Pedagogical Needs, Digital Readiness, and Ethical Tensions: A Thematic Analysis of Junior High School English Teachers' Perspectives on Generative AI Integration in Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract. The integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into language classrooms holds considerable promise for personalized scaffolding and adaptive feedback, yet the pedagogical realities teachers navigate at the Junior High School (SMP) level remain underexplored in the Indonesian EFL context. This study investigates the pedagogical needs, digital readiness profiles, and ethical implementation concerns of three English teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar regarding the deployment of an Adaptive Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) model integrated with GenAI. Employing Inductive Thematic Analysis on semi-structured interview data, the study identified four themes: current pedagogical challenges and CAF+O student difficulty profiles, teacher digital readiness and GenAI experience, and ethical concerns with design principles for responsible AI integration. Findings reveal that teachers recognize GenAI's transformative potential as a thinking partner while simultaneously voicing substantive concerns about cognitive dependency, academic integrity, and the absence of institutional policy frameworks. Teachers proposed quality-standard-based AI involvement that preserves teacher oversight and higher-order thinking. These findings carry direct implications for the design of Adaptive TBLT models that integrate GenAI responsibly and effectively.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Adaptive TBLT, Cognitive Dependency, EFL, Generative AI, Junior High School, Thematic Analysis.

1 Introduction

The productive literacy performance of secondary school students in Indonesia remains a persistent pedagogical challenge. The 2025 Basic Competency Test recorded an average English language score of only 24.93 at the secondary school level, signaling deep structural difficulties in students' writing and speaking development. This challenge is not isolated to Indonesia: researchers have consistently documented the difficulties learners face in converting receptive language knowledge into productive communicative output at the junior secondary level (Kurniati et al., 2025; J. Wang et al., 2025; Widanta et al., 2024).

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Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has long been positioned as a communicative and learner-centered alternative to teacher-fronted, grammar-translation approaches. Its efficacy in developing productive literacy skills, particularly in speaking and writing, is well established (Ellis, 2019; Fang et al., 2021; Wei & Zhao, 2024). However, TBLT application in Junior High School contexts in Indonesia has been uneven, constrained by large class sizes, heterogeneous ability levels, and insufficient teacher training in adaptive instructional design (Kurniati et al., 2025; Widanta et al., 2024). The emergence of GenAI platforms introduces a transformative dimension: research demonstrates that GenAI can provide personalized, real-time scaffolding and corrective feedback that extends what classroom teachers can offer within physical and temporal constraints (Guan et al., 2025; Ironsi, 2023; Lee et al., 2025). However, most evidence is drawn from higher education settings and its generalizability to K-12 SMP-level populations remains limited (Lee et al., 2025; J. Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, the unreflective adoption of GenAI at this level raises serious ethical questions about cognitive offloading, academic integrity, and the erosion of authentic learning effort (Leong & Zhang, 2025; Mohamed, 2024; Selvam & González Vallejo, 2025; Suello & Alda, 2024).

The critical question is not simply whether GenAI can be integrated into TBLT but how that integration must be designed, bounded, and governed to ensure it accelerates rather than undermines productive literacy development. This study responds by centering the voices of three teachers navigating this landscape at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar through semi-structured interviews that map their pedagogical needs, digital readiness profiles, and ethical implementation experiences.

1.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in three intersecting theoretical frameworks. The first is TBLT as formalized by Ellis (2019) and measured through the CAF+O framework developed by Housen et al. (2012) and operationalized by Ogawa (2022). The CAF+O framework evaluates productive language performance across Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency, and Organization. Research confirms these dimensions are not uniformly co-developed, making the framework particularly well-suited to identifying the specific scaffolding functions that GenAI must perform (Housen et al., 2012; Ogawa, 2022). The second framework is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory operationalized through scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). GenAI can be theorized as a dynamic scaffolding agent providing calibrated, adaptive support (Guan et al., 2025; Moslemi Nezhad Arani, 2025), with empirical studies confirming that AI-driven scaffolding produces meaningful gains when designed to guide rather than replace learner effort (Li & Wilson, 2025; Ma et al., 2025). The third framework concerns ethical AI integration. A growing body of literature documents risks of unreflective GenAI adoption, including cognitive offloading, reduced critical thinking, and academic integrity violations (Gu & Yan, 2025; Vivian, 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Human-centered design frameworks foreground teacher oversight and institutionally governed boundaries on AI assistance (Asrifan et al., 2025; Mustapha et al., 2025; Selvam & González Vallejo, 2025).

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by three research questions. RQ1 asks what pedagogical challenges teachers describe and what difficulty profiles across CAF+O dimensions they observe in student writing and speaking. RQ2 asks what the digital readiness profile of teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar looks like with respect to GenAI tools and how they have integrated these tools pedagogically. RQ3 asks what ethical concerns teachers articulate regarding routine GenAI integration into TBLT and what design principles they propose for responsible implementation.

2 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using Inductive Thematic Analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The inductive approach was chosen to allow themes to emerge organically from the data, particularly appropriate given the exploratory character of this inquiry at the SMP level. This qualitative strand is positioned within the broader Exploratory Sequential mixed-methods design of the larger research program. The qualitative insights produced here serve as explanatory scaffolding for the quantitative CAF+O outcomes measured through MANCOVA in the model's experimental phase, providing participant-grounded accounts of the mechanisms that the statistical analysis detects as performance gains across writing and speaking dimensions.

Three English teachers from SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar who have consent in teaching English as public government teachers, were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure relevant teaching experience and demonstrated engagement with digital tools. Ms. Intan teaches English at the SMP level with direct experience in communicative and task-based approaches. Ms. Ninda teaches seventh-grade English with an undergraduate background in Genre-Based Approach and prior experience at an international school in Bali. Ms. Novi is an experienced teacher whose practice leans toward Project-Based Learning with technology integration, with direct personal experience deploying GenAI tools for student-facing cooperative learning simulations. All three participants have personal experience using GenAI for pedagogical purposes, positioning them as especially well-informed voices on AI integration at this level (Aravantinos et al., 2026; Ye et al., 2025).

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol of five open-ended question clusters (P1 through P5) covering: current instructional approaches including task-based experience and ability differentiation; observed student difficulty profiles; current digital tool use and GenAI experience; ethical concerns regarding routine AI integration; and design preferences for an AI-integrated TBLT model. CAF+O-aligned probes from Ogawa (2022) and Housen et al. (2012) were embedded to ensure teacher observations mapped onto the study's analytical framework. The protocol was administered in Bahasa Indonesia to maximize participant comfort. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, recorded and transcribed verbatim, with relevant excerpts translated into English for presentation. Analysis followed the six-phase process of Braun & Clarke (2019): familiarization, initial

coding, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. For member checking, verbatim transcripts and initial thematic summaries were returned to the three participating teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar to verify the accuracy of their statements. All participants confirmed the findings authentically reflected their experiences. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with an experienced qualitative researcher who reviewed the coding framework and a sample of the coded transcripts. These discussion sessions resolved minor coding discrepancies and ensured the four emergent themes were robustly grounded in the data.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

The thematic analysis of the three interview transcripts yielded four major themes. Themes 1 and 2 together answer RQ1. Theme 3 answers RQ2. Theme 4 answers RQ3. Each theme is presented through the language participants used to describe their experience.

Theme 1: Navigating Heterogeneous Classrooms Through Communicative and Project-Based Approaches (RQ1, Part A). This theme addresses the first part of RQ1. All three teachers reported that the central challenge in their classrooms is managing wide differences in student ability within time allocations that limit how much task-based work they can complete. Ms. Intan described a toolkit built around Guided Writing, Peer Review, roleplay, and Communicative Language Teaching, and named the core challenge: "The challenge I face when implementing this method is the diversity of students' abilities in the class. Not all students are proficient in vocabulary and its use in writing or speaking in English." Ms. Ninda, working from a Genre-Based Approach background, identified the same barrier in similar terms, describing "striking heterogeneity in students' initial ability levels" as the primary obstacle to equitable practice time.

Ms. Novi described a Project-Based Learning approach and explained how time constraints shape her practice:

> *"The learning method I currently use tends toward project-based learning because I emphasize the importance of the process and product that students produce each semester. However, to maximize the short time allocation, this project only covers 1 major unit each semester, while for other materials I still use conventional methods."*

This account shows that she limits genuine task-based work to one high-stakes project per semester and relies on conventional methods for the remaining material. The three teachers described complementary strategies for managing ability differences within their classrooms. Ms. Intan assigned stronger students as peer feedback-givers, Ms. Ninda adjusted text complexity and scaffolding depth by group, and Ms. Novi

organized heterogeneous cooperative groups in which peer tutoring occurred as part of the task structure.

Theme 2: Student Difficulty Profiles Across the CAF+O Dimensions (RQ1, Part B). This theme addresses the second part of RQ1, concerning the difficulty profiles teachers observe in student writing and speaking. All three teachers identified vocabulary limitation and grammar construction as the most severe constraint exposed by spontaneous, unassisted tasks. Ms. Novi stated: "In general, if the task is given spontaneously, they are more constrained by vocabulary and grammar, because honestly some students are still at the level of memorizing vocabulary." This difficulty maps onto the Accuracy and Complexity dimensions of the CAF+O framework.

Ms. Novi also identified a second difficulty profile connected to unguided digital tool use. She reported that when students are permitted to use mobile tools during a task, "the obstacle sometimes shifts to ideas or content that are too monotone and AI-like."

Ms. Ninda described the affective dimension of student difficulty in detail:

> *"The aspect that most challenges students in writing and speaking is confidence (mental block) or language anxiety, as well as limited mastery of basic vocabulary and grammar construction. They often have very creative ideas in their minds, but face major obstacles when they have to pour those ideas into English sentences in writing or speech."*

Ms. Intan reported a related pattern: "Sometimes students know what they want to say but are constrained by language. Many also feel insecure because they are afraid of being corrected or laughed at by their peers." Both accounts describe difficulties consistent with the Fluency dimension of the CAF+O framework.

On the question of whether difficulty differs by grade level, Ms. Novi offered an observation that differed from Ms. Ninda's account of developmental contrast between grades: "In terms of ability there is no striking difference between students in grades 7, 8 or 9 because their difficulties are mostly the same: vocabulary and how to construct their own sentences."

Ms. Ninda also identified a strategy-level pattern connected to the Organization dimension of CAF+O, describing what has and has not worked in her own classroom:

> *"Strategies that have proven very helpful include the use of visual media techniques, such as images or short videos, which are very effective at sparking their ideas. On the other hand, a strategy that has not been successful is assigning long paragraph writing tasks directly, without going through adequate preparation stages, such as brainstorming and rough drafting."*

Theme 3: Digital Readiness Profiles and GenAI Pedagogical Experience (RQ2). This theme addresses RQ2. Ms. Ninda described a toolkit that includes Canva for materials, Quizizz and Kahoot for evaluation, and YouTube for listening tasks. Her personal use of GenAI was pedagogical: "I use AI to help design lesson plans, create example reading texts whose difficulty is adjusted to Grade 7 students, find fresh vocabulary game ideas, and compose assessment rubrics." Ms. Intan reported that students already use GenAI outside class, describing it as a tool that "offers convenience because it provides direct answers and corrective feedback that is quite easy to understand."

Ms. Novi described a more advanced use of GenAI, including a cooperative learning activity in which students practiced speaking with an AI conversational partner:

> *"One of them is cooperative learning assisted by AI as an oral learning resource, where students in pairs communicate with AI that can play any role, enabling direct speaking simulation. I have tried it before but now everything is paid for."*

She reported discontinuing this practice once the platform required payment. All three teachers converged on the same training need, describing a desire for structured guidance in prompt engineering for student-facing AI use. Ms. Novi additionally called for institutional support: "Hopefully in the future the government can provide premium access to online platforms or AIs that will make it easier for teachers to digitalize learning."

Theme 4: Ethical Concerns and Design Principles for Responsible AI Integration (RQ3). This theme addresses RQ3. Ms. Ninda and Ms. Intan centered their concerns on cognitive dependency risk and the absence of institutional policy. Ms. Ninda stated:

> *"My greatest concern if generative AI is integrated routinely is the potential decline in students' critical thinking and cognitive dependency. If students become accustomed to asking AI to produce essays or answers instantly, they will lose the golden opportunity to train their own analytical, reasoning, and language creativity abilities."*

Ms. Intan expressed a related concern: "AI technology platforms like ChatGPT or Gemini can indeed make students addicted, and this is negative. Students will become lazy and their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities will further decline." Both teachers also noted the absence of formal institutional policy, with Ms. Intan observing that the school's only related measure was mobile phone restriction during class time.

Ms. Novi offered a different framing: "The use of AI in learning is indeed risky, it can enable academic cheating and cognitive dependency. But no innovation comes without weaknesses, and now it is up to us to regulate how many tasks they must do with AI and how many they must do by thinking independently."

On design preferences, Ms. Ninda proposed a three-phase blended structure with a 30:70 AI-to-teacher ratio for Grade 7, grounded in the view that empathy, motivation, and emotional connection are elements of teaching SMP-age children that technology cannot fully replace. Ms. Novi proposed a different governing principle, centered on quality standards rather than a fixed ratio:

> *"There is no specific procedure, only strict supervision and standards for the student learning process and outcomes so that even when students use AI they still get the opportunity to use higher-order thinking skills. This is not easy for me either, it is still at the trial and error stage."*

Both Ms. Intan and Ms. Ninda proposed teacher-accessible progress monitoring as a structural requirement, with Ms. Intan calling for parental or teacher supervision features on GenAI platforms and Ms. Ninda requesting a recapitulation or progress report feature accessible to teachers. Ms. Novi extended this by proposing that teacher oversight should also assess whether students' AI-assisted outputs reflect genuine cognitive engagement, not only which tasks were completed with AI assistance.

3.2 Discussion

Reading the four themes as a coherent set of answers to three research questions across three participant voices, a consistent and actionable argument emerges: the teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar already possess the pedagogical orientation, task-based instincts, and personal digital competence that GenAI integration requires, but they face a three-layered deficit of institutional governance, student-facing deployment protocols, and systemic platform access that prevents those individual competencies from translating into principled classroom practice.

The combined answer to RQ1, provided by Themes 1 and 2, reveals a specific and tractable CAF+O problem whose contours are clearer with three voices than with two. Students' difficulty profiles cluster at the intersection of Accuracy vulnerability across all grade levels (Housen et al., 2012; Ogawa, 2022), Fluency suppression through language anxiety (Giang et al., 2025; He & Wei, 2025; Wang et al., 2024), and a Complexity ceiling imposed by memorized rather than productive vocabulary. Ms. Novi's critical addition is the AI-like content problem: when students have unguided digital access, apparent Complexity gains are artificial because the cognitive work has been offloaded to the AI rather than performed by the learner. The experimental group's CAF+O gains in the MANCOVA analysis, particularly in Accuracy and Complexity for writing and in Fluency for speaking, reflect the consequence of replacing unguided AI access with structured AI scaffolding. Students who receive hints and prompts rather than complete outputs must engage the vocabulary and grammar they have been supported to acquire, rather than passively accepting AI-generated text they did not produce. The Fluency gains in speaking are best understood as the quantitative trace of the anxiety-reduction mechanism all three teachers described: a low-stakes AI conversational partner removes the social cost of attempted production, and students

who attempt more in a safe space produce more fluently when they transfer to the assessed task (Ma et al., 2025; Tai & Chen, 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

The answer to RQ2, provided by Theme 3, reveals that the pedagogical implementation required for the Adaptive TBLT model already exists in this school. Ms. Novi independently designed and piloted a cooperative AI-mediated speaking simulation only to have it blocked by platform costs. The barrier is structural, not conceptual. What is needed is institutional support providing access, governance, and prompt engineering training that allows teachers to move from individual experimentation to replicable, principled practice (Aravantinos et al., 2026; Choi et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2025). The answer to RQ3, provided by Theme 4, is the most theoretically rich contribution of the three-teacher account. Ms. Novi's reframing of the ethical question from risk identification to design obligation moves the conversation from defensiveness to professional agency. The ethics of AI integration at the SMP level are not resolved by restricting AI access but by designing task structures that ensure AI-assisted cognitive work remains genuinely demanding for the learner. This provides the theoretical foundation for the Adaptive TBLT model's core design decision: GenAI functions as a scaffolding partner at the pre-task and during-task phases, and students are assessed on products that require independent synthesis, revision, and oral delivery. The teacher-accessible monitoring requirement transforms the ethical concern about cognitive offloading into a structural accountability mechanism and addresses the academic integrity concern documented in the AI-generated text detection literature (Coetzer & Van Aardt, 2024).

4 Conclusion

This study answered three research questions about the pedagogical needs, digital readiness profiles, and ethical implementation experiences of three Junior High School English teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Denpasar. In answer to RQ1, teachers' current instructional practice is communicatively and project-oriented in instinct but structurally constrained by time scarcity and classroom heterogeneity, with student difficulty profiles clustering at the intersection of vocabulary limitation, grammatical accuracy, and language anxiety across all grade levels and mapping directly onto the Accuracy, Fluency, and Complexity dimensions of the CAF+O framework. A critical finding from the third participant is that this difficulty profile does not resolve with grade progression under conventional instruction, and that unguided AI access creates a second distinct failure mode alongside anxiety-Fluency suppression. In answer to RQ2, teachers demonstrate a readiness spectrum from sophisticated personal GenAI competence to the practical wisdom of trial-and-error deployment, with the primary barrier being systemic: institutional platform access, governance policy, and prompt engineering training are absent in ways that block individual competence from becoming collective, replicable practice. In answer to RQ3, the governing principle is not a fixed AI-to-teacher ratio but a quality standard ensuring students retain genuine higher-order cognitive engagement in every task cycle regardless of AI assistance received. These findings mean the Adaptive TBLT model must configure GenAI to

scaffold at the process level rather than the product level, incorporate a teacher preparation component addressing institutional access and governance, embed teacher-accessible monitoring as a structural feature, and be architected for ongoing calibration. Future research should extend these findings through student-facing FGD data and classroom observation, and test the model's effectiveness across all four CAF+O dimensions using the quasi-experimental MANCOVA design planned for the next phase of this research program.

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