

Feeling with Machines: Emotional AI, and Humane Pedagogy in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

The Pedagogical landscape in English Language Teaching (ELT) is being continuously redefined by the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically in regards to emotional or affective computing. This essay analyzes the role of emotional AI in transforming the affective, ethical and relational aspects of teaching and learning. The study takes a conceptual, interpretive approach and utilizes the affect theory, critical pedagogy, and posthumanism to guide the study as well as incorporating empirical evidence of current studies on emotional recognition, adaptive feedback, and emotion regulation in teachers.

The review reveals that culturally specific emotions are frequently misconstrued in emotional AI, escalates emotional labour in teachers and diminishes intricate affective encounters to quantifiable information points. Although in this way, such systems have the potential to make augmentation more engaging by providing adaptive feedback, they may be prone to standardisation of emotional expression and favouring algorithmic legibility over human authenticity.

Subsequently, the paper suggests the Emotionally Intelligent AI-Pedagogy Framework (EI-AIPF) that focuses on emotional awareness, ethical governance, as well as human mediation. The paper holds the opinion that educators need to develop critical emotional literacy as a

way of becoming ethically aware of AI-generated affective data and because educators need to maintain relational sense in AI-mediated classrooms. The article adds the theoretically based framework of maintaining the humane pedagogy in the technologically mediated education settings.

Keywords: Emotional AI, ELT, Affective pedagogy, Critical pedagogy, Posthumanism, AI in education

1. Introduction

1.1. Affective Turn in Digital Pedagogy

The learning of English by intelligent machines is delicate to a certain extent. What was once a subtle system of voices, gestures, and shared laughter is now translated with the invisible existence of algorithms. Artificial Intelligence (AI) does not only enter the modern teaching of English as a set of tools but also as a cultural, emotional, and epistemic phenomenon that redefines the ways in which the teachers and learners experience, perceive, and interact. Formerly an affective ecology of glances, silences, hesitations, mutual humour or discomfort, communication and language learning become mixed into the algorithms of judgement and predictive models which are said to read emotions. Recent research indicates that emotional AI is not merely a viewer of emotions but is an active participant in terms of what can be viewed as attention, engagement, or enthusiasm (Liu et al., 2024; Vistorte et al., 2024). The role of emotion in the era of AI is thus paradoxical, both as the focus of learning and as a flattened data point to familiarise oneself with, which only contributes to the idea of the circulation of affect between bodies, technologies, and institutional contexts where emotions are continuously shaped and reshaped, as Ahmed (2004) explains.

There is no shortage of AI in the English Language Teaching (ELT) domain. For example, many are already familiar with writing assistance which adapts to the preferences of the learner, pronunciation assistants, chatbots which seek to anticipate the needs of the learners, lesson writing systems, and feedback engines. The question of whether machines can teach is no longer an issue, and the more pressing one is whether machines can feel and what the pedagogy is when machines strive to emulate feeling. Pedagogy is not cognitive or technical work but emotional, moral, and interpersonal, as the affective turn in education has always

demonstrated (Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2017). AI compels teachers to readdress emotion as the place of tension and value between human compassion and machinic deciphering.

The emergence of AI in ELT is the manifestation of a conflict between affective automation and the relationality of humans. Although individualised learning can be offered by systems like affect-recognising feedback tools or adaptive writing assistants, they rely on universalised emotion models that can misunderstand or simplify cultures, linguistic or neurodiverse manifestations (Chutia and Baruah, 2024; Salloum et al., 2025). This forces the field to face some acute questions:

1. What is it like to teach English humanely in the presence of intelligent technologies?
2. In what ways could emotional intelligence be used as an opposition to the mechanisation of care?
3. Does that not mean that the economies of feeling in teaching are platitudes?

These are some of the questions that guide this paper.

The current paper relies on affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2010), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2011), and posthumanism to discuss the emotional changes caused by AI in ELT.

To address these gaps, this paper proposes the Emotionally Intelligent AI-Pedagogy Framework (EI-AIPF) as a model for integrating artificial intelligence with humane, affect-sensitive pedagogy in English language teaching.

2. Analytical Orientation

The study presented in this article takes a qualitative and interpretive approach to analysis. This paper does not aim to gauge the validity of emotional AI tools but to learn how they transform the affective, ethical, and relational realities of English language teaching. To achieve that, the paper will rely on the literature published between 2014 and 2025, both recent empirical studies on affective computing in ELT (Liu et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025; Salloum et al., 2025; Vistorte et al., 2024; Seyri and Ghiasvand, 2025; Xie et al., 2025) and theoretical background in the study of affect theory, critical pedagogy, and posthuman philosophy (Ahmed, 2004, 2010; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2011; Braidotti, 2013).

The argument rather takes a conceptual and hermeneutic approach instead of synthesising this literature in a quantitative manner. It views empirical results in the light of a philosophical and pedagogical model to comprehend the process of mediation, control or transformation of emotional life in AI-enhanced classrooms.

This study is a conceptual and critical theoretical inquiry that develops a pedagogical framework rather than reporting empirical data.

3. Theoretical Background: Emotion, Intelligence and the Posthuman Classroom

The affective turn in the humanities changed the conceptualisation of learning and subjectivity by scholars. According to Ahmed (2004), in lieu of internal properties, emotional states are circulations of value sticky intensities binding bodies, objects, and histories. Emotions pass through the classroom: intrigue, worry, happiness and anger go round in gesture, words and quietness to create the emotional experience we employ to refer to learning. Freire (1970) brings to our minds the fact that education can never be neutral but an act of love or domination. In order to teach with love, in the case of Freire, it is necessary to converse not only in dialogues in an emotional way but also in dialogues in a political way.

This is advanced and refined by bell hooks (1994), who promotes engaged pedagogy, as she maintains that the teachers should teach out of their entire being and not a separation between the intellect and the emotion. Giroux (2011) places emotional labour in the context of more general neoliberal pressures, which have the potential to empty out the caring imagination required to live a democratic life. In this school of thought, emotion is not sentimental; rather, it is ethical and political as a social intelligence.

Posthuman theorists (Braidotti, 2013; Knox, 2019) take these arguments further to digital ecologies, where human beings and machines are co-producers of knowledge. Emotion circulates in such assemblages involving teacher, learner, device and algorithm. The difficulty is to make certain that posthuman pedagogy is humanising so that machine-simulated empathies do not displace human relationality.

The current investigations in AI and ELT indicate that algorithmic visibility is influencing emotional lives in classrooms more and more. Xie et al. (2025) demonstrate that the application of AI systems impacts the way teachers regulate their emotions, which tends to provoke a performative neutrality, which fits into the Giroux critique of emotional

standardisation (2011). In this way, emotional intelligence in posthuman classrooms demands critical emotional literacy, or the ability to know when the emotions are organically generated or when they are mechanically induced by machinic expectations.

Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) cannot be understood as an individual ability in this new environment but rather as a political-ethical literacy. The training information, cultural customs, and computational bias are all that define emotional signals that AI eye movements, tone, and gestures discern (Liu et al., 2024). Critical emotional literacy involves the acknowledgement of real affect, coded affect and commodified affect. It is only at that point which educators can exercise responsible interference in the digital learning spaces.

4. The Artificial Intelligence and the Emotional Politics of English Teaching

AI comes into English education in the forms of both hope and danger. It has visions of automatic-error-correcting classrooms, personalised tasks, and measurable interaction. However, as Selwyn (2019) cautions, AI is an ideological endeavour: automating the affect and privatising the empathy. Similar claims are made by Macasawang (2025), who states that AI impacts cognitive, social, affective, and ethical aspects of human behaviour and that emotional reactions to AI are greatly influenced by the human-computer interaction context. Educators and students are under the threat of being recreated in the likeness of affective transparency and productivity.

Recent empirical research indicates that emotional AI remakes the affective economy of ELT give precedence to legibility over authenticity through automated feedback loops. As Liu et al. (2024) show, AI is unable to recognise culturally specific manifestations of excitement or disorientation. Similarly, Benaissa (2024) demonstrates that an emotional negotiation process occurs in the teachers engaging in integration of AI, since they are both enabled and restrained by AI-mediated instruction requirements. Salloum et al. (2025) discovered that the real-time emotion recognition increases frustration, which in turn affects the reaction of the teachers. Such systems are prone to making emotion a performance in accordance with the algorithmic expectations.

The emotional factor has always been at the centre of ELT, which included worry, endurance, tediousness, hope, trust, and weakness. However, the ambiguity of affect is minimised when it is coded into algorithms. Barrett (2017) cautions about emotion recognition, which supposes

that all emotions are expressed in the same way, irrespective of cultural differences. A smile in Delhi will never be the same as a smile in Dublin, but AI systems tend to view them as such.

More recent studies also indicate that emotional AI has the ability to replicate injustices. According to Vistorte et al. (2024), cameras that detect emotions cannot read people with darker skin colour or non-Western norms of affect. Such misrecognition would become embedded in marginalisation in varied ELT classrooms.

This makes emotion not only a matter of analysis but also a location of politics. The emotional labour is commodified (Benesch, 2017), and teachers are commonly required to promote the requirements of positivity and resilience supported by AI-based emotional analytics.

Yet change is possible. Emotion-sensitive systems may be retooled as a means of insight and not surveillance. Emotional information when mediated by teacher interpretation can support an empathetic reaction to frustration or lack of interest. According to Akgun and Greenhow (2021), transparency and human decision-making are in focus.

5. Findings: New Trends in Emotional Artificial Intelligence and Second Language Teaching

A review of the modern studies on the topic of emotional artificial intelligence (AI) in ELT shows that there are four key thematic findings. These conclusions point to the fact that AI is not only changing the technical aspects of teaching but also transforming the affective, relational, and political context of the environment in which English language teachers and learners conduct their work.

5.1. Emotional AI Misinterprets and Normalises Selected Emotional Cultures

As present literature indicates, emotional AI systems have difficulty comprehending affect in the correct context in a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. According to Liu et al. (2024), the sentiment analysis tools and affect recognition tools often interpret the emotional state of learners very poorly, particularly in the situation when cultural norms influence expressions differently. Vistorte et al. (2024) show that a large number of emotion-recognition systems are biased towards Western patterns of emotion, that a state of neutrality or introspection is perceived as a lack of engagement, and that an expression is perceived as a

lack of clarity or frustration. This is an indicator of structural bias that has been ingrained into AI systems and thus ends up favouring particular emotional cultures above other cultures.

5.1.1. Interpretation:

The AI systems do not simply read emotion, but they generate emotional norms. They encourage certain expressions at the expense of others, thereby transforming the affective dynamics of the classroom.

5.2. AI Modulates the Teacher Emotions and Strengthens Emotional Labour.

The AIs do not mediate the emotions of students, but they also affect the emotional behaviour of teachers. Seyri and Ghiasvand (2025) demonstrate that educators in AI-improved classrooms tend to change their emotional displays, smiling more, managing their irritation, and engaging in an upbeat tone since the system monitors their emotional state. Benaissa (2024) demonstrates that the emotional involvement of EFL teachers varies between excitement and uneasiness as the classroom expectations are transformed by AI. Accordingly, Liu et al. (2025) show that AI-based assessment systems reduce complicated teacher-student interactions of emotions to quantifiable factors of calmness, positivity, or engagement.

5.2.1. Interpretation:

The emotional labour is heightened in the AI, which transforms the teachers into data points. This alters the work of the teacher to be focused on relational care to affective performance in accordance with the algorithmic expectations.

5.3. Adaptive Emotional Feedback Increases Engagement at the Risk of Emotional Reductionism.

Feedback systems based on AI can detect the development of student frustration or lack of engagement and provide support in time. Salloum et al. (2025) observed that real-time emotional monitoring enhanced engagement of the learners and minimised negative affective states that lasted long. But these systems understand emotion in a discrete form – frustrated, confused, bored – and not as complex and layered experiences. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) make us remember that the emotions of language learning are dynamic and contradictory by nature.

5.3.1. Interpretation:

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Artificial intelligence enhances the emotions, but it does not have access to emotional meaning. It is capable of identifying the behaviours related to affect as compared to the living, relational and cultural aspects of learning emotions.

5.4. Teachers also need emotional literacy as much as digital literacy.

Recent research emphasises that affective AI technology entails novel interpretative pressures on educators. Yuvaraj et al. (2025) point out that teachers should be in a position to perceive emotional predictions and biometric indicators critically but not accept them as absolute facts. Crompton et al. (2024) discovered that teachers frequently tend to believe AI-generated insights without questioning them and end up relying on them more than on their own intuitions as teachers. As reiterated by Macasawang (2025), AI has an impact that goes beyond thinking to emotional and ethical behaviour, and this makes the role of an educator an important challenge to negotiate AI effects affecting them critically. Benesch (2017) demonstrates that ELT emotional labour is always a political phenomenon, which AI makes even more intense, transforming the emotional stimuli into institutional measurements.

5.4.1. Interpretation:

Educators need to ensure the achievement of not merely technical competence but also critical emotional literacy: the capacity to ask questions of affective information, identify algorithmic prejudices, and moderate AI results with human compassion and cultural context.

6. Research Gaps

Although the number of studies exploring the subject of emotional AI continues to grow, there are still a number of conceptual, methodological, and political gaps. These lacunae support the necessity of end-of-technical or end-of-behavioural analyses of emotion like this paper.

6.1. Few studies have investigated how teachers are resisting emotional automation

Previous research explains the effect of AI on the emotional behaviour of teachers (Seyri and Ghiasvand, 2025; Liu et al., 2025), although little tries to examine how teachers:

6.1.1. Oppose procedural emotional conventions,

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6.1.2. *Question computer-based emotional demands,*

6.1.3. *Refranchise emotional information using cultural or relational information.*

6.2. Contribution of this paper:

The present paper predicts emotional intelligence as an ethical and pedagogical resistance mode, which is not addressed in recent studies. Further, this paper theorises humane teaching based on affect theory, critical pedagogy, and posthumanism, an area which is not represented much in the current literature on AI. This paper also synthesizes the below traditions and research in a unique way to shed light on the emotional politics of AI in ELT.

6.3. The absence of conceptual clarity on the issue of humane teaching in AI environments

In the majority of emotional AI studies, the authors concentrate on:

6.3.1. *Accuracy,*

6.3.2. *Engagement,*

6.3.3. *Behavioural outcomes,*

6.3.4. *Detection performance.*

Few pieces of literature deal with more profound questions, such as:

1. Humane teaching when machines can read emotions?
2. What other relationalities do we have after surveillance?
3. What ways do teachers maintain dignity, ambiguity and care when they are automated?

6.4. The Lack of Integrating Affect Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Posthumanism in AI Research

Recent research is based on the extensive use of psychological or computational theories of affect. Very minimal emotion AI research is based on:

6.4.1. *Sara Ahmed's affect theory,*

6.4.2. *Political love as envisaged by Freire,*

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6.4.3. *Hooks' engaged pedagogy,*

6.4.4. *The criticism of the neoliberal emotional labour by Giroux,*

6.4.5. *New posthuman ethics by Braidotti.*

6.5. Lack of Conceptual Frameworks between Emotion, AI Ethics and ELT Practice

Although there are frameworks of:

6.5.1. *AI in education,*

6.5.2. *Teacher emotions,*

6.5.3. *Affective computing,*

There does not exist a unified model of all three.

6.6. Contribution of this paper:

One of the earliest attempts to conceptualise the idea of emotionally intelligent pedagogy in AI-enhanced ELT is EI-AIPF.

6.7. Excessive Reliance on Quantitative or Engineering Strategy

Most emotional AI studies:

6.7.1. *Focus on the facial recognition rate,*

6.7.2. *Use enormous sets of emotional data,*

6.7.3. *Treat affect as measurable,*

6.7.4. *Do not consider cultural, ethical and relational dimensions.*

6.8. Contribution of this paper:

The study is a reflective, theoretical, and qualitative critique that puts the emotional AI into context in successive socio-cultural and ethical issues.

7. Discussion: A Humanist Future of Feeling Machines

It is paradoxical to teach in the era of AI. Machines are smarter and even lovelier, though their appeal is simulation and an echo of our emotional cues. Teachers are urged to be more like data analysts and read dashboards rather than dispositions.

Humane teaching involves going beyond emotional coldness in favour of relationship richness. Although AI is able to distinguish facial tensions or vocal strain, it is not able to read between the lines or weakness (Liu et al., 2024). This is an indication of what Macasawang (2025) noted: that the interaction between a human and a computer influences emotional and ethical behaviour in a manner that AI cannot fully explain. The humaneness is in the relational presence, the judgement of ethics and the cultural sensitivity.

The resistance of emotional intelligence occurs when teachers criticise machinic emotional norms. Seyri and Ghiasvand (2025) demonstrate that instructors are under the pressure to act positively, but emotionally literate teachers fight against it by focusing on authenticity and relational honesty.

Even in AI-mediated contexts, emotional agency, according to recent systematic reviews (Yuvaraj et al., 2025), is in the centre stage. Nonetheless, the emotional economies are not entirely encoded; AI acquires signals, not meanings (Vistorte et al., 2024); emotional states, not emotional stories (Salloum et al., 2025).

Therefore, emotional information should not be conclusive but descriptive.

8. Emotionally Intelligent AI-Pedagogy Framework (EI-AIPF).

The Emotionally Intelligent AI-Pedagogy Framework (EI-AIPF) is a result of the intersection between affect theory and critical pedagogy and recent studies concerning emotional AI in ELT. It hypothesises that emotional intelligence and artificial intelligence are not conflicting aspects but are co-constitutive components of an ethical learning system of the future. Instead of considering AI as the tool of efficiency or as the danger to human emotion, EI-AIPF places AI in the role of a partner, the insights of which are to be mediated by human empathy, cultural awareness, and moral imagination.

The paradigm recognises the fact that AI is good at identifying surface affect patterns in voice, eyes, hands, and involvement but not at access to lived emotional content. Human teachers, on the other hand, are good practitioners in interpretation, moral judgement and

relational presence. In this way, emotionally intelligent pedagogy will be a hybrid practice: machines, on the one hand, notice signals; on the other hand, people create meaning. This slimmed-down agency safeguards against technological determinism without a retrogressive humanist lapse.

8.1. Emotional Awareness

Pedagogy of emotional intelligence starts with an understanding of the fact that emotion is both information and experience. Artificial intelligence will be able to notice changes in the tone, speed, or even facial expression; however, the cultural, interpersonal, and historical context of such emotions will have to be interpreted by an educator. Teachers are effective translators who act as intermediaries between the crude messages that systems pick up and the realities of lived experience among learners. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), there are anxiety and enjoyment phases in language learning; EI-AIPF makes sure that this emotional nuance is not reduced and disregarded.

8.2. Feedback espoused

AI promises more responsiveness than any system that has existed before through its real-time feedback, which, however, can be mechanistic or punitive in its absence of empathy. Adaptivity at EI-AIPF is reformulated as dialogic in place of algorithmic. The feedback must be sensitive to the language mistakes as well as emotional states such as frustration, boredom, or confidence. Instead of controlling learners to behave in the same manner, adaptive systems should help them be emotionally resilient (Salloum et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024).

8.3. Governance Ethics

Emotional AI cannot afford to think about ethics as an appendix. Selwyn (2023) and Luckin and Holmes (2016) caution that instead of supporting learners, affective data can be utilised to discipline them. EI-AIPF demands transparency in the data practices, informed consent, sensitivity to the culture and accountability. Emotional data must be used to enable self-reflection and relational care and not to monitor or measure performance. The moral requirement is quite straightforward: emotion should never be turned into a product.

8.4. Human Mediation

Lastly, all AI-generated feedback, predictions, and emotional responses should be received in the light of the relational, cultural, and ethical knowledge of educators. AI can identify the tendencies in engagement, yet it is a task of teachers to identify the context of engagement. The human mediation will mean that AI provides a complement, not a substitution, to the pedagogical judgement. According to this model, the teachers do not act as administrators of algorithms but rather co-create meaning in an environment that is hybrid, affective learning.

Collectively, these principles make up a paradigm that was not only resistant towards technological determinism but also nostalgic humanism. EI-AIPF proposes that educators should consider AI as a companion that is as accurate as human emotions are in depth and develop a pedagogy that is both ethically robust, relationally full and critically conscious.

9. Conclusion: On the way to a humanised pedagogy of AI.

The meeting point between artificial intelligence and English language teaching is a tension that is not solved yet: computers become even more skilled at processing the text, but they do not feel the basic human quality of communication. Teaching English nowadays is to move between code and care, information and passion, anticipation and reality. Emotional intelligence does not disappear in this scene; instead, it turns out to be unavoidable. Pedagogy is attached to humanity by the thread.

This paper has demonstrated that in the field of teaching, AI is intruding on the emotional component of the teaching process, which necessitates a novel type of literacy: affective, ethical, and critically digital. The promise of emotional AI is that it can detect the emotions of learners, but the interpretive aspect of the technology can oversimplify the classroom effect. The EI-AIPF framework provides a means by which one can strike a balance between the precision of the analytical and emotional facets of the human project of education and the factors that may result in the project being overshadowed by technology.

The more that schools and institutions become quantitative and instrumentalise emotion, the harder the task of the critical pedagogue of recovering feeling as a form of resistance is. Emotion should not be regarded as a liability or a measure but as a relationship becoming a place where learners expose themselves to others and the uncertainties of language. In the online or offline classroom, the classroom is one of the few remaining spheres where unpredictability, vulnerability, and presence still count.

A humanised pedagogy of AI is thus based on two promises, and they include adopting what machines are good at – pattern detection, accuracy, and responsiveness – and maintaining what is exclusive to humans: interpreting, empathising, listening, and relating. AI can be used to enhance the efforts of teaching, although it could not substitute relational, ethical, and affective labour that distinguishes the educational activity. In this respect, emotion is not a thing but an object to be respected. It is the thing that machines will never automate and even what makes teaching something worth defending.

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