Teachers' Pedagogical Strategies Regarding Students' Use of Generative AI in IELTS Writing Classrooms

Abstract

This interpretive qualitative case study examines the reported pedagogical strategies of nine IELTS writing teachers at one private language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and had more than six months of IELTS-writing teaching experience. Data were collected through an open-ended written interview and individualized follow-up questions and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed four themes: making writing processes visible; regulating GenAI through stage-specific rules; cultivating critical AI literacy and independent reasoning; and exercising teacher agency amid uneven institutional guidance. The findings further indicated that participants did not generally endorse a simple ban on GenAI. Instead, they distinguished between support for brainstorming, vocabulary, grammar explanations, and revision, and unacceptable substitution of students' drafting and thinking. The study highlights the need for professional development and institutional guidance on process-oriented assessment, AI literacy, and appropriate pedagogical boundaries for GenAI in IELTS writing contexts.

Keywords: generative AI; IELTS writing; teacher agency; AI literacy; assessment; writing pedagogy; Vietnam

1. Introduction

Generative AI has become an increasingly available resource for second-language writers. Learners can use tools such as ChatGPT for various purposes, including generating ideas, receiving explanations, checking grammar, and revising sentences. A systematic review of 22 studies found that generative-AI feedback can support grammar, vocabulary, and organisation, particularly through timely feedback and revision opportunities (Karagoz, 2025). In IELTS Writing Task 2, Damanik et al. (2026) reported improvements across all four scoring criteria after a structured AI-feedback intervention.

Yet the usefulness of GenAI is neither automatic nor uncomplicated. AI feedback can be inaccurate, generic, or unable to respond adequately to higher-order writing concerns such as argumentative quality, critical thinking, audience awareness, and context-sensitive meaning. Moreover, feedback only becomes educationally valuable when learners can interpret, evaluate, and use it in revision. Helm and Hesse (2026) argue that the central challenge is not simply generating better feedback, but supporting learners' uptake of feedback.

These concerns are amplified in IELTS writing classrooms. IELTS writing is a high-stakes context in which students must demonstrate independent writing ability under timed examination conditions. AI may provide useful formative support outside the examination, but it can also make homework a less reliable indicator of students' current ability. The IELTS-focused literature to date largely examines learner outcomes, automated feedback, scoring reliability (Koraishi, 2024), or proposed classroom uses of AI. A practice-focused IELTS paper further notes the shortage of adaptable, IELTS-specific implementation guidance for teachers (Le-Khanh & Do, 2025).

Teacher-focused research is emerging. Chen and Pi (2026) examine EFL writing teachers' assessment practices and reasoning when evaluating GenAI-assisted student texts. Ansaree and Uddin (2026) investigate instructor agency in GenAI-supported undergraduate writing instruction in Bangladesh. Tran et al. (2025) identify strategies that Vietnamese ELT teachers use to address pedagogical, technological, and content-related challenges associated with GenAI.

These studies establish that teacher strategies and reasoning have been studied. However, the intersection of students' GenAI use, teachers' pedagogical responses, IELTS writing, high-stakes assessment, and private language-centre practice remains insufficiently documented in the present literature. The current study addresses that more specific issue by examining how teachers at one Hanoi language centre report responding to student GenAI use and how they justify those responses.

Thus, the following research questions are raised.

1. What pedagogical strategies do IELTS writing teachers report using in response to students' use of generative AI?
2. How do IELTS writing teachers explain and justify these reported strategies in relation to writing development, IELTS assessment, and responsible AI use?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Generative AI in L2 writing: affordances and pedagogical limits

Generative artificial intelligence has become increasingly prominent in L2 writing practice because it can support idea generation, vocabulary selection, grammatical editing, text organisation, and iterative revision. Research on AI-generated feedback indicates that its most consistent benefits concern surface-level and structural features of writing, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and organisation, because learners can receive feedback immediately. However, the same body of research suggests that AI feedback may be generic, off-target, or insufficiently

responsive to higher-order concerns such as argument quality, contextual meaning, rhetorical appropriateness, and audience awareness (Karagoz, 2025).

A randomized controlled trial with undergraduate students similarly found that AI-generated feedback improved writing quality with particularly strong effects on organisation and content development, suggesting that structured AI feedback can extend beyond surface-level correction (K. Zhang, 2025).

This distinction matters because feedback does not improve writing merely by being available. Learners need to interpret, evaluate, and selectively apply feedback in ways that strengthen rather than replace their own decision-making (Helm & Hesse, 2026). In ESL contexts, peer review, reflective analysis of AI suggestions, and activities requiring students to critique and personalise AI-generated feedback have been recommended to preserve independent reasoning and ownership of the text (Karagoz, 2025).

A teacher-mediated approach is especially important in L2 writing. AI may help learners identify language problems and explore alternative phrasing, but teachers remain responsible for aligning feedback with instructional goals, learners' developmental needs, and the broader purposes of writing. Research on GenAI-supported writing consequently points toward structured sequences in which students draft independently, use AI to obtain feedback or alternatives, and then justify, revise, or reject suggestions through guided reflection (Damanik et al., 2026).

2.2 GenAI in IELTS writing and the problem of independent performance

The potential value of GenAI is particularly visible in IELTS writing preparation, where learners often require rapid feedback on grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, task response, and essay organisation. In a four-week mixed-methods intervention, Damanik et al. (2026) found improvements across the four IELTS Writing Task 2 criteria after repeated cycles of AI-generated feedback and revision. Participants also reported that immediate and non-judgmental feedback increased their engagement with revision. This evidence suggests that AI can contribute to formative support in high-stakes test-preparation contexts.

Nevertheless, IELTS writing differs from many ordinary homework-writing contexts because the examination requires candidates to produce texts independently, under timed and controlled conditions. Therefore, improvement in AI-supported homework does not necessarily demonstrate that learners can perform at the same level without assistance. Research on GenAI in IELTS writing has emphasised the continuing importance of human teachers for supporting critical thinking, motivation, and context-sensitive pedagogical judgment (Le-Khanh & Do, 2025).

This creates a central instructional tension. Teachers need to allow students to benefit from AI-supported brainstorming, language explanation, and revision while ensuring that students continue to develop the independent planning, idea generation, drafting, and self-monitoring required in the examination. A pedagogical response cannot be limited to detecting AI use after submission. It must instead make the writing process visible, distinguish support from substitution, and create opportunities for students to demonstrate what they can write independently.

2.3 Teacher assessment literacy, process-oriented assessment, and GenAI

GenAI challenges the assumption that a submitted writing product directly represents a student's ability. In a qualitative study of four EFL writing teachers, Chen and Pi (2026) found that teachers struggled to identify GenAI involvement in student texts without prior knowledge and varied in how they adjusted scoring decisions after being informed of AI use. Their findings show that GenAI affects not only academic-integrity concerns but also the validity of writing assessment and teachers' criteria for judging student performance.

Teacher assessment literacy is therefore increasingly relevant in AI-mediated writing environments. J. Zhang (2025) uses a three-dimensional teacher assessment literacy framework to examine EFL teachers' perceptions of assessing AI-assisted writing, focusing on academic integrity, rubric compatibility, and criterion development. The study highlights the need for teachers to develop digital and ethical competencies alongside conventional assessment knowledge.

A process-oriented approach provides one response to this challenge. Teachers can attend to planning notes, first drafts, revision histories, oral explanations, reflection logs, and comparisons between unaided and AI-assisted writing in addition to students' final essays. Such evidence does not eliminate the complexity of authorship, but it can provide a more valid basis for diagnosing learners' writing needs and evaluating their development. This approach also shifts the pedagogical focus from proving whether AI was used to understanding how learners used it and whether they retained control over their writing decisions.

2.4 Teacher agency and critical AI literacy in ELT

Teachers do not implement GenAI tools as fixed technologies. They interpret AI affordances, adapt activities to local learner needs, and negotiate ethical, institutional, and assessment-related constraints. Ansaree and Uddin (2026), drawing on Postmethod Pedagogy and TPACK, found that university English instructors used GenAI as receptive and assistive tools while adapting materials to students' needs. The study also identified constraints related to AI literacy, resources, institutional policy, and resistance to change.

Teacher agency is relevant in IELTS preparation, where teachers must decide which AI uses are pedagogically appropriate at different stages of the writing process. Available research suggests that blanket prohibition is unlikely to be an adequate response. Instead, responsible implementation requires principles such as pedagogy-first decision-making, transparency, human monitoring, attention to accuracy, prevention of overreliance, and a focus on learner agency.

Critical AI literacy extends beyond knowing how to write effective prompts. It includes evaluating the accuracy and relevance of AI output, recognising generic or inappropriate language, checking claims, and modifying suggestions. In writing classrooms, these practices can be taught through activities that require students to compare AI-generated and self-generated texts, explain revision decisions, evaluate the relevance of feedback, and rewrite AI output in language they can control. Such pedagogy treats AI literacy as part of writing development, assessment literacy, and learner autonomy instead of a separate technical skill.

2.5 Research gap and present study

Existing studies establish that GenAI can support aspects of L2 and IELTS writing, particularly feedback and revision. They also show that GenAI complicates writing assessment and increases the importance of teacher judgment and pedagogically structured AI use. However, less is known about how IELTS writing teachers in private test-preparation settings respond pedagogically to students' everyday GenAI use.

This gap is significant because private language centres operate in a context where visible score improvement, homework, learner expectations, and preparation for unaided examination performance coexist. The present study addresses this gap by examining the reported strategies of nine IELTS writing teachers at one private language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam. It focuses on how teachers make writing processes visible, regulate GenAI use across stages of writing, cultivate critical AI literacy and independent reasoning, and exercise agency amid uneven institutional guidance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted an interpretive qualitative case study design involving nine IELTS writing teachers at one private language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam. The study investigated the pedagogical strategies teachers reported using in response to students' use of generative AI and the reasoning underlying these strategies. Data were collected through two rounds of written interviews, consisting of an initial open-ended interview and individualized follow-up questions. The study took an interpretivist approach, focusing on how teachers understood and explained their pedagogical decisions within their shared institutional context.

3.2 Participants and setting

The study was conducted at a private language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam, referred to by the pseudonym Hanoi Language Centre to protect institutional confidentiality. The participants were nine IELTS writing teachers employed at the centre. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their current IELTS writing teaching responsibilities and relevant teaching experience.

The inclusion criteria for participant selection were: (1) being employed as an IELTS writing teacher at the research site, (2) having current responsibility for teaching IELTS writing, and (3) having more than six months of IELTS writing teaching experience. Participants' teaching experience ranged from approximately seven months to eight years. They taught learners with varied levels of English proficiency and IELTS target bands, commonly ranging from approximately Band 4.0 to Band 6.5.

All participants worked within the same institutional setting but differed in their length of teaching experience and classroom practices. This shared setting provided a bounded context for examining common patterns as well as variation in how IELTS writing teachers responded to GenAI in their pedagogical practice. Participants were assigned numerical identifiers, Teacher 1 to Teacher 9, to protect their identities.

3.3 Data analysis

The dataset was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis involved repeated reading of the complete dataset, coding of segments concerning teachers' strategies, rationales, dilemmas, and contextual conditions, and iterative development and refinement of themes.

The analysis was primarily inductive. It focused on what teachers said they did when students used GenAI, why they said they did it, and which institutional or pedagogical conditions shaped their decisions. Literature on teacher agency, AI-supported writing, feedback, IELTS assessment, and responsible AI use informed the interpretation but did not function as a predetermined coding frame.

The final themes are interpretive patterns in teachers' accounts. They should not be read as fixed categories or as evidence that every participant used every strategy.

The researcher is an IELTS teacher at Hanoi Language Centre and therefore shares professional knowledge, institutional routines, and classroom concerns with the participants. This insider position supported the development of contextually relevant interview questions and helped the researcher interpret participants' references to IELTS teaching, student writing practices, and the use of generative AI. However, this proximity also created a risk of assuming

shared meanings or interpreting participants' accounts through the researcher's own teaching experience. To address this, the researcher used open-ended questions, requested concrete examples in the follow-up interviews, and revisited the full dataset when developing themes. The analysis aimed to represent both common patterns and differences among teachers' accounts rather than treating the researcher's own views as typical of the group.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Formal institutional ethical approval was not required for this study. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the director of the participating language centre. Prior to data collection, all participants received a written information sheet via email outlining the aims and procedures of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to protect their data. Each participant provided written informed consent by signing and returning a consent form via email. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question and withdraw from the study without consequences for their professional standing.

To protect confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonymous identifiers (Teacher 1 to Teacher 9), and the institution was referred to by the pseudonym Hanoi Language Centre. Identifying details were removed from the reported findings. Written interview responses were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher.

4. Findings

The integrated findings across the two research questions generated four interrelated themes concerning how IELTS writing teachers responded to students' use of generative AI:

1. Making writing processes visible rather than relying on submitted products
2. Regulating GenAI through stage-specific and conditional use
3. Cultivating critical AI literacy and independent reasoning
4. Exercising teacher agency amid uneven institutional guidance

4.1 Making writing processes visible rather than relying on submitted products

The analysis of the written interviews revealed several ways in which teachers sought to make students' writing processes more visible in response to the growing uncertainty surrounding GenAI-assisted homework (see Figure 1).

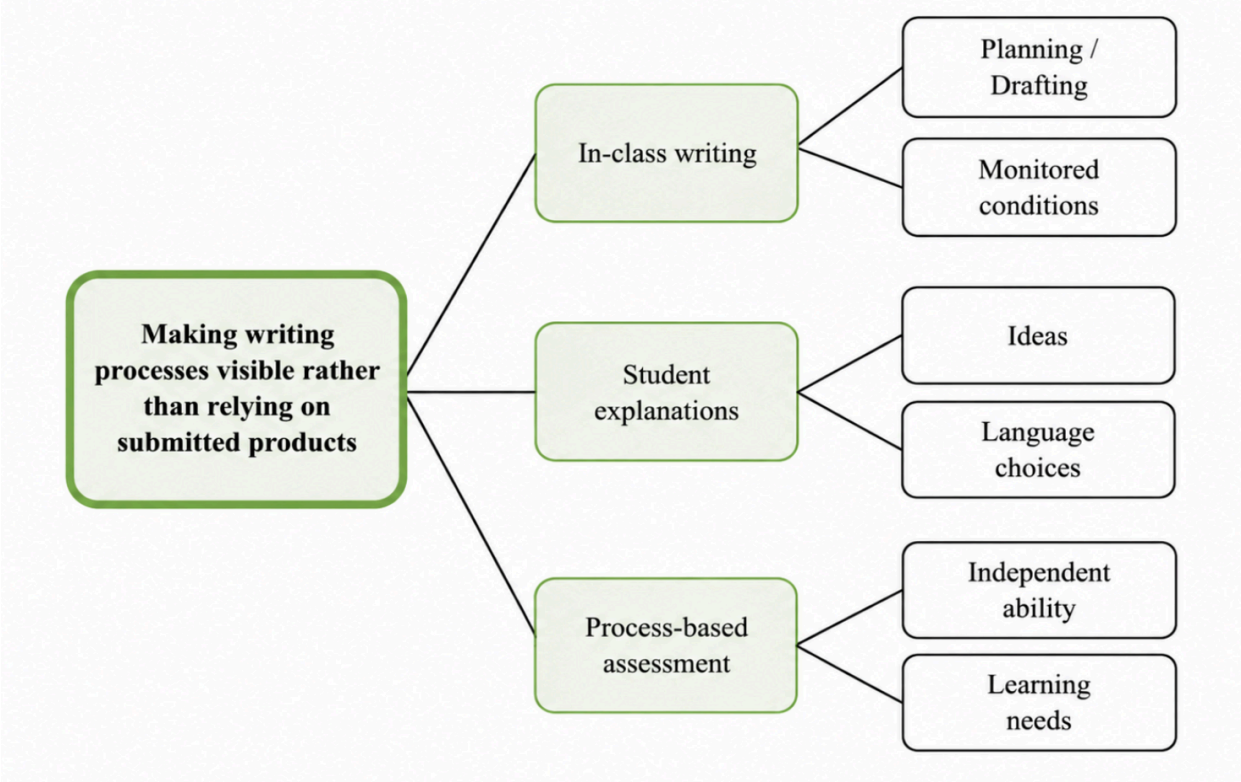


Figure 1. *Thematic map of Theme 1: Making writing processes visible rather than relying on submitted products*

The most prominent pattern was teachers' reduced trust in homework essays as direct evidence of students' independent ability. Teacher 1 described recognizing that homework could no longer be treated as "a reliable reflection of a student's actual writing ability" because GenAI had changed the nature of writing assignments. Teacher 7 made a similar point, arguing that marking an essay generated by AI was "meaningless" because it did not reveal students' weaknesses or enable useful feedback.

Teachers responded by shifting some drafting, planning, and assessment activity into the classroom. Teacher 5 moved "initial drafting strictly to live, in-class handwriting sessions" so that students would develop "real exam muscle memory without digital aids." Teacher 9 likewise distinguished daily practice from formal assessment, explaining that strict classroom writing tests using pen and paper were necessary to verify learners' actual proficiency.

Teachers also used students' explanations as evidence of ownership and understanding. Teacher 1 described asking students to explain or present ideas from suspicious homework, rather than immediately accusing them of AI use. Teacher 4 explained that, when a homework essay appeared substantially stronger than a student's prior work, she asked the student to explain their outline and vocabulary choices. Her purpose was not to establish whether AI had been used, but to determine whether the student understood the text.

This process-oriented approach was pedagogical as well as disciplinary. Teacher 6 required students to make outlines, write independently, and explain their ideas so that she could identify recurring language problems and students' "real writing level." Teachers thus treated visible writing processes as a means of preserving valid assessment while also diagnosing what students needed to learn.

4.2 Regulating GenAI through stage-specific and conditional use

Teachers regulated students' use of GenAI through a range of stage-specific and conditional practices, particularly by distinguishing supportive uses from those that substituted for students' own writing (see Figure 2).

Most participants did not advocate banning GenAI completely. Instead, they developed conditional rules that distinguished supportive uses from substitutive uses. Across accounts, AI was generally treated as acceptable for brainstorming, vocabulary, grammar explanations, or feedback, but not for generating complete sentences or essays.

Teacher 6 described responsible use as treating AI as a "learning assistant" instead of a replacement for thinking or writing. Teacher 7 permitted AI only before or after writing, and only for reference purposes; if students used it during drafting, the work would not be marked. Teacher 9 similarly advised teachers to allow AI for vocabulary suggestions and feedback but not to generate an entire essay because students still needed to develop independent ideas, critical thinking, and writing skills for the examination.

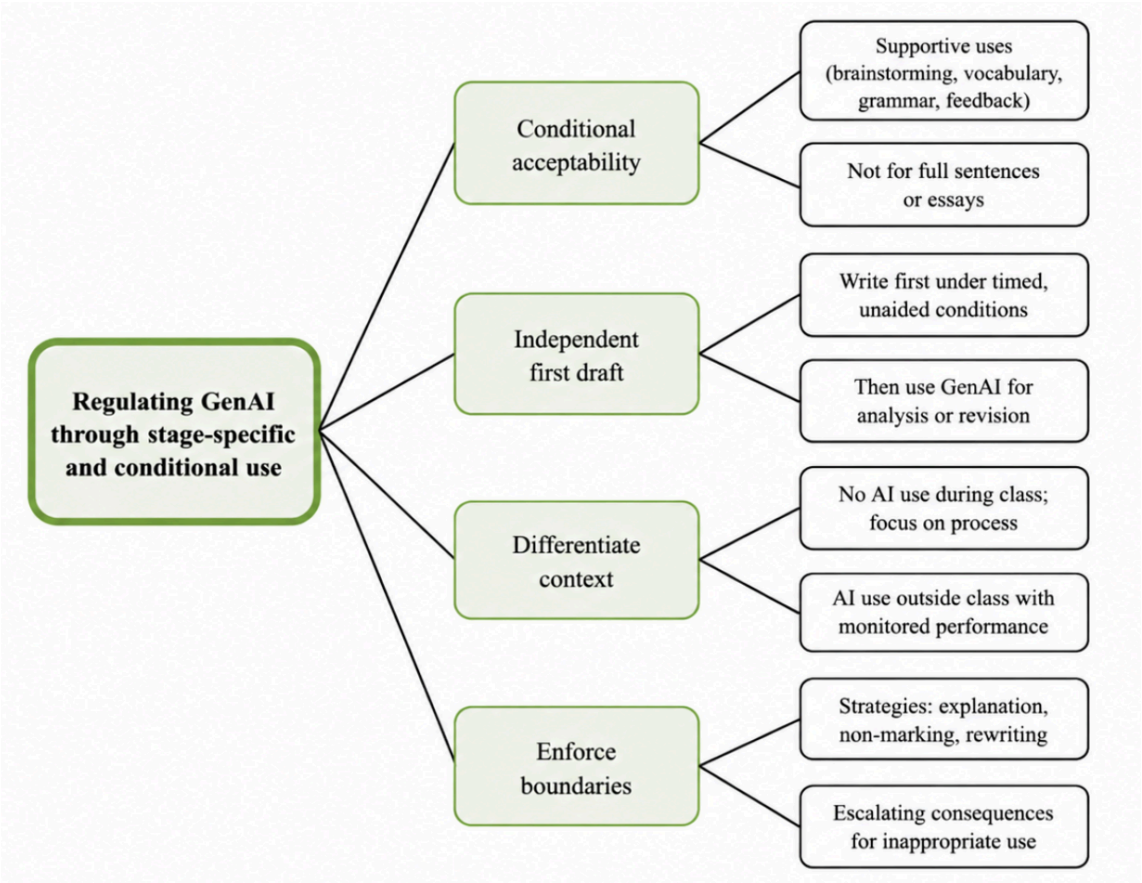


Figure 2. *Thematic map of Theme 2: Regulating GenAI through stage-specific and conditional use*

A recurring strategy was to require students to produce an independent first draft. Teacher 5 taught a two-step sequence: students wrote a draft under timed, unaided conditions and then used AI to analyse vocabulary or grammar rules. Teacher 4 first built students' idea-generation and essay-structure knowledge, then allowed them to use AI "as a reviewer instead of a writer." Teacher 1 asked students to write independently, then use AI-supported revision and compare the original and revised texts.

Teachers also differentiated between classroom work and homework. Teacher 1 did not allow AI use during class, where students worked through brainstorming, pictures, guiding questions, pair work, and discussion. Teacher 4 permitted AI outside class only if students could demonstrate comparable performance in monitored writing conditions.

However, teachers varied in how strongly they enforced boundaries. Some used revision, explanation, and guided reflection. Others relied on non-marking, rewriting, or escalating consequences. Teacher 8 described requiring students who repeatedly submitted fully AI-generated work to complete homework after class and eventually refusing to check later

essays. Teacher 3 explained that homework involving inappropriate AI use would not be assessed because it did not provide valid evidence of learning.

The shared logic was therefore conditional integration. GenAI was not inherently defined as either useful or harmful. Its appropriateness depended on the stage of writing, the degree of student control, and whether the use supported or displaced independent performance.

4.3 Cultivating critical AI literacy and independent reasoning

The analysis also revealed several ways in which teachers sought to develop students' critical AI literacy while preserving independent reasoning and decision-making (see Figure 3).

Teachers framed responsible GenAI use as a capability that required judgment, not merely access to a tool. They described teaching students how to prompt, fact-check, reject unsuitable outputs, paraphrase overly advanced language, and make final writing decisions themselves.

Teacher 2 taught students to use prompts such as "help me brainstorm this topic" rather than "help me write an essay for this topic." The same participant emphasized that AI-generated language should be treated as an idea source, after which students needed to simplify unfamiliar vocabulary and rewrite sentences using grammar they could genuinely control.

Critical evaluation of AI output was also a recurring classroom strategy. Teacher 4 showed students an AI-generated Task 2 paragraph and invited them to ask whether it answered the question, offered convincing examples, sounded natural, and would persuade an IELTS examiner. Students then rewrote generic AI sentences with examples they genuinely believed in and language they could use more naturally in the exam.

Participants also designed activities to reduce learners' dependence on AI for idea generation. Teacher 1 used images, guiding questions, pair discussion, presentations, and opposing viewpoints to help students generate and justify ideas before writing. Teacher 6 used pair or group brainstorming, class discussion, and peer explanation before individual writing.

Teachers' rationale was that fluent AI language could conceal weak reasoning. Teacher 4 explained that AI may improve grammar but cannot replace students' critical thinking or judgment. Teacher 7 cautioned students against trusting AI for idea development, logical coherence, task fulfilment, or band-score assessment because its feedback could be inaccurate or inconsistent. Teacher 6 similarly noted that students could receive inconsistent comments and scores when the same essay was submitted in separate AI conversations.

AI literacy was therefore understood as a form of writing pedagogy. It involved teaching students to use AI selectively, critically, transparently, and in ways that maintained ownership of ideas, language choices, and revisions.

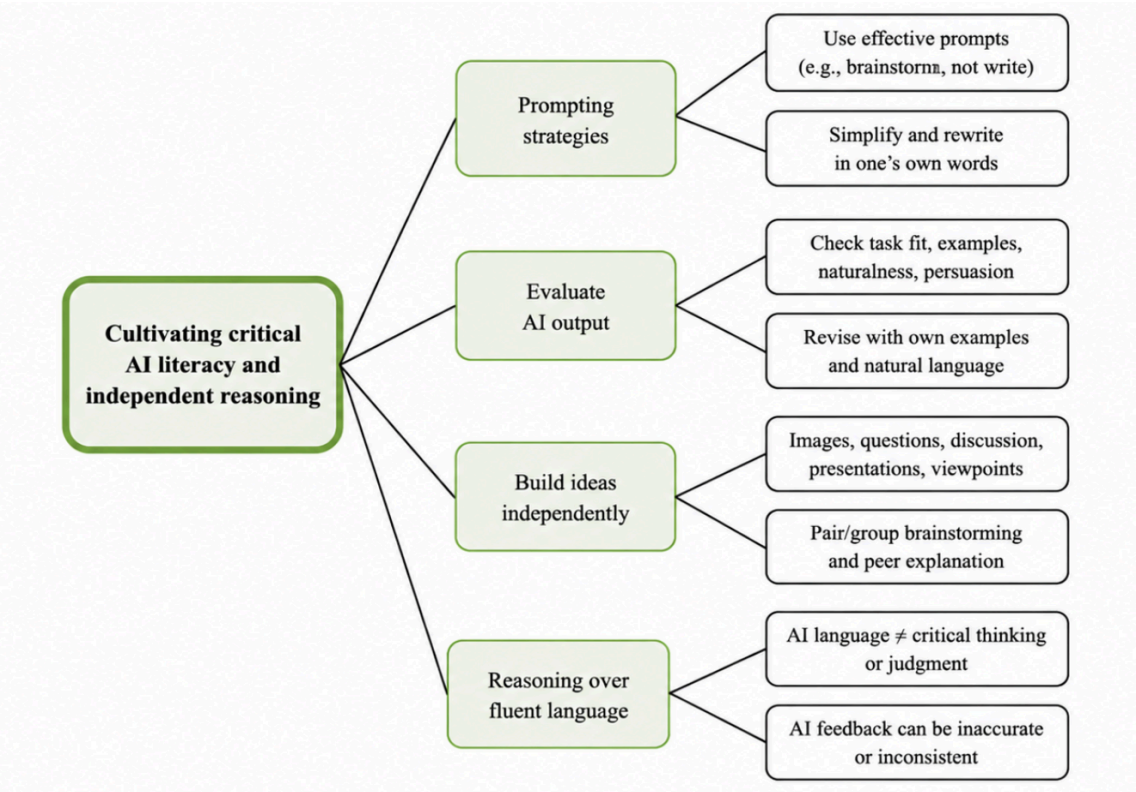


Figure 3. *Thematic map of Theme 3: Cultivating critical AI literacy and independent reasoning*

4.4 Exercising teacher agency amid uneven institutional guidance

Teachers' responses to GenAI were also shaped by substantial professional autonomy, uneven institutional guidance, and varied opportunities for professional learning (see Figure 4).

Participants generally reported substantial autonomy in deciding how to respond to GenAI use. Teacher 1 described having flexibility because the centre expected students to complete writing independently but did not specify how teachers should respond when AI use was suspected. Teacher 2 explained that professional experience and knowledge of IELTS criteria helped them judge where AI could add value and where it could undermine learning.

However, teachers' accounts of institutional guidance were mixed. Several reported no formal policy or only informal verbal discussion. Teacher 4 stated that the absence of written policy meant "everyone approaches AI slightly differently." Teacher 6 reported that the workplace had given general advice to limit AI use in homework and avoid excessive interference in assignments. Teacher 8 reported only verbal guidance that broadly encouraged teachers to embrace the technology without obvious overuse.

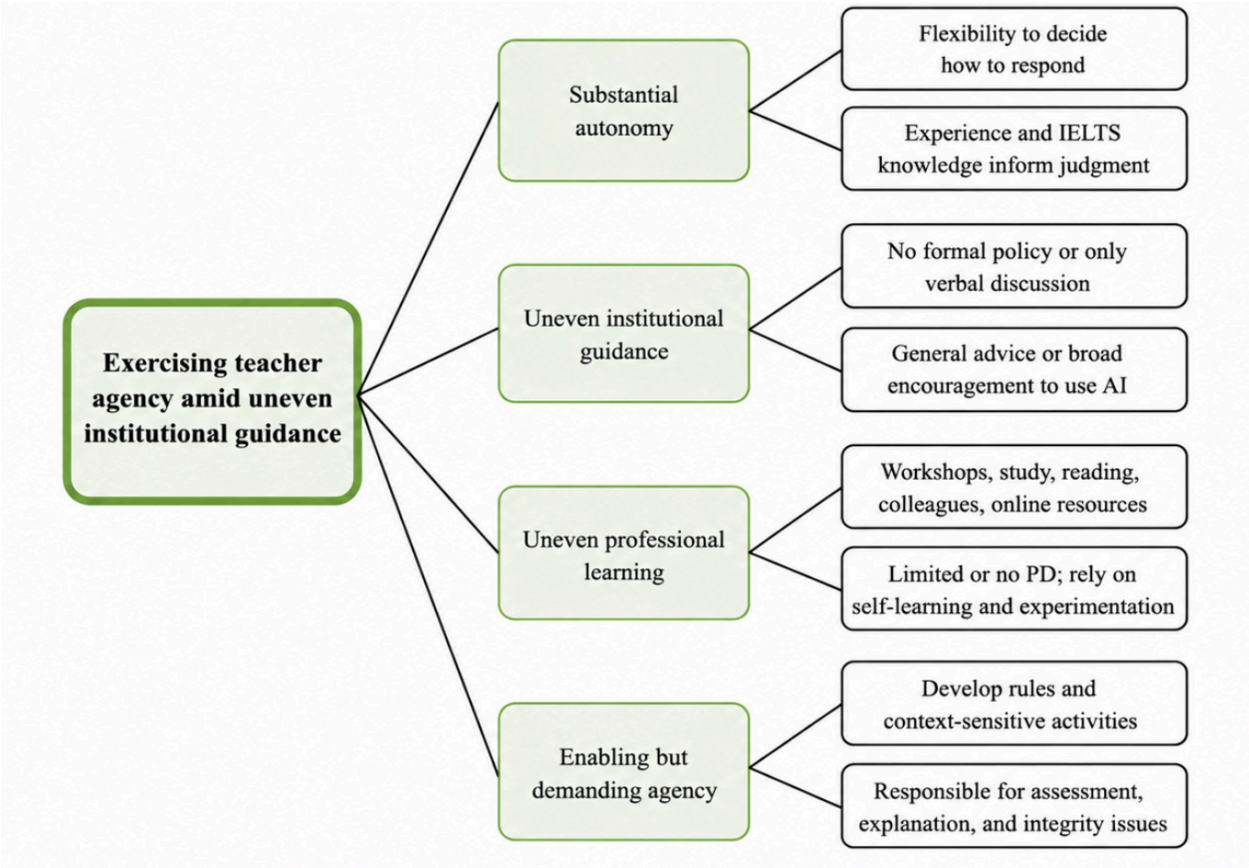


Figure 4. *Thematic map of Theme 4: Exercising teacher agency amid uneven institutional guidance*

The variation in accounts may reflect informal communication, uneven awareness of available guidance, or differences in how teachers interpreted centre expectations. The dataset does not allow these possibilities to be distinguished.

Professional learning was also uneven. Some participants described workshops, university study, discussions with colleagues, academic reading, or online resources as useful. Others reported no formal AI-related professional development and relied on experimentation, Internet-based self-learning, or observation of students' AI use.

This theme shows that teacher agency was both enabling and demanding. Teachers could develop context-sensitive rules and activities, but they also carried responsibility for interpreting AI output, assessing student work, explaining acceptable use, and responding to academic-integrity concerns with limited shared guidance.

5. Discussion

5.1 From product assessment to process-oriented evidence

The study's first contribution is to show that teachers responded to GenAI by making the writing process more visible. In-class drafting, handwritten work, oral explanation, comparison with prior work, and outline discussion were used to understand what students could produce independently.

This finding aligns with Chen and Pi's (2026) work showing that GenAI disrupts traditional EFL writing assessment because teachers can find it difficult to distinguish human and AI-assisted writing, especially where AI use is subtle. Chen and Pi also found that teachers differed in whether they focused primarily on final products or on students' interaction with GenAI during the writing process.

The present study extends this issue to IELTS preparation. Participants treated process visibility as necessary not only for detecting inappropriate AI use, but also for preparing students for unaided examination conditions and diagnosing their actual writing needs. The strategy is therefore better understood as process-oriented pedagogy than simply AI detection.

Importantly, the data do not establish that teachers can reliably identify AI-generated work. Several participants relied on sudden differences in vocabulary, grammar, organisation, or mismatch with prior work. Others mentioned AI detectors. These are teachers' reported judgments, not validated detection methods. The findings should not be presented as evidence that detection is accurate.

5.2 Conditional integration rather than a simple ban

A second contribution is the stage-specific approach to GenAI use described by participants. Most teachers permitted limited AI support before writing, such as brainstorming and vocabulary assistance, and after independent drafting, such as grammar checks and feedback. They generally restricted AI use during drafting itself.

This pattern corresponds with structured AI-writing interventions in the literature. In Sağlam's (2026) study, pre-service teachers produced initial drafts independently before using AI tools to evaluate, revise, modify, or reject suggestions. In Heydarnejad's (2025) intervention, students used structured planning, self-evaluation, AI feedback, and revision procedures rather than direct AI text substitution.

The present study adds an IELTS-specific rationale. Teachers did not protect independent drafting only because of authorship or academic honesty. They did so because students ultimately need to write independently under controlled conditions. The examination therefore served as a practical anchor for teachers' distinction between assistance and substitution.

5.3 AI literacy as critical judgment and authorship

The third contribution is the teachers' broad understanding of AI literacy. Participants did not reduce responsible use to technical prompt-writing. They described AI literacy as the ability to formulate an appropriate request, evaluate AI output, identify inaccuracies, simplify language, preserve original work, and make independent final decisions.

This finding supports Karagoz's (2025) conclusion that prompt specificity and learners' critical interpretation influence the quality of AI feedback and subsequent revision. It also aligns with the same review's recommendation that AI feedback be combined with teacher and peer evaluation, reflection, and activities requiring students to actively engage with rather than passively accept AI suggestions.

The present study contributes by showing how teachers embedded AI literacy into familiar IELTS-writing practices. Students compared AI paragraphs with IELTS expectations, evaluated the persuasiveness of examples, revised generic claims, justified vocabulary choices, and practised idea generation before AI became part of the task. AI literacy was therefore intertwined with writing, assessment, and learner autonomy.

5.4 Teacher agency in a shared but ambiguously governed setting

The final contribution concerns teacher agency. Participants at the same centre reported considerable freedom to establish classroom rules, but they differed in their descriptions of institutional guidance and in their responses to student AI use. Some emphasized reflective revision and discussion; others used strict non-marking rules, rewriting requirements, or sanctions.

This finding is consistent with Ansaree and Uddin's (2026) account of instructors as active pedagogical agents who adapt GenAI use to learner needs, institutional constraints, and ethical concerns rather than adopting it as a fixed method. It also aligns with Chen and Pi's (2026) framing of AI-supported writing assessment as a professional instructional decision involving feedback, authorship, and writing development.

However, the data also reveal that individual autonomy can create inconsistency when formal guidance is limited. Teachers may agree on broad principles, such as independent writing and responsible use, while still differing in sanctions, homework policies, assessment practices, and acceptable AI support. This suggests a need for centre-level discussion and professional development focused on realistic IELTS-writing scenarios rather than generic statements that AI should be used "responsibly."

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how IELTS writing teachers at a private language centre in Hanoi, Vietnam, responded pedagogically to students' use of generative AI. Using an interpretive qualitative case-study design, the research examined teachers' reported strategies, rationales, and institutional conditions through two rounds of written interviews with nine IELTS writing teachers. The findings indicated that teachers did not generally regard GenAI as something that could simply be prohibited or ignored. Instead, they described four interconnected responses: making writing processes visible rather than relying solely on submitted homework; regulating GenAI according to the stage of writing; cultivating critical AI literacy and independent reasoning; and exercising teacher agency amid uneven institutional guidance.

The findings suggest that the central pedagogical concern was not whether students used GenAI, but whether they retained ownership of their ideas, language choices, drafting, revision, and final writing decisions. Teachers differentiated between AI as a learning resource and AI as a substitute for students' own thinking and writing. GenAI was generally considered appropriate for brainstorming, vocabulary support, grammatical explanation, feedback, and post-draft revision. However, participants expressed stronger concerns about using AI to generate complete sentences or essays, particularly during independent drafting. In response, teachers reported using monitored writing, handwritten tasks, outline discussion, oral explanation, and comparisons between classroom and homework performance to develop a more credible understanding of students' independent writing ability.

The study contributes to research on GenAI-supported ELT writing instruction by providing a context-specific account of teachers' pedagogical decision-making in IELTS preparation. Rather than treating GenAI primarily as a problem of detection or academic integrity, the findings highlight the importance of process-oriented pedagogy. Teachers' strategies were shaped by the need to balance AI-supported learning with preparation for an examination in which students must write independently under timed conditions. The findings also show that teacher agency can enable flexible and context-sensitive responses to GenAI use. At the same time, uneven institutional guidance may leave individual teachers responsible for setting classroom boundaries, evaluating AI-related work, and addressing concerns about student overreliance and assessment validity.

Although the findings offer useful insights, several limitations should be considered. The study involved nine teachers from one private language centre and therefore does not support statistical generalisation to all IELTS teachers, Vietnamese language centres, or other EFL contexts. The written-interview format also shaped the nature of the data. While it allowed participants time to reflect and respond asynchronously, it constrained the depth of follow-up probing compared with live interviews: the absence of real-time interaction limited opportunities to clarify responses, pursue emerging lines of inquiry, or capture non-verbal cues, which may have restricted the richness of some data. The same format captured teachers' reported strategies

and rationales but could not verify how consistently these strategies were enacted in classrooms or how students experienced them. The qualitative design enabled an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives and contextual decision-making. However, it does not establish whether the reported strategies improve students' writing development, reduce overreliance on AI, or strengthen the validity of writing assessment. Nor did the study include classroom observations, learner interviews, student drafts, revision histories, AI-chat records, writing-score data, institutional policy documents, or interviews with centre managers, any of which could have enriched the analysis from additional perspectives. Finally, because GenAI use intersects with professional identity, teacher accountability, assessment, and academic integrity, participants may have emphasised responsible practices or underreported uncertainty, inconsistency, and unsuccessful responses.

Future research could address these limitations by involving teachers from multiple private language centres, cities, and institutional settings. Employing longitudinal or mixed-methods designs that combine teacher interviews with classroom observations, learner perspectives, student writing samples, revision records, AI-chat data, and writing-score measures could provide a more comprehensive account of how teachers' strategies influence writing development and responsible AI use. Further research should also examine how institutional policies, leadership practices, and professional development shape teachers' capacity to use GenAI in ways that support learner autonomy while preserving valid evidence of independent IELTS writing ability.

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