



Journal of Education and Learning Research

Journal homepage: <https://jelr.greadc.org/index.php/jelr>

Foreign Language Teachers in the AI Era: Identity Reconstruction and Development Pathways

Yang Xu*

Foreign Language Teaching, School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, 730000, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27 March 2026

Accepted: 30 April 2026

Published online: 10 May 2026

Keywords:

Artificial Intelligence,
Career Development,
Foreign Language Teachers,
Identity,
Pathway

* Corresponding author.

E-mail: xuyang000123@163.com

Article Doi

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.62208/jelr.3.3.p.89-99>

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the internship experiences of Non-Formal Education students and the meaning they construct from those experiences through the use of photo elicitation methods. The research questions focus on revealing the internship experiences of undergraduate students in the Non-Formal Education Program at Manado State University and how they interpret those experiences. The study employed a qualitative research method with a theoretical perspective grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and the epistemological foundation of constructionism. The research was conducted at a public university in central Indonesia. A total of 17 participants (6 males and 11 females) were involved in this study, selected through saturation sampling. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews. The findings of this study reveal three main themes or units of meaning regarding the internship experiences of undergraduate students in the Non-Formal Education Program at Manado State University: students' internship experiences, the meanings students attribute to their internships, and the continuity of competencies gained from internship experiences. These three themes are interrelated and diverse. First, the theme of students' internship experiences includes seven subthemes. Second, the theme of the meaning of internship from the students' perspective consists of nine subthemes. Third, the theme of the tendency for competency continuity includes five subthemes.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology is reshaping the global educational landscape. Foreign language education, as a core field of language and cultural dissemination, stands at the forefront of these profound changes. Breakthroughs in generative AI models such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek in text generation and real-time translation are shifting foreign language teaching from a teacher-led model

toward a human-machine collaborative paradigm. These transformations pose significant challenges to all educators, particularly foreign language teachers (FLTs), as language disciplines appear more susceptible to AI-driven disruption than many other academic fields (Xu & Gu, 2025). Traditional language teaching emphasizes face-to-face interaction and incremental skills development. Yet AI technologies, with their vast knowledge reserves, instantaneous feedback capabilities, interactivity, and

simulated emotional support, can already assume certain instructional functions traditionally reserved for FLT, thereby challenging conventional role definitions and threatening established professional identities.

The debate over whether FLT will ultimately be replaced by AI continues to intensify (Klimova et al., 2024; Sawangwan, 2024; Tutton & Cohen, 2025; Wen, 2024). Early scholarship on AI in education, dating back to the 1970s, appeared predominantly in computer science venues rather than education-focused publications (e.g., Brown et al., 1975). The release of ChatGPT in November 2022, however, marked a watershed moment, prompting a surge of research examining AI's impact across multiple educational dimensions. Current research on AI's educational impact spans multiple dimensions. Many scholars have explored the macro-level opportunities and risks of AI in higher education (Fuchs, 2023; Rahman & Watanobe, 2023), its transformative effects on research practices (Álvarez-Álvarez & Falcon, 2023; Pack & Maloney, 2023), and its implications for teaching and learning processes (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022; Klimova et al., 2024).

Due to AI's unique technical attributes, foreign language education may be more significantly impacted than other disciplines, attracting considerable attention. For instance, Kern (2024) explored generative AI's profound impact on language education and proposed pathways to address new challenges. Hu and Gao (2024) analyzed issues in foreign language disciplines under large language models, including professional talent demands, shifts in teachers' roles, and program design. Besides, a growing body of research has investigated AI applications in specific educational contexts, including curriculum design (Kong, 2024; Hou, 2019), human-machine collaborative learning scenarios (Qin, 2023; Jiao & Chen, 2023), and the comparative effectiveness of AI versus human teachers (Sawangwan, 2024). A growing body of work also addresses teacher-related variables, including emotional responses to AI integration (Shen & Guo, 2024) and the relationship between AI acceptance and learner well-being (Huang et al., 2024).

Despite this expanding literature, the professional development of FLT in the AI era has received insufficient systematic attention. While many studies acknowledge that FLT must redefine their roles (Hiniz, 2024; Tutton & Cohen, 2025; Xu & Gu, 2025) and enhance their technological literacy (Wen, 2024), few have offered a comprehensive, theoretically grounded examination of the identity crises FLT face

or the concrete pathways available for professional renewal.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting a rigorous conceptual analysis that delineates the multidimensional identity crisis confronting FLT, examines the practical dilemmas hindering their professional growth, and proposes an integrated framework of competency enhancement pathways. In doing so, this paper seeks to transcend the binary opposition of "substitution theory" versus "instrumentalism," examining the current predicament through the dual lenses of philosophy of technology and educational ecology.

2. Methodology

This study employs a conceptual analysis and theory-building approach, a qualitative research methodology appropriate for synthesizing disparate strands of scholarly discourse into a coherent conceptual framework. The aim is not to report empirical data but to systematically analyze existing theoretical and empirical literature to identify patterns, tensions, and emergent themes concerning FLT identity and professional development in the AI era. The study draws on the complementary theoretical perspectives of Bernard Stiegler's philosophy of technology (1998), particularly his concepts of *technics* as *pharmakon* (both remedy and poison) and the risk of cognitive proletarianization—and educational ecology, which situates teacher identity within the evolving dynamics of human-machine interaction.

A systematic search was conducted using Web of Science, Scopus, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) databases for publications from 2019 to 2025. Keywords included combinations of "artificial intelligence," "generative AI," "ChatGPT," "foreign language teacher," "language education," "teacher identity," "professional development," "technological literacy," and "human-machine collaboration." Following title, abstract, and full-text screening against inclusion criteria (explicit focus on FLT roles/identity/professional development in relation to AI; peer-reviewed sources; substantive theoretical or empirical insights), a final corpus of 52 core publications was selected for analysis.

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis, an established method for integrating findings across qualitative and conceptual studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) extraction and initial coding of relevant passages; (2) grouping codes

into descriptive themes across three dimensions—AI-induced identity threats, professional development dilemmas, and proposed strategies; and (3) elevating descriptive themes to analytic constructs through iterative comparison and theoretical integration. The resulting analytic themes directly inform the structure of the subsequent sections: the descriptive themes constitute the findings presented in the first part of Section 3, while the elevated analytic constructs underpin the interpretation and pathway development elaborated in the following two parts.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the key findings in three stages. It first delineates the multidimensional identity crisis and practical professional dilemmas confronting FLTs in the AI era. Building on these findings, the discussion engages with the dual nature of AI through the theoretical lenses of philosophy of technology and educational ecology, before proposing an integrated framework of five interconnected competency-enhancement pathways. It follows a path from problem identification to theoretical interpretation, and finally to strategic response.

The Identity Crisis and Professional Dilemmas of FLTs in the AI Era

a. Displacement of Traditional Teaching Roles

The literature consistently indicates that AI technologies, particularly those leveraging advances in natural language processing and machine learning, are now capable of performing instructional tasks that were once the exclusive province of human teachers (Kern, 2024). AI's advantages in learning assessment, emotional support, and personalized tutoring challenge teachers' traditional roles as evaluators, caregivers, and knowledge transmitters, casting doubt on their uniqueness and irreplaceability (Xu & Gu, 2025). For example, in pronunciation correction and oral training, AI speech recognition technologies enable platforms like Rosetta Stone and Duolingo to identify learners' pronunciation errors in real time and provide precise corrective feedback. In automated writing correction, tools like Grammarly can evaluate and suggest improvements, partially replacing teachers' grading responsibilities. Additionally, generative AI tools like ChatGPT can engage learners in interactive dialogues, simulating real communication scenarios. The widespread use of these technologies leads students to increasingly rely on AI tools for language learning, thereby undermining FLTs' central role and sense of value.

b. Erosion of Teaching Authority

Historically, FLTs derived their professional authority from their status as the primary source of linguistic knowledge and cultural mediation. The proliferation of AI is dismantling this knowledge monopoly. Students can now instantly access lexical definitions, grammatical explanations, and cultural background information through AI platforms, diminishing their dependence on teacher-delivered instruction. Large language models not only answer language-related queries but also assist with writing, editing, translation, and simulated exam preparation—often with a speed and systematicity that individual teachers cannot match in a time-constrained classroom setting. As students increasingly perceive AI tools, rather than their teachers, as the primary knowledge providers, FLTs' professional authority risks erosion, and their sense of self-worth is correspondingly undermined (J. Li & Tan, 2025).

c. Transformation of Teacher–Student Dynamics

The integration of AI has fundamentally altered classroom relationships, shifting the traditional teacher–student dyad into a tripartite configuration of “human teacher–AI agent–student.” As FLTs transition from being sole knowledge transmitters to collaborators, their authority diminishes, and their influence wanes, significantly challenging their traditional roles (J. Li & Tan, 2025). When students increasingly perceive AI tools rather than FLTs as knowledge providers, the latter's professional authority and role positioning risk marginalization, fostering self-doubt about their value and professional identity.

d. Misalignment Between Pedagogy and Learner Expectations

AI has not only altered teaching approaches but also profoundly influenced learning behaviors. Student-centered, personalized, and adaptive learning have become prevailing trends, while traditional foreign language teaching often adheres to uniform pacing and group instruction, creating a growing disconnect. Modern learners prefer fragmented, on-demand, and task-driven learning, which AI technologies readily accommodate (Kuhail et al., 2023). In contrast, many FLTs' lag in adapting to technology exacerbates the gap, while others lack the technical proficiency required to effectively integrate AI tools into their teaching practices. This disparity further widens the gap between pedagogical methods and student expectations. For instance, when students extensively use AI for writing and speaking practice, teachers who

persist with traditional lectures and pen-and-paper assignments may be perceived as “outdated.” FLT’s who fail to adapt their instructional philosophies and strategies risk gradual marginalization, intensifying their identity crisis.

e. Pressure to Upgrade Skills and Adapt to Technological Change.

The rapid evolution of AI demands unprecedented skill transformations. Teaching in the AI era requires not only subject-specific pedagogical expertise but also AI literacy—encompassing the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to use AI effectively and ethically in instructional practice (UNESCO, 2024). Previously, FLT’s could rely on their backgrounds in linguistics, pedagogy, or literature. Today, they also need to master new competencies, such as data analysis, AI platform operation, and multimodal instructional design. However, many FLT’s lack a technical foundation and feel daunted by complex AI tools. Compounding the issue, many universities have yet to establish systematic mechanisms for teacher skill renewal, with technical training often superficial or misaligned with actual needs (Afroz et al., 2024). Without adequate support, teachers are left to rely on self-directed learning—a process that consumes significant time and effort and may yield limited progress, exacerbating professional anxiety and developmental stagnation.

f. Challenges in Redefining Curriculum Content and Teaching Methodologies.

As AI’s capabilities in language processing expand, traditional teaching models centered on grammar drills, vocabulary accumulation, and reading comprehension are losing their unique value. AI tools can swiftly handle tasks like text translation, writing correction, and grammatical analysis, reducing student reliance on teachers for these functions. This necessitates a fundamental reevaluation of instructional priorities and methods (Klimova et al., 2024).

Current educational research emphasizes the need to cultivate students’ cross-cultural communication skills, critical thinking, and creative language use in the AI era. This requires FLT’s to design more thought-provoking, task-based activities that encourage multilingual expression and discussion on social, cultural, and ethical topics, fostering both language proficiency and higher-order thinking. Yet, in practice, many FLT’s remain entrenched in the traditional “explanation-drill-assessment” cycle, overlooking the imperative to align teaching objectives and methods

with the demands of AI-driven learning. When curriculum design, pedagogical activities, and assessment methods diverge sharply from contemporary learners’ needs, teaching efficacy declines, student engagement wanes, and the professional value of teachers is called into question. Moreover, the erosion of humanistic elements in foreign language education has become increasingly pronounced under AI’s influence (Hu & Gao, 2024), underscoring the urgency of redefining content and methodologies.

Confronting the Dual Nature of Technology and the Enduring Core of Education

The findings presented above indicate that FLT’s have ample reason for professional anxiety. Yet, a closer examination of AI’s inherent limitations and the enduring essence of education suggests that outright replacement is not an imminent or inevitable outcome. As the subsequent discussion will demonstrate, AI systems, for all their computational power, remain fundamentally constrained in domains that lie at the heart of language education: genuine emotional attunement, culturally situated interpretation, ethical guidance, and the cultivation of critical consciousness. These distinctly human capacities, irreducible to algorithmic processing, constitute both the lasting core of the teaching profession and the foundation upon which FLT’s can reconstruct their professional identities and pathways for development.

Current applications of AI in foreign language teaching exhibit a dual character. Natural language processing-powered systems, while proficient in handling routine tasks like grammar correction and automated scoring, reveal profound constraints when attempting to approximate human cognitive understanding and behavioral patterns. Hiniz (2024) notes that generative AI offers groundbreaking resources for foreign language education, but its successful implementation depends on sound instructional design, teacher expertise, and ethical constraints. AI should serve as a supportive tool, not a substitute for teachers’ central guiding role. Empirical studies further confirm AI’s inherent limitations. Mohammadkarimi (2023) highlights its restricted capacity for fostering higher-order cognitive skills, while Sawangwan (2024) demonstrates that teachers significantly outperform ChatGPT in writing instruction—particularly in interpreting criteria, nurturing critical thinking, and providing ethical guidance. These findings affirm that AI functions best as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for teachers’ core instructional roles (Tutton & Cohen, 2025). In emotional interaction, AI systems can

identify explicit emotional vocabulary but struggle to perceive nonverbal cues like tonal shifts or facial expressions (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). The empathetic dynamics and spontaneous pedagogical improvisation that characterize classroom interactions lie beyond algorithmic quantification.

Pierre Bourdieu (1990) posited that teachers as cultural mediators bear the responsibility of transmitting values. The essence of education lies in nurturing individuals, with knowledge transmission being only one facet. While AI excels at delivering knowledge, it falls short in shaping students' value systems, moral ethics, cultural identity, and critical thinking. At its core, foreign language teaching is a vehicle for cultural transmission and character formation. In this dimension, human teachers are irreplaceable. Regardless of how deeply AI integrates into teaching practices, the essence of education remains unchanged. Teachers should always focus on elevating students' quality of life and life values, fostering holistic development. As Robert Hutchins (1968) asserted, the aim of education is to cultivate human excellence, nurturing wisdom and humanity.

Consider emotional exchanges in teaching. AI operates on data-driven algorithms designed to mimic human cognitive functions. This very mechanism underscores teachers' irreplaceable role in emotional education. A key feature of the human condition is our need for social interaction, and language is inherently social and interactive (Kasper & Wagner, 2011). When users know that emotional responses originate from AI rather than humans, they may undervalue them due to inherent biases (Yin et al., 2024). Thus, AI's effectiveness in emotional support is constrained by human prejudices and its own cognitive limitations. Moreover, AI's emotional support relies on reactive mechanisms, lacking the ability to initiate dialogue, guide exchanges, or follow up proactively. It cannot detect subtle emotional shifts or provide in-depth psychological counseling, leading to a loss of humanistic care in teaching. Real-world communication often relies on nonverbal signals—a dimension where AI, dependent on explicit linguistic input, falls short. While AI can offer limited emotional support, it cannot replicate reciprocity, spontaneity, and resonance. Therefore, teachers' unique socio-emotional attributes remain beyond AI's reach, underscoring their enduring importance. Beyond emotional exchanges, teachers play irreplaceable roles in shaping students' character, ethical guidance, and critical thinking (Mohammadkarimi, 2023; Sawangwan, 2024). Ultimately, the human interactions and humanistic care intrinsic to education cannot be replaced by machines. If students acquire

vast knowledge but lack ethical grounding or humanistic spirit, their education cannot be deemed successful.

The innovation of education in the AI era is, at its heart, a reexamination of the fundamental question: What kind of people are we cultivating? Teachers' core competitiveness lies in preserving education's humanistic core amid technological empowerment and nurturing a new generation equipped with both digital literacy and human warmth. This competitiveness is not a static set of skills but a dynamic "humanity plus intelligence" hybrid, embodying education's oldest wisdom: influencing lives with lives and awakening souls with souls.

Returning to the recurring question: Should FLT's be anxious? Perhaps the answer is no—but they must embrace change and strive to adapt to societal demands. As Neil Selwyn (2019) critically observed, while it is misguided to position AI as ready to replace human-centered educational processes, it is equally foolish to assume teaching methodologies will remain static amid rapid AI advancement.

Pathways and Strategies for Enhancing FLT's Competencies

In light of the identity crisis and practical dilemmas identified previously, and informed by the preceding discussion of AI's limitations and education's essence, this part proposes five interconnected pathways for FLT competency enhancement. These pathways are not presented as discrete options but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a holistic professional renewal.

a. Recognizing Role Transformation at the Conceptual Level.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about technology play a significant role in its integration into language instruction (Tseng, 2018). Thus, the primary challenge for FLT's in the AI era is overcoming the cognitive inertia of traditional role perceptions. Long-established role definitions and experience-driven teaching models evoke instinctive resistance when confronted with AI-driven educational reform. Research indicates that many teachers using intelligent educational applications often exhibit passive acceptance, accompanied by anxiety and low value recognition (Zhao et al., 2022). Additionally, "technophobia" leads many teachers to avoid adopting new technologies (H. Hou & Wang, 2025). The conceptual shift required in the AI era—from knowledge transmitters to collaborative learning

designers—directly challenges entrenched teaching habits, threatening professional development trajectories and triggering unprecedented dilemmas.

FLT's adherence to the “knowledge authority” identity stems from path dependency: for decades, FLT's built their authority on linguistic expertise, a system now facing structural collapse under AI's impact (J. Li & Tan, 2025). This cognitive inertia leads some to view AI tools as competitors rather than collaborators, trapping them in the “replacement theory” mindset. In reality, AI does not diminish teachers' value but redefines its realization—shifting from monopolizing knowledge delivery to orchestrating cognitive development. For instance, while speech recognition technology can correct pronunciation, it cannot, like teachers, discern the root of a student's cognitive block by observing subtle expressions. Thus, conceptual transformation hinges on redefining “authority”: teachers' professional value is increasingly defined not by the breadth of their knowledge base, but by their competence in employing AI tools to craft tailored cognitive advancement solutions.

In this context, FLT's need to establish a “dynamic role matrix,” breaking away from the singular identity construct of podium-centricism. This transformation requires shifting from being knowledge transmitters to becoming facilitators, with a focus on cultivating students' higher-order skills rather than merely delivering basic language knowledge. Additionally, they should strengthen their capacity for reviewing and adapting AI-generated materials (Himız, 2024). For example, in translation teaching, as machine translation accuracy surpasses a threshold, teachers should shift focus from grammar correction to cultural transmediation, assuming roles like “cross-cultural navigator,” “technical reviewer,” and “ethical supervisor” (Ng, 2026). This role expansion is, fundamentally, a return to education's essence—shifting from language knowledge accumulation to cultivating cross-cultural competence in the AI era. Only by redefining and reconstructing their roles can FLT's adapt to this inevitable trend.

b. Developing Technological Literacy.

Beyond role redefinition, FLT's should enhance their technological literacy to facilitate this transformation. In an era of ubiquitous AI, technological literacy encompasses intelligent awareness, digital skills, and ethical judgment—a competency increasingly emphasized in the literature (Kohnke et al., 2023). As AI permeates education, such literacy has become a critical measure of teachers' professional adaptability (Tutton & Cohen, 2025).

Philosophically, humans have long distinguished themselves through tool use, from Franklin's “tool-making animals” to Stiegler's prostheticity theory, which posits technology as humanity's second nature: “Technics is the pursuit of life by means other than life” (1998). As technology evolves, it increasingly defines human essence and drives societal advancement. Education, as a key mechanism of social reproduction, bears the brunt of AI's transformative impact. For FLT's, technological literacy is no longer an added bonus but a survival skill for professional continuity. They should become not only knowledge transmitters but also learning designers and technology curators. Without solid technological understanding and integration skills, they risk marginalization.

AI's transformative contribution to education lies in reshaping teaching processes. Today, generative AI and adaptive learning systems are widely used in writing correction, speech recognition feedback, and learning behavior analysis, offering unprecedented opportunities for efficiency and personalized learning. However, FLT's lacking technological literacy risk two extremes: uncritically accepting AI-generated content, undermining professional judgment, or rejecting technology out of fear, clinging to outdated methods. Thus, technological literacy is not merely about tool operation but about reconstructing professional authority in human-machine collaboration. By systematically understanding AI's mechanisms and pedagogical applicability, FLT's can filter, refine, and optimize AI-generated content—evolving from technology users to technology guides. This requires determining which AI tools suit specific training needs and how to integrate them into teaching goals and curricula. The essence of technological literacy is not simply “using tools” but “using them well” and guiding students toward higher-order objectives (Tutton & Cohen, 2025).

Teachers with high technological literacy tend to achieve greater teaching efficacy and job satisfaction in new technological environments (Stan, 2022). Yet many FLT's still lack AI proficiency, hindering role adaptation. As Li and Tan (2025) note, technological literacy is not merely an extension of traditional data literacy but the foundation for sustainable professional development. This entails not only technical training but also updating mindsets and educational philosophies. FLT's should deepen their understanding of technology, reflect critically, and proactively explore its boundaries to seize AI's opportunities. While FLT's may not be replaced by AI, those who cannot use AI may be replaced by those who can. Thus, enhancing technological literacy is both an

urgent individual need and a strategic imperative for education's intelligent transformation and future talent cultivation.

c. Cultivating Innovation Beyond Technological Dependence.

While technological literacy is indispensable for FLT's in the AI era, they should also develop the ability to innovate beyond technological reliance to fulfill their educational mission. Stiegler (1998) noted technology's dual nature: it can be both a remedy and a poison. As a remedy, technology compensates for human limitations, granting power and the ability to transform nature. However, its misuse can threaten survival, leading to self-destruction. Today, the proliferation of digital technologies has caused disadjustment—they often escape human control, exerting reverse control and absorbing knowledge and skills that belong inherently to humans, manifesting technology's toxicity. Rather than stimulating human desire, intelligent technologies stifle it; they disrupt rather than focus attention, plunging humanity into an era of hyperactivity and attention deficits (H. Hou & Wang, 2025).

While technology offers unprecedented convenience in foreign language teaching, overreliance risks new problems. Excessive student dependence on AI may mask their true proficiency (Kern, 2024; Kong, 2024), and machine-generated personalized learning scenarios can create "information cocoons", hindering student growth (Kim et al., 2025). Similarly, overreliance on AI may erode teachers' creativity and flexibility, impairing professional judgment and limiting instructional depth and breadth.

The proliferation of generative AI has made FLT's increasingly dependent on these technologies, and this dependence carries risks. In teaching content, generative AI excels at producing materials—ChatGPT, for instance, can assist in lesson planning. Yet, overreliance may diminish teachers' creativity and judgment, compromising student learning experiences. In teaching methods, greater dependence on generative AI may reduce innovative pedagogical skills. While AI provides data-driven decision support, teaching strategies may become algorithm-dependent rather than grounded in educational theory and practice (Liu & Liu, 2020). In assessment, AI's data analytics enable personalized evaluation, helping teachers track student progress. However, outsourcing assessment entirely to AI without critical engagement risks diminishing teachers' innovative evaluation capabilities. Thus, for FLT's, overreliance on AI may lead to cognitive degeneration (Wen, 2024). While

embracing technology, they must maintain a critical distance to avoid its negative impacts.

d. Fostering Critical Thinking.

Critical thinking is essential for FLT's to identify the limitations and biases of AI tools. Generative AI risks fostering teacher complacency. Faced with ready-made teaching resources and lacking effective verification methods, FLT's may accept AI-generated content uncritically. Over time, this can diminish reflective and questioning abilities, challenging their autonomy and independence (H. Hou & Wang, 2025). AI models are trained on vast datasets that inevitably contain biases, outdated views, or cultural misinterpretations (Kohnke et al., 2023). AI-generated English essays, for example, may be structurally flawless but oversimplify complex issues or reflect Western-centric perspectives. FLT's need to critically evaluate the accuracy, logic, and cultural appropriateness of AI-generated resources, using their expertise to interpret and assess AI outputs (Celik, 2023). Without critical analysis, teachers may treat these outputs as authoritative, misleading students' values and academic thinking (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022).

Besides, critical thinking enables FLT's to guide students in using AI critically. FLT's should serve as mentors for higher-order thinking, such as critical and creative thinking. While AI facilitates learning, it also risks eroding students' willpower, innovation, and critical faculties. In the AI era, students' self-regulation, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills are more vital than ever. As students increasingly use AI for writing, translation, and grammar correction, FLT's should help them recognize these tools as aids, not replacements, and alert them to issues like bias reproduction and informational conservatism in AI-generated content (Kern, 2024). This requires FLT's to understand AI's mechanisms and analyze the ideologies behind its outputs. Only with critical thinking can they design tasks that provoke deep reflection, such as comparing AI and human writing or exploring AI's impact on linguistic diversity, thereby cultivating students' critical language awareness and cross-cultural thinking (Kohnke et al., 2023).

Critical thinking sustains intellectual pluralism, creating an ecosystem where diverse perspectives thrive and contend. Without it, human cognition risks homogenization and mechanization. Yet, as AI becomes increasingly embedded in daily life, critical thinking faces unprecedented erosion. AI's automation and standardization, while enhancing efficiency, may

dull the individuality and sharpness of human thought. As Stiegler (1998) cautioned, digital technologies suppress human subjectivity through algorithmic dominance. In the context of AI-driven learning, uncritically accepting AI outputs as definitive answers risks cognitive conformity and ideological uniformity. Algorithmic filtering narrows the scope for diverse perspectives, undermining the co-construction of meaning in educational exchanges. Over time, this could impoverish education's dialogic and creative essence, leading to a decline in intellectual vitality. Even more concerning, the deep integration of AI into teaching risks reducing pedagogical interactions to mere data exchanges. Without critical vigilance, the relational core of teaching—rooted in mutual understanding, improvisation, and ethical engagement—may be overshadowed by technical efficiency. Therefore, FLTs should anchor their practice in critical thinking to ensure technology serves pedagogical goals rather than dictating them.

e. Cultivating Humanistic Spirit and Values.

As AI-powered tools permeate classrooms, they ostensibly enhance learning efficiency, yet this convenience risks obscuring the deeper purpose of language education (Kern, 2024). The emotional detachment inherent in machines threatens to erode students' humanistic qualities. Language is not merely a communicative tool but a vessel for cultural transmission and humanistic identity. Thus, amid AI's "dehumanizing" tendencies, upholding humanistic values becomes not only a responsibility of foreign language education but its unshakable foundation.

Foreign language education carries the mission of fostering cross-cultural understanding and humanistic dialogue. While AI tools excel at semantic processing, they cannot genuinely grasp the cultural contexts or emotional resonance behind words. As Wen (2024) demonstrates, technology's role in education remains strictly instrumental—it can reshape teaching practices but cannot replicate the nurturing essence of education, which fundamentally depends on human interaction. The true aim of foreign language teaching has never been to produce "translation machines" but to cultivate globally minded individuals who appreciate cultural diversity and possess critical awareness. Humanistic values are central to this endeavor, helping learners navigate cultural richness while countering instrumental rationality.

Humanistic spirit serves as a bulwark against educational alienation through technologization (Lan, 2024). Its absence risks reducing language learning to a hollow shell. Generative AI can effortlessly produce

grammatically flawless texts, but do learners truly comprehend the cultural nuances within them? If students mechanically complete tasks via AI without engaging with meaning, they risk losing their capacity as "thinkers." Unchecked, this trend could distort language learning from meaning-making to efficiency-seeking—a regression that would surrender education's humanistic purpose.

Moreover, AI's advancement poses ethical challenges, necessitating a revival of humanistic values. In teaching overly reliant on AI feedback, FLTs risk marginalization into mere "implementers." Yet authentic education thrives on emotional inspiration, value transmission, and character formation. As Zhang and Dong (2020) emphasize, education's essence lies in nurturing people—a task only humans can fulfill. FLTs should prioritize cultivating students' emotions, values, and social responsibility (Kong, 2024). Given AI's operational limitations, its capacity for value guidance remains inherently constrained (Z. Li, 2024).

FLTs are not merely linguistic instructors but cultural mediators and guardians of humanistic spirit. For instance, when teaching Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, AI might competently analyze vocabulary and plot. However, the human teacher's unique contribution lies in deconstructing the "code hero" through cultural metaphors, guiding students to compare portrayals across translations, and addressing latent biases. In the AI era, FLTs should proactively steer students to critically examine technology and engage in ethical reflection, transforming classrooms into vital arenas for humanistic dialogue.

Foreign language education in the AI age demands a harmonious balance between technological empowerment and humanistic values (Kern, 2024). Humanistic values do not reject technology but advocate a higher-order perspective where technology serves holistic human development and value cultivation. Only in this way can foreign language education uphold its mission of teaching for humanity, achieving mutual flourishing between technology and humanistic values.

4. Conclusion

At this historical juncture of deepening integration between AI and education, the professional challenges faced by foreign language teachers reflect the broader pressures of paradigmatic shifts in pedagogy. The present conceptual analysis has systematically delineated the multidimensional identity crisis confronting FLTs as well as the practical dilemmas of

skill upgrading and curricular redefinition. Building upon a critical examination of AI's dual nature and the enduring essence of education, the study has proposed five interconnected pathways for competency enhancement: embracing role transformation, developing technological literacy, cultivating innovation beyond technological dependence, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing humanistic spirit.

From a macro-historical perspective, iterative advancements in educational technology have never truly rendered teachers obsolete; rather, they continually reshape educational forms. However, this does not grant FLT's complacency. On the contrary, they should fully recognize the current technological upheaval and proactively adapt through multifaceted reforms: transforming educational philosophies, skillfully leveraging AI, fostering innovation beyond technological dependence, strengthening higher-order thinking, and nurturing humanistic values. Unless they continuously recalibrate their competencies and positioning, today's apprehensions may well become tomorrow's realities.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Teaching Reform Research Project of the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University.

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How to cite this article:

Xu, Y. (2026). Foreign Language Teachers in the AI Era: Identity Reconstruction and Development Pathways. *Journal of Education and Learning Research*, 3(3), 89-99.