite having high competence, rejected AI efficiency due to the high cognitive load of verification. This illustrates that critical literacy can sometimes function as a Job Demand rather than a resource if the tool is perceived as unreliable. This

reinforces Pérez-Paredes et al. (2025)'s argument that Critical AI Literacy must include technical understanding and ethical awareness to allow learners and teachers to navigate the black box nature of GenAI without succumbing to over-reliance or existential dread.

Thus, well-being in the AI era is contingent upon the teacher's ability to shift from a passive consumer of content to an active, critical evaluator, transforming the technology from a threat into a manageable professional resource.

#### 5.4. Critical AI Literacy: From Creator to Curator

The third research question investigated how Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) influences the ability to maintain autonomy. The results indicate a fundamental shift in the teacher's role from the *creator* of content to the *curator* and *verifier* of algorithmic outputs. In the JD-R framework, CAIL functions as a vital Personal Resource that enables teachers to manage the new cognitive Job Demand of "algorithmic auditing" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Wu & Miller, 2025). Without this literacy, the displacement of creative labor is experienced as a loss of professional identity (de-skilling); with it, the displacement is reframed as strategic delegation (pedagogical sovereignty).

##### 5.4.1. Active Engagement with Generative AI

The qualitative data reveals that high-agency teachers do not passively accept AI outputs; instead, they employ sophisticated verification protocols to maintain the "Human-in-the-Loop" (Tacelosky et al., 2025). Zara formalized this process as the "Sandwich Technique" (Prompt → AI Output → Human Check/Refine), illustrating that effective AI integration requires active, continuous labor rather than passive consumption. This finding aligns with Liu (2025), who argues that human oversight is essential to mitigate AI's propensity for hallucinations and to ensure pedagogical integrity. Similarly, Alex described using intuitive filtering—a verification strategy based on twenty years of "gut feeling" and pedagogical experience—to rapidly assess the utility of AI-generated materials. This confirms Torres-Casierra et al.'s (2025) assertion that while technological knowledge is high, the critical integration of AI requires deep pedagogical content knowledge to evaluate the tool's output against student needs.

However, this curation role introduces a new cognitive load. Frank (P4) noted that utilizing AI was "perhaps more time taking" because of the necessity to "double check" every output to avoid errors. This reflects the "Efficiency Paradox" where the reduction of manual labor (Job Demand) is offset by the intensive cognitive demand of verification, a trade-off that only teachers with high CAIL are equipped to navigate without experiencing anxiety (Karataş & Yüce, 2024; Wu & Miller, 2025). reported by participants like Frank and Zara, challenges the narrative that AI simply automates tasks. Instead, it replaces the cognitive load of *generation* with the cognitive load of *evaluation*. This aligns with the literature defining AI literacy not just as technical skill, but as the capacity for "critical evaluation" of bias and accuracy. The study confirms that without this critical layer—exemplified by Zara's "Sandwich Technique" (Prompt-Check-Refine)—teachers risk distributing hallucinated or culturally inappropriate content.

##### 5.4.2. Contextual Domestication and Cultural Guardrails

A critical dimension of the Architect role involves what Simon described as "adapting to the context"—actively modifying AI outputs to strip them of Western-centric biases and align them with local cultural realities (e.g., removing inappropriate references for Turkish students). This protective labor is essential because, as Tacelosky et al. (2025) and Filiz et al. (2025) argue, GenAI tools are predominantly

trained on English-language data and Western educational frameworks, often resulting in content that lacks cultural adaptability or nuance. Without teacher intervention, Tagare et al. (2025) warn that these tools risk promoting a "standard language ideology" that endangers the values, cultures, and ideologies of the Global South.

This bias extends beyond text to multimodal outputs; Dilek et al. (2025) found that AI image generators frequently rely on "stereotypical indicators" and lack cultural specificity, necessitating critical human oversight to ensure accurate and non-offensive representation. Zara further exemplified this curation by "humanizing" content to remove algorithmic biases against local religious or cultural norms. This demonstrates that Ethical Awareness—a core component of CAIL identified by Pérez-Paredes et al. (2025)—is not merely a theoretical concept but a practical, daily workflow for teachers in non-Anglophone contexts. By acting as ethical gatekeepers, these teachers transform the AI from a potential source of cultural imperialism into a localized pedagogical resource.

#### 5.4.3. *The Psychological Cost of Curation: De-skilling vs. Up-skilling*

The transition from creator to curator precipitates a crisis of professional identity for some. Natalie expressed fear that the removal of the "toil" of creation leads to "blunting" or cognitive atrophy, framing the efficiency of AI as "laziness." This echoes Wu and Miller (2025), who note that teachers often associate their professional worth with the effortful creation of materials. Conversely, high-CAIL teachers like Alice and Oscar viewed this shift as an opportunity for "up-skilling," using the saved cognitive energy to focus on higher-order tasks such as student interaction or strategic planning. This dichotomy suggests that CAIL functions as a protective factor: it allows teachers to perceive the "curator" role as an evolution of their professional identity (up-skilling) rather than an erosion of it (de-skilling), thereby preventing the "health impairment" pathway associated with threats to self-efficacy (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

Briefly This study interrogated the lived experiences of ELT professionals to determine whether Generative AI (GenAI) functions as a remedy for the profession's endemic occupational strain or as an accelerant of it. The findings confirm that while GenAI possesses the technological affordance to alleviate high-volume quantitative demands—such as lesson planning and material generation (Hashem et al., 2024)—its integration often precipitates a "dual nature" experience of holistic empowerment coupled with ethical anxiety (Karataş & Yüce, 2024).

Rather than a simple reduction in labor, GenAI instigates a qualitative shift in the nature of work: from the drudgery of creation to the cognitive load of verification and "human-in-the-loop" oversight (Tacelosky et al., 2025; Tagare et al., 2025). Without intentional regulation, this shift risks activating a "Treadmill Effect," where efficiency gains are immediately consumed by work intensification rather than psychological recovery (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Theoretically, this research advances Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory by situating GenAI not merely as a static tool, but as a catalyst for Job Crafting (Tims et al., 2013). The study demonstrates that teachers with high Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) proactively modify their job demands (e.g., automating administrative tasks) and increase their structural resources (e.g., using AI for ideation), thereby triggering a positive "gain spiral" of engagement and self-efficacy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Salanova et al., 2010).

Conversely, for teachers lacking this literacy, GenAI functions as a threatening demand that depletes energetic resources, fueling a "loss spiral" characterized by anxiety, guilt, and a fear of professional obsolescence (Wu & Miller, 2025). Furthermore, this study supports the expanded JD-R propositions, illustrating how resources in one domain (technological efficiency) can inadvertently exacerbate demands in another (professional identity and ethical load) if the individual lacks the regulatory strategies to manage the boundary between human and machine labor (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025).

To harness GenAI as a sustainable resource, educational stakeholders must move beyond techno-centric implementation to focus on "Ethics-Driven AI Literacy" (Tagare et al., 2025). Administrators should foster a supportive climate where teachers are encouraged to experiment with AI without fear of replacing their pedagogical role. Schools must implement "Critical Co-Discovery" frameworks (Dilek et al., 2025), treating AI adoption not as a mandate but as a collaborative inquiry into how these tools align with local cultural and pedagogical values. The preservation of well-being requires a shift in professional identity from creator to evaluator. Teachers must develop "Socio-political Awareness" and "Human-in-the-Loop" competencies (Tagare et al., 2025) to act as ethical gatekeepers who domesticate AI outputs for their specific cultural contexts (Filiz et al., 2025). By viewing AI through the lens of Job Crafting—as a tool to be actively shaped rather than passively consumed—educators can reclaim agency and prevent the erosion of professional satisfaction (Tims et al., 2013).

While this study provides a rich "thick description" of teacher experiences, it is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to common method bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs (e.g., diary studies or Experience Sampling Methods) to track the dynamic fluctuations of teacher well-being and the stability of the "Architect" versus "Imposter" profiles over time (Mercer, 2021; Sulis et al., 2023). Additionally, given the findings regarding the social substitution effect among freelance tutors (e.g., using AI to replace colleagues), further inquiry is needed into the long-term impacts of human-AI collaboration on social relatedness and isolation in the gig economy. Finally, future scholarship must rigorously examine the cultural adaptability of these tools, specifically investigating how English-dominant Large Language Models impact the professional identity and workload of non-native English speaking teachers in the Global South (Filiz et al., 2025; Tagare et al., 2025).

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